

Post



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# The other side of Stockholm - August 23, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

We got a second day in Stockholm which we were glad of. Our shore excursion took us on a scenic driving tour repeating several things from our tour yesterday, but we also got to take a boat ride which was great. That really made us want to come back to this beautiful city - there is so much we didn't yet do! - Karen

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## ***DETAIL***

When we wake, low clouds keep it from being too bright outside. It's 55° on our balcony and it feels wonderful. Yesterday we arrived in Stockholm, and today we are still here. There's no movement of the boat as we're lashed to the dock.

We do have an excursion today: "Land and Water." Very dramatic title. What does it mean? We're riding part of the time in a bus and part of the time on a touristic boat motoring around the Stockholm harbor. Before we get off our big boat, er, ship, we have breakfast. As much as we'd love to, it's too cool to eat outdoors. Maybe later in the cruise.

Our tour guide is Annette. She's short, has very dark hair, and doesn't have blue eyes. Scandinavian? We have our doubts. Annette informs us that our driver is from Dalarna, Sweden. As such, he has a red horse prominently on display. His horse is stuffed, rather than the more traditional carved wood. They're now a national symbol of Sweden, so in theory we should care. Eh.

On the bus we pass a Systembolaget. It's 9:58 am and there are a few people in line to get it. It opens at 10am and is the state liquor store. The national government has a monopoly on the sale of all liquor, quite the gig, if you can get it. It's been going on like this for a long time and it was more strict early on. Every adult was issued a book and each month you could buy one liter of alcohol and they'd stamp the space in your book for your liter for that month. This was ended in 1955 and now (according to our guide) they don't keep track of who buys how much. We're not sure we believe that. They do control consumption by making it quite costly. At 18 years of age you can buy a drink in a bar but you can't buy liquor at the state store in a bottle until you're 20.

This explanation killed a fair amount of time, which is good as our bus, and all traffic, is blocked by a big cement pumping truck. It's blocking traffic in one direction and a police car, with flashing lights, was blocking the other direction. After a while the bus in front of us, a big full-size bus like our own, throws it in reverse. They've had enough. We follow soon after. The plan is to back up a half mile, uphill, and then turn around and find another route. Very exciting. The wheels on the bus do go round and round, in reverse, too.

Following much conversation on Annette's cell it's established that we will miss our boat ride. She calls an audible and the sequence has been reversed between the 'panoramic bus tour' and the boat ride.

We drive down to where the embassies of the countries that have relations with Sweden. They're all impressive, though the US's is a bit bigger and the Iran consulate hasn't mowed their lawn in a few years. It turns out Iran decided the building wasn't big enough, abandoned the building and stopped paying the gardeners.

We drive through the Nobel Museum park where there is no Nobel Museum. It was planned that the Nobel Museum would be built there, but that never happened. But they still call the area "The Nobel Museum Park", much to the amusement of the tour guides.

We see the Vasa ship museum in the distance. We're still so impressed with that. We go by the Navy Castle. It's agreed, and understood by all, that each day, if the country is at peace, some sailor will come out (undoubtedly in dress whites) and raise the flag. We're not sure how many Swedes use that as their means of knowing whether their country is, or is not, at war.

We pass the Nordic museum, one that we did not (along with the Abba Museum) visit on this trip. According to Annette, the most amazing stuff there is what's in the basement. Apparently, back in the day, what it took to be a macho Nordic war lord was: 1) be a good fighter, 2) be an inspiring leader, and 3) give nice gifts to your neighbors. As such there is lots of gold jewelry and drink-ware in the museum basement. Fifty-two kilograms of gold, to be exact (114.6 pound), on display.

How do they have so many impressive gold artifacts? Farmers plow their fields and find them. But why would a farmer be so silly as to give them up? Well firstly, it's the law, and secondly (perhaps more importantly) the government pays the finder for the weight of the gold and for the value of the antiquity of the piece. Sounds reasonable.

Eventually we get off the bus and head for the tour boat in the harbor. Upstream is the "lake" and downstream is the archipelago and the Baltic Sea. Near us is a bridge joining the two with the water rushing quickly past due to the elevation difference between the two. It's rocking and rolling and as such this place is called "The Flow".

The boat we're on is carrying not only our excursion group but many other people and other tour groups as well. We slowly circle a big island (one of many) near Stockholm. It's like a big park with there's an actual amusement park and an outdoor Swedish museum where many historical buildings have been brought from all over the country and reassembled. There's lots of nature and hiking and biking trails. It's lush and green and looks lovely.

On the shores are big houses where wealthy families, of years gone by, built family summer homes (including the queen and king). There's boating clubs and innumerable joggers and bikers. We pass under bridges and with each we learn about when it was added and how it improved access to the island for the people of Stockholm. The weather is warm and sunny and it turns our boat, with so many glass windows, into an insufferably warm greenhouse. As we travel in one direction people move from the sunny side of the boat to the shady side and then (we assume) they switch back when the boat turns around the end of the island.

Back on our big ship we have lunch by the pool, no big deal, and later go to an event, to which we have been invited. It's for passengers who have sailed with Azamara previously, which is pretty much everyone. People are dolled up (other than us) and the captain and other ship officers are in attendance, smartly dressed in their uniforms.

There's all kinds of fussy, fancy finger food and drinks, pink ones and blue ones. Sadly we can also order from the drink menu with is a really bad idea. We have too many drinks, sampling from the intriguing sounding ones and watch the astonishing beauty of the Stockholm archipelago guide past. The bright blue sky and the sun, coming in at a low angle, perfectly illuminate the water, rocks, trees, and well maintained summer homes.

As always, we've kept good track of what the theme of the evening's dinner will be. Tonight it's British Fine Cuisine, which we sadly think of as an oxymoron. Maybe we just don't know any better. We sample the Shepard's pie, Chicken pot pie, Coronation salad, Waldorf salad, apple slaw, mushy peas, steak and ale pie, fish and chips, and many other delicacies. Truth be told, they were really good. (Better than the Mexican food of the other night, sadly).

For dessert there was no spotted dick spotted, but what we tried did include Eton mess, Bakewell tart, Chocolate Trifle Cake, No-bake Cheesecake, and Sticky toffee pudding. In all, way too many calories. That doesn't even include the accompanying beverage. Yikes.

Post dinner, as so often happens, Karen opts to hang out in the room and read. I am OK with that and head, stag, to the Cabaret Lounge. Tonight's entertainment is our Cruise Director, Ms. Emily Love. She's singing with a quartet/quintet of the Pursuit band: a couple of horns, guitar, drums, and piano. She does 'Don't rain on my parade', 'At last', and 'Somewhere over the rainbow'.

Next she does a medley of Dolly Parton song, starting with "There you go again". She needs someone to sing to, and silly me, I chose a front row seat. She walks over and sings the song to me. I bravely smile (the wine helps) and eventually it's over and she walks away. Then she comes back for the second part of the song. Anyway it ss great fun. The rest of the medley include 'Jolene', 'Nine to five' and other songs. A fun day but time for bed. We lose an hour tonight, on our way to Lithuania.

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## Photos



The famous red (some of them) carved horses that now have come to symbolize Sweden



The state liquor stores. People are ready to go in exactly when they open.



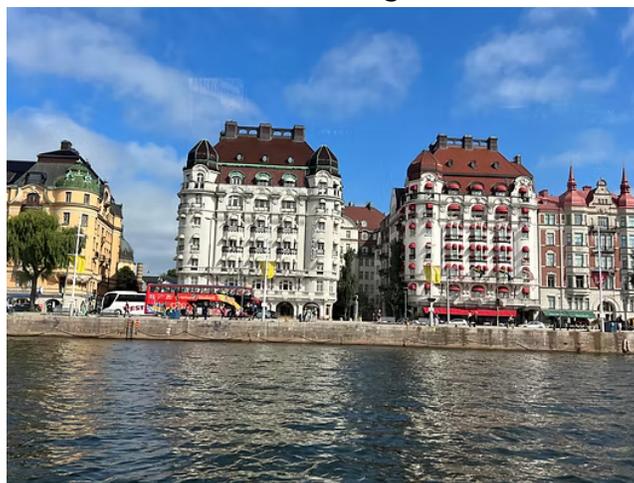
This big cement pump truck let us see how well our bus driver could back up.



This art, which we have also seen in Paris and Zurich, by Niki de Saint Phalle. This was to be put in front of the royal palace, but it was felt it was too obscene, so they put it over by the embassies, like the American Embassy.



The boat we toured on with one of the fancier hotels in the background.



There were many nice hotels in Stockholm. Not cheap.



The path of our boat tour. The island we circled was pretty and looks like fun.



This house is part of the outdoor museum. Very cool.



Lots of impressive ships in Stockholm.

FARNSNIENTE





Part of our tour, island's on the right. Both sides were very pretty.



Last part of our tour was the view from a high point. Good view.



When we were looking from the lookout point the locals were using their mirrors to watch us. Many apartments had these mirrors so the residents could see down without having to stick their heads out the window.



The glide through the Stockholm archipelago was one beautiful island after the next.



Ditto

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