

Cultural Tourism in Sweden

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Sweden is a small country in the far north of Europe with an area equalling that of California in the USA, Thailand in Asia or Cameroon in Africa. Half that area consists of forests and almost 100,000 lakes. We have a population of 8.6 million and Sweden is a thinly populated country, with 19 inhabitants per square kilometre, as compared, for example with Sri Lanka's 262.

The Atlantic Gulf Stream gives Sweden a milder climate than other countries on the same latitude. Constitutionally, Sweden is a parliamentary monarchy. For a total of 40 years during this century, government office was held by the Social Democratic Party. The present government is a non-socialist coalition. Sweden's high standard of living has been founded on cheap hydropower, high-quality iron and timber resources, and an industrial sector upgrading products from these raw materials.

The Heritage

But does this tiny country on the fringe of the world have any culture? Looking closely at the UNESCO World Heritage list of more than 300 world-famous places you just find one single little dot on the map for Sweden, and in fact Sweden was only added to the list in 1992. The listed building is Drottningholm Palace, on the outskirts of Stockholm, the capital. That palace is the residence of the King of Sweden and his family. It is an 18th century building in a Baroque style to be found almost anywhere else in Europe.

And yet Drottningholm qualifies for inclusion in the World Heritage List, partly by virtue of its authentic, totally unaltered theatre building, complete with fittings and furnishings, scenery and stage scenery which are still in use. It is also included on account of a Queen's

wedding present – a small, Chinese-style pleasure palace in the grounds, unique of its kind and also in a good state of preservation.

Another seven buildings and environments of widely differing character, origin and function are now on a tentative list for inclusion in the World Heritage List.

Each of them represents Swedish society, and they range from prehistoric rock carvings and Iron Age man-made landscapes to a small group of timber buildings, known as a "church town", in the north, a gigantic copper mine – the oldest joint stock company in the world – a complete manufacturing community and a woodland cemetery with 20th century buildings of outstanding architectural merit.

Foreign visitors to Sweden who are interested in a spectacular culture of great aesthetic and artistic quality have plenty to look at.

The period between the end of the Viking era, at about the beginning of the 11th century, and the Reformation of the Church, in the 1520s, when protestantism replaced Catholicism, we call the Middle Ages. For many centuries during that period, Sweden was a poor country and was seldom invaded by foreign powers with the result that something like 1000 medieval churches are extant. Their murals, never painted over, their woodcarvings and their vestments and other textiles are a supreme art treasure. That treasure possesses a high artistic quality and an expressive, provincial character hardly to be equalled elsewhere in Europe.

A few hundred castles and manor houses survive from what we call the Great Power periods – that is, the 17th century, when Sweden controlled much

of the territory round the Baltic. Those places present a European splendour and opulence.

The Authentically Swedish

The unique thing about Sweden, though, is something quite different. Something which is an obvious, everyday reality to every Swede, something which the tourist trade has not been perceptive enough to use as a means of attracting foreign tourists to the remote, chilly Ultima Thule, as a Roman visitor once called Scandinavia during the 2nd century B.C.

What is unique is our fresh, unspoiled, verdant, magical countryside, with its superabundance of water and greenery.

What is unique is "Everyman's Right" – our rights of common access, which give the general public freedom of movement in forest and field.

What is unique is the countryside, where with your own eyes you can see and understand the continuity of the man-made landscape, with its traces and remains of settlements and burial grounds from the Late Iron Age to the present.

Environments of that kind include manufacturing communities and fishing villages, shiedking linear villages and the "church towns" idyllic small towns with timber buildings. These places bear the imprint of their dominant livelihoods – agriculture, fishing, cattle farming, iron production or forestry. The settlement in these places is antiquated, often exactly the same today as when it was first built.

The buildings, often on a small scale, are made of locally available materials. Timber predominates. The architecture has seldom been influenced by foreign examples, but it tells us how people used to live and under what conditions. These things can be as exciting and exotic to visitors from other countries and they are self-evident and part of the everyday scene to the Swedish people.

The History of Tourism

From the Falun copper mine in the province of Dalarna we have written evidence of foreigners long ago visiting

the sights of Sweden. The copper mine was visited in 1615 by a German tourist, in 1634 by a French diplomat and in 1706 by an English doctor and mineralogist. Visitors' books survive from the 1760s, by which time there were also guides on duty in the mine.

The first tourist brochure aimed at attracting tourists to Sweden's first spa was written in 1682. Entitled "Les divertissements de Medevij", it is a series of letters, transcripts of which were distributed to castles and manor houses.

Mountains became a real attraction in Europe during the second half of the 19th century. The first Alpine associations were the embryo of our present-day tourist organisations. First of all came the Alpine Club in London. The Swedish Touring Club followed in 1885, developing into a nationwide, voluntary organisation. At first its members consisted mainly of naturalists and geologists, but from its very inception the organisation concerned itself with places of cultural interest. The founder-chairman of the organisation was Hans Hildebrand, at that time Director-General of the Central Board of National Antiquities. During the 19th century the organisation was mainly for the upper classes, but it developed quickly, extended its social range and acquired a popular educational mission. Holiday legislation was passed in Sweden during the 1930s, and the members of the Swedish Touring Club also came to include junior clerks and manual workers.

Tourism in Sweden Today

The cultural heritage and the natural environment, combined with activities, are the cornerstone of Swedish tourism. The same goes for the whole of Scandinavia where international marketing is concerned.

The tourist sector provides 3 or 4% of Sweden's GDP. In 1991 tourist earnings totalled about 11 billion dollars, and tourism in one form or another is the business of 21,000 enterprises with more than 230,000 employees. Popular

purchasing power and the statutory minimum of five week's holiday a year encourage Swedes to divide their leave into short periods spread out over the whole year. Northern Europeans, the Swedes included, are among the most travelled people in the world.

Swedes on the whole are not very adventurous. As a people they are said to be shy, cool and of few words. But the Interrail youngsters, business travellers and affluent pensioners of today are demanding more in the way of new experiences, crossing of boundaries and excitement.

Two out of every ten tourists in Sweden come from abroad, which makes a total of 3 million foreign visitors annually. One million of them come from outside Europe, the majority from the USA and Japan. More than 60% of the money spent by tourists is collected by the community in the form of taxes and other fiscal charges. Earnings from foreign travellers are estimated at about 2 billion dollars. Foreign travel by Swedes involves twice that amount.

Foreign visitors are attracted by the sparsely populated welfare society with its great expanses of unspoiled natural scenery. Opportunities of adventure and wilderness experience and the Swedish cultural heritage are the biggest attractions of all. Sweden is looked on as a safe country to visit.

The Organisation of Tourism

Already in the 1930s one could speak in terms of a national tourism and recreation policy. But it was above all during the seventies and eighties that politicians began to take an interest in tourism. The Swedish Tourist Board, a foundation controlled by the State, the municipalities and the county councils, was set up in 1976. At the same time the Riksdag – parliament – stressed that everybody must be given the opportunity of obtaining the relaxation and exercise which each and every one was entitled to expect, and that this particularly applied to young families, pensioners and the disabled.

The main task of the Tourist Board was to promote an expansion of tourism in Sweden. In 1988 the Board was allotted 9 million dollars for a three-year marketing programme. A scrutiny of the Board's activities showed them to be far too extensive, inefficient and poorly organised. After 15 years of activity the Board was dissolved.

The present non-socialist government has relinquished the social and cultural objectives for tourism. Only economic and monetary objectives remain. The State now purchase its services from an organisation owned by the enterprise sector.

Next Stop Sweden was set up in 1992 as the country's new central tourist organisation. It is a limited company owned by upwards of 300 large and small businesses, and assumes full responsibility for marketing Sweden abroad. The aim is to increase the number of people travelling to and in Sweden. Sweden has a negative tourist balance. Tourist earnings in Sweden equal only half the amount of money which Swedes spend in other countries. Sweden comes far behind other European tourist countries like Italy, France and Greece.

The activities of Next Stop Sweden are funded through the Sweden Image Board. The words culture, cultural heritage and cultural tourism have disappeared from the vocabulary of the central tourist organisation.

The **Sweden Image Board** is a small national authority with a staff of eight, set up in 1992. It purchases service from others and has about 13 million dollars at its disposal.

The **Swedish Touring Club** numbers about 5% of the national population among its members. This is very much due to the Club providing inexpensive accomodation at youth hostels, tourist stations and guest harbours. In addition the Club is a big producer in the tourist sector, with a comprehensive organisation of travel agencies. But the,

popular educational ideal is what matters most today, and the Club's motto is "Know Your Country".

Swedline, a newly started company, is a national database which collects, updates and distributes information for consumers in Sweden and abroad. The traveller can personally call up, on a display screen, a coloured map, pinpoint destinations and routes on it and, in a sequence of steps, obtain all the information, which may be needed for the journey.

Co-operation between Culture and Tourism

Co-operation between culture and tourism has not always been as self-evident in Sweden as in many other European countries. There have always been great differences between the cultural and tourist sectors, and the two have had different attitudes and values. In the cultural sector one speaks of underprivileged groups and experience while tourism speaks in terms of market adjustment, number of beds and guest nights. Tourism is concerned with profitability and pursues commercial and social targets. It has not regarded culture as a meaningful resource or source of earnings. Tourism always operates in relation to a public, whereas heritage conservation often has to give priority to measures of preservation and care and is unable to work on a sufficiently extrovert basis in relation to the public and visitors.

The attitude of the cultural sector is strongly non-commercial. The aim of heritage – conservation is to preserve the cultural heritage and bring it to life. In 1974 the Swedish Riksdag adopted a number of cultural policy aims, one of them being to "guarantee that the culture of earlier periods is preserved and brought to life".

In 1985 the Central Board of National Antiquities and the then Swedish Tourist Board inaugurated a joint scheme aimed at highlighting culture in the tourist context. The purpose of the project was to diversify the content of

tourism in Sweden and to encourage partnership. The project operated intensively for seven years, after which it was expanded and came to include a number of other public institutions.

During this time the following materialised:

- * 14 seminars up and down the country,
- * a databank of attractions and events,
- * an annual catalogue for cultural tourists,
- * a book of ideas for the marketing of museums,
- * an inventory of suitable places for the development of tourism.

The common aims of this large-scale venture were:

- * to create understanding for each other's aims and attitudes,
- * to utilise each other's knowledge and resources,
- * to establish a network of contacts at local, regional and central levels,
- * to bring culture to a new and wider audience.

There were expectations on both sides. The tourist sector wanted to:

- * identify new attractions and experiences,
- * reach a new and larger public,
- * create new job opportunities,
- * make money.

The heritage conservation sector wanted:

- * to acquire large resources for bringing the cultural heritage to life,
- * create understanding and respect for the cultural heritage,
- * increase the determination to preserve and care for Sweden's cultural heritage,
- * achieve better marketing of places of historic interest,
- * to achieve a wider spread of tourist flows liable to damage the cultural heritage.

The seminars:

Goals, resources and preconditions of co-operation were charted at 12 seminars held in various places in the course of three years. Points for discussion

included the commercial and non-commercial approaches and various attitudes to profitability and sponsoring. The project began and ended with two large, nationwide conferences, the second of which was attended by the Minister of Cultural Affairs. 55% of the seminar delegates from the cultural sector, 45% from tourism. 54% were officials and employees, 37% were politicians and 9% represented voluntary organisations.

Six main points were discussed.

- (1) Valuation of one's own country. Awareness and knowledge of one's own cultural heritage and the possibility of its conservation and development.
- (2) Co-operation. In many cases, heritage and tourist representatives were meeting for the first time. The politicians were commended for their good co-operation with both sides.
- (3) Attitudes and relations. The people from the cultural sector were accused of academic attitudes, snobbery, tediousness and inaccessibility. The tourist people were accused of commercialism and superficiality. The cultural representatives appreciated knowledge and idealism, while the tourist people respected commitment, enthusiasm and willingness to co-operate.
- (4) Opinion differed on the subject of activities and experiences. Many were sceptical about reconstructions and dressing people up, while others found this a necessary means of understanding the cultural heritage in the first place.
- (5) Economics and finance. Great difference of approach. Is culture to be a treat or something one pays for? Tourism, which saves amenities and employment, can assert itself more easily than culture, which is dependent on financial grants. The attitude to sponsoring was predominantly

favourable, but sponsoring must be on the terms defined by culture and must be used for big investments, not for running costs.

- (6) Education. Cultural studies should be a compulsory subject in tourism education. The local population should be trained and employed as guides in areas with which they are familiar.

The outcome of the seminars can be summarised as follows:

- Heritage conservation must give more thought to the needs and preferences of the visitor and must concern itself with marketing.
- Tourism should derive its substance from culture and should make use of museums and archives as a source of knowledge.

Culture must have life – tourism must have substance!

The Cultural Databank

For a long time Sweden lacked a good survey of attractions and events, but a computerised information system began to be built up in 1988. This includes a "cultural databank" as one of its subsystems. Information is systematically collected concerning the theatre, dance, music, art, exhibitions, museums, fine arts and the cultural heritage. Six organisations – the Central Board of National Antiquities, the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Society of Crafts and Design, the Swedish National Theatre Centre, the Swedish National Concert Institute and the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions Service – contribute up-to-date information from their several fields.

The contents of the databank are distributed to Swedish offices abroad, to travel arrangers and to information and tourist offices.

Exploration

A catalogue entitled "Exploration" ("Upptacktsresan" in Swedish) is published annually. It is based on the

material entered in the databank. A list of 400 attractions and events is accompanied by articles, literature and hints about travel, accommodation and courses. For financial reasons it also includes advertisements. The catalogue, running to a couple of hundred pages, has a print run of 200,000 and is distributed through about 500 tourist offices and public libraries.

Tourism and Cultural Policy

The Council of Europe is in the process of evaluating the cultural policies of various countries. Several international experts began by scrutinising a Swedish summary of Swedish cultural policy, the aims of which are to support creativity, to decentralise and augment public participation in cultural activities. A meeting then takes place between the experts and the Minister of Cultural Affairs. A meeting of that kind was held at the Council of Europe in 1989. The outcome was favourable to Sweden. The then Social Democratic Minister admitted that his policy was aimed more at transforming and influencing than at preserving the cultural heritage.

State grants to the cultural sector in Sweden are among the largest in Europe, and Sweden was criticised for inadequate supervision of the uses to which this funding was applied. To this the then Minister of Cultural Affairs replied that county councils and municipalities are not the instruments of the State.

One of the auditors, the British economist and statistician John Myerscough, pointed out that the cultural sector had a very important bearing on the national economy. He said that, to begin with, he had been intent on demolishing the Swedish model, but, as one journalist put it, he left his task "bubbly with enthusiasm".

Myerscough was invited to attend a Swedish conference, where he said: "In England we act first and think afterwards, whereas you think first and act afterwards. A conference to make culture and tourism co-operative would never be needed in England".

Artificial or authentic?

Sommarland – a theme park with games and entertainment – rapidly caught on in Sweden and expanded at the expense of other attractions. Before long copies were being planned and created which had no local profile and ended in economic disaster. Copying Disneyland in Paris was not a good idea. Artificial attractions have a rapid but shortlived magnetism. They amuse for the moment, provide a physical shake-up and arouse laughter, but they provoke no thoughts and they leave no memories.

A fashionable trend in Sweden has produced about 30 newly constructed prehistoric buildings and villages. This large-scale repetition leads to trivialisation.

The quality of an arrangement or a place can make it attractive despite the lack of reception apparatus. Many historic places attract large numbers of visitors, despite their meagre presentation. It can be the very lack of facilities and information which creates an indefinable atmosphere and a complete experience. The authentic survives and has greater powers of attraction in the long term. All new initiatives have to be accepted and understood by the local population. One must bank on what already exists and look to see whether it attracts the local public before going any further. The connection between an experience and the cultural heritage is very much a matter of feelings. There is a threshold which has to be surmounted in order to achieve personal experience. The mystique and excitement of an archaeological site, the beauty of a castle, the spirituality of a church or the drama of an industrial monument. Knowledge, though, is no less an important part of experience. The more we know, the greater our experience will be.

Small-scale, finely tuned local experiences can easily become great attractions to many people, but is that what we want? Will they survive the onslaught? We also have to teach people to be careful, teach them that the natural environment and the heritage are fragile.

Finally a couple of examples of good ventures in the field of cultural tourism.

Eketorp prehistoric village on the island of Oland in southern Sweden conveys the illusion of an Iron Age settlement. The prehistoric fort was inhabited for 1,000 years in three different stages. An encircling wall has been built and dwelling houses, cattle sheds and storage barns have been reconstructed. There are livestock and guided tours here, and a museum where excavated artifacts are on display. Scientific and public-oriented work have preceded hand in hand. Archaeological experiments are taking place for all to see. The reconstruction is based on scientific findings. But the higher the fort rises above floor level, the more difficult things become, Roofs and parapets are intelligent guess work. The thatched roofs, however, imitate the living tradition of the island.

As a tourist attraction the prehistoric village is plausible, thanks to the knowledge which has gone into its reconstruction. The whole place breathes authenticity, even though chapter and verse cannot be given for every detail.

During the summer season the fort admits the maximum number of visitors it can tolerate, which is about 100,000.

And there is no end to questions from the general public and discussions between experts.

This August Gotland, another Baltic island, will be celebrating **Medieval Week in the town of Visby**, for the tenth year in succession. That enterprise is run by a committee representing the county administration, the country museum, adult education associations, the tourist Association and private enterprise. The medieval lanes, surrounded by the longest and oldest town wall in Scandinavia, are usually invaded by 40,000 visitors. The people of Visby put on this festival themselves, but tourists are welcomed as guests, whether taking part or looking on. 2,500 people dressed up in medieval costume, which is the requirement for taking part. Many of them have made their own costumes, and created names and roles which they revive year after year. 150 programme items take place concurrently during the week.

The event is supported by several sponsors, an arrangement from which their employees benefit. For example, they have their own knights taking part in the tournaments. Medieval Week has speeded up local historical research. The reconstruction of material things and events provides a framework for intellectual content, images, myths, tales and beliefs.



Great interest from tourist when carpenter reconstructs medieval houses in the prehistoric village of Eketorp.



Eketorp on the island of Oland, Sweden. Ringfort with reconstructed walls and houses.