

Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

Scandinavia: charming throughout all seasons



Chapter 21

September 2009 - August 2010

Scandinavia: charming throughout all seasons

Denmark: stopping for a holiday

Coming from Iceland, we arrived on Saturday, September 26th 2009 with the big carferry *Norröna* at the [Danish](#) seaport of Esbjerg. During the last few years, autumn had always been the time, when we looked for a warm place for the winter. This time it should be different! We had decided to face the cold and spend the winter in Scandinavia. We travelled slowly northwards and spent most of the time in holiday cottages along the way. By spring we should have reached Northern Scandinavia, somewhere around the North Cape. Thereafter, we planned to make our way southwards along the Norwegian coast before finishing in Sweden, where we planned to spend the summer.

But let's start back in September in Jutland: [Esbjerg](#) is a surprisingly pretty town that deserves some attention. After all the small places we had just visited out in the Atlantic, the long pedestrian area felt huge and was really lively and cosmopolitan.

We followed again the scenic road along Jutland's west coast, as we had already done before departing with the *Norröna*. Especially in the southern section, it was still bustling with German Tourists commuting in- and out of holiday houses. In the evening, we reached the same camping a bit inland at Humlum, where we had been 2 months ago. Here we passed the night in the same old cottage, after digging into Humlum-Kro's superb buffet, one more time.

On the next morning, we drove along the beautiful Limfjord to **Tranum**. Here we had arranged for a summerhouse for the next 4 weeks. Summerhouses are very popular in Denmark and they can be anything; just a romantic shed by the water, or more often: real luxury houses. Several agencies rent them out and issue catalogues as thick as telephone books. In off-season, even the most luxurious ones go for a modest price.

The house we chose was only one year old. It had 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and a fully glassed south façade. It had no less than 8 glass-doors of which 7 led outside... The living room with an open-plan kitchen was spacious and very bright. To make sure that holidaymakers can relax, the house was equipped with dishwasher, washing machine and tumbler, a small inside spa, a sauna, sunbeds, satellite tv, dvd, video and broadband internet access. On the other hand, the bedrooms were very narrow - but at least most had 3 doors to escape, in case someone got claustrophobia... With so many goodies supplied, nobody would moan, and the icing on the cake was: an outside spa for 6 people.



Visitors and excursions around our summerhouse

After 10 days Heinz's sister Edith and her hubby Karl joined us. After we picked them up at Aalborg airport, we spent 10 very nice days together. Apart from talking, cooking and eating, our daily highlight was the bath in the hot tub, sometimes complemented by a sauna session. We also enjoyed sitting around the log fire, which Kari lit up every time Edith told him to do so.

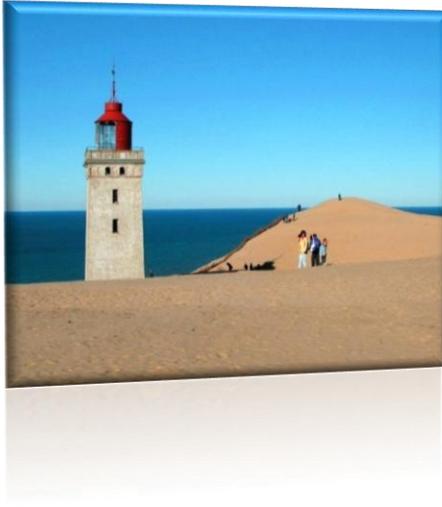
Although Edith & Kari loved to read in their books and certainly needed to relax much more than we did, they were quite energetic when it came to excursions. Two times we just gave them the car, but most of the time we ventured out together to discover the surrounding area. We made long walks along the beaches at Tranum Strand and other places around [Jammerbugten](#) and we visited the touristy seaside village of Blokhus and the town of Fjerritslev. It was amazing how many old windmills were dotted around the flat green landscape among many modern wind farms.

Also the nearby town of Brovst was more than just our shopping place. Denmark doesn't have the reputation to be a cheap destination and some items are really quite pricey! However, shopping can be reasonable, as Danish supermarkets usually offer huge discounts if you buy in bulk. If one item costs 10 Kroners (€ 1.33/CHF 2), you sometimes get three items for 14 or even more extreme: if one item costs 30 Kroners, for 50 you might get 4 of the same! The most incredible was: 1 item for 10 and 5 items for 18 DKK! Also meat is often sold as bulk-style bargain offers. One piece of porc-fillet might set you back 60-75 DKK; the 3-filet-special goes for 99 DKK, and it doesn't matter whether the package weighs

900 grams or more than 2 kg – it's all the same... Similar with fruit, that often sells per piece; it can include 8 – 10 pieces of various types of fruit for 20 Kroners. In Switzerland you might get just half a kilo of apples for the equivalent price! So, tourists are advised to travel in big groups, eat a lot and always spare some space in the luggage to store the surplus...

Back to our sight-seeing; by far the nicest town in the surrounding was [Aalborg](#), where we spent an entire day. We enjoyed the nice pedestrian area and the many historic buildings in the centre. Nearby was a beautiful park with the observation-tower "Aalborg-Tårnet". We were lucky; it was open just this day still (13.10.09) as it was the last day of the school holidays. What a great view it offered! In 360° we could look over the entire city, admire the blue Limfjord, the autumn coloured landscape and even the open sea at Jammerbugten.

Another excursion led us to the impressive shifting sand dune at **Rubjerg Knude**. There is a lighthouse that is slowly, but surely, consumed by the drifting sands. When the lighthouse was completed in 1900, it stood on a 60 metres high hill, 200 metres from the sea. By 1968 the dune accumulated that high in front of the 23m tall lighthouse, it wasn't even visible from the sea anymore!



Meanwhile, the sand dune passed the tower and shifts further inland. On the other side, the coastline recedes with a speed of 1-2 m per year. The waves wash out the high sandy cliffs that meanwhile are so close to the lighthouse, it will collapse and fall into the water in the near future.

On October 18, 2009, we drove Edith & Karl back to Aalborg airport. Meanwhile autumn had visibly progressed, the nights had become frosty. We used our last week in the house at Tranum to organise some holiday cottages in Sweden and Norway, so we were assured to sleep in style during the coming winter months.

Copenhagen: rediscovering a beautiful city

On October 25, 2009 we drove through the autumn coloured landscape 450km east to [Copenhagen](#). We stayed for three nights in the almost deserted Amager Youth Hostel. It is located on the outskirts, but well connected to the city centre by public transport. So we could easily visit all the sights of the Danish capital, albeit mostly in rain.

We enjoyed strolling around the long pedestrian zones and touristy Nyhavn. We felt it was rather cool, but many restaurants still offered "al fresco dining". To encourage customers to sit outside, blankets and gas heaters were provided. We enjoyed choosing from different cuisines in the many ethnic restaurants that can be found all around the city. Some of their lunch-offers were that competitively priced, you would hardly save any money by fixing a cheap feed from the supermarket.

Copenhagen has of a good mix of well maintained historic buildings and some ultramodern flashy ones. After our 2 ½ months in the sparsely populated North Atlantic, we enjoyed it particularly, to dive into the bustle of this metropolis.

We left Denmark by passing the impressive 16 km long Öresund link to Sweden. The road leads first through an undersea tunnel that alights on an artificial island. From there it swings onto an almost 8 km long bridge, where we drove a swindling 57 metres above the sea. The 4 main supporting towers are more than 200 metres tall.

Sweden: a few autumn weeks

On the [Swedish](#) side of the Öresund Bridge the highway led us very soon into the town of **Malmö**, where we stopped on October 28, 2009 to spend the day. With 280'000 inhabitants, coming from 150 nations, Malmö is the country's 3rd largest and also the most multi-cultural town. First we headed for the centre with its many beautiful historic buildings. Also the small old town Gamla Staden, as well as the old fisherman's harbour next to the castle, were very charming. Right besides the castle was an old windmill in a park with colourful autumn trees. There is also a remarkable building that was completed in 2005: a skyscraper called the turning torso. The famous Spanish architect [Santiago Calatrava](#) designed this 190m tall tower that twists through 90° from bottom to top.

Already before we left the town at 4 PM, it was possible to take nice twilight pictures and as we moved on in the rain, it was darkish already around 5 PM.

After an hour's drive, we arrived in **Helsingborg**, where we had booked a room in a small hostel for the next three nights. The town is very appealing, and has a long promenade along the sea. After sunset, Gamla Stan (the old town) looks especially charming. It has many businesses and restaurants along the cobblestone lanes. The most beautiful and prominent buildings, are the town hall and the square tower Kärnan. Together with stairs winding romantically up between archways and other towers, those are the only remains of a castle above the town. No reason to mourn after the castle; the town hall, with dozens of turrets, makes up for it. The red brick building was glooming in the low sunlight. A very impressive sight indeed!

The ferries that cross the 4 km wide strait to Denmark, dock right in the town centre. Helsingborg holds a colourful market, and there are several parks to enjoy. In expectation of winter temperatures, the city council had decorated flower pots with ornamental cabbage.

Sights outside Helsingborg

On our second day we went out to the surroundings. Admiring the beautiful autumn colours, we walked to discover Sofiero Castle northwest of town. Beech-, Oak- and Birch trees were displaying a fire of gold-brown colours, competed by smaller bushes that boasted reds and green-yellows. In the middle of that firework, the brick-castle was looking out to the glistening blue sea.

Hungry after that long walk, we had lunch at Helsingborgs Winterbath Palsjö. From the excellent restaurant, the unique bath house was in view. It consists of 36 tiny huts and some bigger buildings, all on stilts, a few meters offshore. People go there during winter to heat up in the sauna and cool down in the water just below the huts. As we were having lunch, we could see every few minutes someone climbing down the stairs for skinny dipping.

Now we drove out to scenic **Kulla** Peninsula, passing the wonderful old windmill Kullabygden near Höganäs and the pretty fishing village of Mölle. At the tip of the peninsula is Kullaberg Nature Reserve with a lighthouse. We had to hurry, because the sun sets early on the end of October. It was a magical landscape with steep cliffs and trees bent by the winds. The sea shimmered in an array of pastel colours and we really enjoyed this wonderful sunset.



Stylish holiday cottage in Skavböke

On October 31, 2009 we continued to Skavböke, some 30 km northeast of Halmstad, where we had rented a holiday cottage for 4 weeks. Although it looked only like a cabin on a campground from the outside, it was almost “designer style” inside. There was a living room with a very high ceiling, an open plan kitchen and dining area. The main-bedroom was not that small – but it was only slightly bigger than the bathroom. A spiral stair led to the first floor, where there were two additional open bedrooms. One was situated above the bed and bathroom and the other one above the patio at the other end of the building. Those two were linked by a bridge that swung across the living room. Everything was stylishly decorated, mainly in black and white colours.



The house was part of a farm but the young bloke (in our age) who constructed it, makes a living with a construction company that was obviously also his hobby and maybe he should try his hand as an architect.

We used the time in this modern house mainly to write the travel diary about our trip to the North Atlantic. This was just perfect, as the weather was not. During all of November, it was mostly rainy with several storms. Temperatures were moody too; from +10°C to -10°C. On the odd sunny days we went for walks in the nearby forests and were amazed that the sun didn't make it above the trees anymore. It also set earlier every day and on most days (i.e. cloudy days) it got

darkish around 3 PM already, before the end of the month. Surely this has also its good points: on the day we visited **Halmstad**, we could take nice twilight pictures right after breakfast. This lively town that has some good shopping options was buffing up for Christmas. Here we also got a set of second-hand studded tyres that should bring us safely through the Scandinavian winter.

On the way back to our cottage we sighted three elks (North American Moose) on the roadside. Just a shame that it was too dark for a photo shooting...

After our time in Skavböke, we headed towards Norway. On a brief stop along the Bohulän coast we discovered that it is pretty dead on this time of the year. So our intended delightful meal in a seaside restaurant had to be shifted to a simple Pizzeria in the village of Ljungskile.

Strömstad, shortly before the Norwegian border, was more of a “happening place”, as Norwegians flock here for “cheap” shops, booze and restaurants. There were almost more Norwegian cars than Swedish. Strömstad is a charming seaside town that presented itself particularly pretty around twilight.

Norway: three winter weeks around Kvitfjell

On November 28, 2009 we crossed the border bridge near Halden into [Norway](#). Shortly thereafter we reached the Tuneheimen YHA in Sarpsborg around 5 PM. Here we had booked a room, as we didn't want to drive in the dark for long. If it was for sight-seeing only, it's another story: the short days are no excuse to miss out on touristy highlights. They can be as charming after sunset as in daylight. So we drove into Fredrikstad where we visited the historic old town “Gamle Byen”. It has many well maintained wooden buildings, of up to 4 storeys. We found a good restaurant among them, where we tasted a traditional Norwegian Christmas-dinner.

Upon returning to the Youth Hostel, the corridors were teeming with people in tail coats and evening dresses. The dining room was booked for a celebration. As most Youth Hostels in Scandinavia, also this “Vandrarrhem” was rather a conference- and event centre, with its guesthouse associated to ‘Hostelling International’ than a backpacker's heaven. Some lonely travellers might find it irritating to mingle with businesspeople and local families instead of globetrotters. For NOK 670 (€ 80) we got a double room with en-suite facilities and a huge breakfast buffet. It was loaded with delights and gave us the chance, to sample some cheeses that can only be found in one or two-kilo packets, in Scandinavian shops.

On the next day we drove on minor roads towards the Kvitfjell region north of Lillehammer. When we set off, the landscape was still green, but north of Oslo, it started to be snow covered and lakes were frozen along their shores. At this stage, we didn't realize that we should be surrounded by white landscapes with frozen rivers and lakes only, for the next four months.

Holiday cottage in the snow

As soon as we left the E6 we were very glad we had studded tyres, as the roads were covered with glaze. When we arrived at our holiday cottage in Fåvang, it was freezing and a lot of icicles hung from the roof. Nevertheless, inside it was very warm as the floor-heating had been switched on the previous day. The cottage had been constructed of wood, which made it cosy but somehow also darkish. We got more space and luxury than we needed, including dishwasher, sauna and solarium.

The location of this holiday house was just perfect, as it was only a few hundred metres from the village centre of Fåvang. There we found several supermarkets and a very nice bakery, so we were looking forward to our three weeks here.



The ground was covered in snow, but it was only about 10cm deep. Except of a period in the middle of our stay that was “a little bit warmer”, temperatures were between 12°C and 29°C below zero. So we could witness the freezing process of the Troms River in Fåvang, as well as the river through Gudbrandsdalen that forms Lake Lagen around here. The ice on

the lake was of smooth flat icesheets, but because the river underneath was in motion, they rubbed against each other. Consequently, along the cracks, which were like long dark threads across the lake, the ice shifted up like wedges. The fast flowing Troms River offered a completely different picture. Around every big stone in the water, the ice froze into amazing shapes and changed its looks daily. At first, the river was only frozen along its shores, and had small flamelike ice shields, on those stones that were close to the surface. Only two days later, the stones under the surface were padded in ice. A few days later, it all got frozen entirely.

Excursions into winter wonderland

Only 10km to the north of Fåvang is Ringebu, a bigger village with lots of shops, and even more interesting to tourists: one of the biggest and most important Stave Churches in Norway. It is being dated back to at least 1220, but has of course gone through several restorations. Stave Churches are among the oldest surviving wooden buildings. The name Stave Church derives from its architecture of a “post and beam” structure, by which vertical supporting posts carry the load of the building.

In December, Ringebu was particularly charming, with lots of Christmas decoration and illumination in streets and in many private windows.

The area’s big draw-card is Kvitfjell (simply white mountain), famous for its ski fields, but also pleasant in summer for hiking. At first, Brigitte was a bit worried, whether we might be able to drive up there at all, as the road was very steep and very icy. However, Heinz managed easily to drive our car up, into real deep snow country. Soon we made our first stop, as we approached a high rock face, almost covered with huge icicles. Not only were the icicles fascinating, but also the frozen branches of rocks. They were embedded in ice that was about 10 times branches diameter.

Here on the mountain, there than in Fåvang, only a few The fir trees were under a here; it was real winter! We many walking possibilities, holiday homes were cleared, The walls of many houses they appeared almost them a fairytale look, wooden planks were Temperatures were below frozen now but they the air was fairly dry.



bushes, beneath the in a transparent layer of thicker than the

was much more snow hundred metres below. thick layer of snow up were delighted to find as the paths to the but left white. had so much frost that whitish. This gave especially where the adorned with carvings. approximately 15°C appeared warmer, as

Kvitfjells ski slopes were illuminated day and night, but not yet crowded. Also for those who don’t ski, a visit is very rewarding. From one point we had unlimited views over the Gudbrandsdalen valley to the peaks of the treeless mountains in Dovrefjell and Rondane National Parks. The sun just put a beam of light on these chains, which let them glow like unreal snow dunes in the distance.

Kvitfjell West

Two days later we made another trip to Kvitfjell, this time to its western edge. Skiing is also big business up here although there are not that many lifts. The landscape looks equally rewarding. It is just around the treeline and the forest was mixed; birch and fir, presently all covered in thick hoarfrost. They bent under the heavy snow-load, and even the trunks were literally embedded in snow and frost. It was magical to walk around, but we had to stick to the ploughed roads, as we immediately sunk down almost to our hips, as soon as we tried otherwise.

Ski slopes and cross country tracks led on many overpasses over the roads. It was the middle of December but 95% of holiday homes and lodges were still empty. Most hotels hadn’t even opened for the season yet. Incredible to imagine that only 10 days later, Christmas holiday should be in full swing.

Up here, the sun shone much longer than down in the valley. That means: sunset was around 2 PM, whereas from our

cottage we saw the sun come out at 10:30h and it disappeared behind a hill, already 100 minutes later at 12:10h. Not only the sunshine hours were short, the sun also didn't rise very high above the horizon! As we enjoyed the sun, we would never guess that the light is so much less intense than in Switzerland for instance. Scandinavians do realize and therefore illuminate ski slopes even in full daylight. Craftsmen use strong spot lights when working on façades at midday. If it was cloudy we realised as well, how dark it is. It was surprising, from how far away oncoming car's headlights were visible even at midday and as soon as we went inside our wooden cottage, it felt dark – even with lights on. We found a study that proved that the wintersun does not even manage in Germany to get enough light through. So the body does not produce enough vitamin D to have a positive impact. The further north people live, the more their bodies get affected by it. Many Scandinavians suffer of SAD (seasonal affective disorder), except the Icelanders, who are thought not to be affected due to their high consumption of fish.

Real cool Venabygdsfjell

Another excursion led us up to Venabygdsfjell from where we had fantastic views over the chains of white peaks in Dovrefjell and Rondane Nationalparks. From here they looked even more spectacular than from Kvitfjell, as we were considerably closer now. Also here laid very deep snow and trees were decorated in hoarfrost that sometimes covered only one side of the branches due to the wind. The frost looked like rigid banners that could have ten times the thickness of the branch to which it was almost invisibly attached.

There were again many magnificent picture opportunities but sometimes it was difficult to avoid our shades to appear in the pictures. Due to the low sun they could be some 20 metres long, even at midday. Venabygdsfjell is on an altitude of 920 metres and the temperature was a mere 25°C below frozen. Even with long underwear, this felt quite cold. Our car's windows would freeze even on the inside, each time we left it, for more than a couple of minutes. Imagine our surprise when we noticed that the campground was open and the snow in front of the ~ 50 permanent caravans had been carefully cleared. Many awnings were decorated for Christmas and it didn't look deserted at all. On the way back, we sighted some Norwegian and also German Tourists, towing their caravans up there; that's the real die hard's!

On the same evening, temperatures around our cottage also dropped down to 30°C below frozen. But after sweating in the sauna, we still run out naked from tip to toe, into the snow. However, the cold literally tried creeping into the house; even the well insulated triple-glaze windows froze along the frames. Around the keyhole, frost appeared even inside, as well as around each venting in the walls. To remain cosy and warm we had to put the heaters further up, which came at the cost of € 300 for 3 weeks.

On our way back to Sweden, we came first into snow flurries but later enjoyed sunshine again. Surprisingly, the E6 "sometimes-motorway" led almost through the city centre of Oslo.



Sweden in winter: cold but extremely beautiful

When we arrived back in [Sweden](#) on December 19, 2009, Christmas decorations were at their best. Scandinavians and Swedes in particular, love to decorate their windows for the outside world, unlike Swiss, who draw their curtains, to make sure nobody peeps in. Here in Northern Europe, windows in private homes are nothing short of showcases. If they have curtains, they are only framing the "exhibits". Many pretty decoration-objects are placed in windows, and to make them seen also at night, it is very common to have lighting fixtures in the windows. Usually, there is one lamp in each window and they are normally switched on, even if nobody is home.

Decorations are adapted to the seasons and during Christmas time, lightings in the windows are replaced by some kind of small electric Advent candle arch, called Julstake. The most common type of this comprises 7 candles and they are being placed everywhere; even in empty and abandoned houses or summerhouses that are not being inhabited during the entire winter at all. Also the outside of the houses are often nicely decorated and therefore it's very pleasant to wander around Swedish villages and towns during December nights, as they look even more charming.

Holiday cottage in Färgelanda

It was already dark by the time we arrived at our holiday house near Färgelanda, northeast of Gothenburg. Candles were lit inside and outside of the house, and Julstakes had been placed in the windows. Although the house belongs to a

German couple, it was decorated as Swedish as can be. We almost felt like stepping into a Christmas theme-park. Candles were placed in big or small dwarfs, and Santa Clauses, a tiny, but real X-Mas tree and a table runner, table sets and tableware in X-Mas designs, were completing the picture.

The house appeared small from the outside, but because it consisted of only one room on each of the two floors, it felt very spacious. There was an additional bedroom attached for summer use only and because it had been added later, it wasn't insulated as well as the rest of the house. In that unheated room, temperatures regularly dropped below frozen and just on the other side of the thin wooden door, it was easy to heat up to 20°C.

The cottage stood on a forested hillside right next to the owners house, with only very few other houses in sight.



During the week before our arrival, Southern Sweden had received its first lot of snow. Now, the landscape was covered with a white blanket. It had already been cold enough for the lakes to freeze. During our 17 days in Färgelanda, we could observe how the ice on the nearby lake grew. At first, it was still shimmering in the sunlight, and there were stripes with frost across the lake. After a lot of snowfall, the last funny starlike holes closed, the lake got covered under a white blanket, and it was difficult to see where the shore was.

Heavy snowfall brings joy and sorrow

In fact, there was so much snow coming down on Christmas day that many trees bent and broke under the heavy load. As the power lines lead on pylons, across the vast forests, many power supply lines were interrupted by falling trees. Just a couple of minutes after the first power cut, the owners of our cottage knocked on the door and asked, whether we need a torch or more candles. They mentioned that we should stay at their house, in case the power would not resume by tomorrow morning, as they have a wood-stove and generator.

We didn't worry about that, as we were convinced that the power will resume very soon, but sure enough; it didn't! On the next morning, the owners brought us some toast, boiled eggs, as well as a thermos flask with hot coffee and informed us that they make their spare room ready for us. To get warm, we went out for a long hike. When we came back, our landlords insisted that we have to stay in their house, as ours would be too cold without electricity by now. We moved over to their basement, where we got an own living room and also a bedroom. If there was a second night without electricity, they wanted us to sleep here. As they were more than generously heating the basement with the wood fire, we almost felt like stripping off. Now, we had enough light and more than enough warmth, but we had to think of how we could make dinner, as the generator was not strong enough to run the stove. Luckily Brigitte had baked two loafs of bread yesterday, and we had also a big sausage that our Landlady warmed up in a pan she placed on the wood fire. After 40 hours; power finally resumed again around 10 A.M. the next morning.



The outside temperature was some 20°C below frozen and all heaters worked full power. As soon as the temperatures in the cottage reached comfort level, the power failed again on the same evening! Meanwhile, our Landlords had friends

visiting for New Year, so the spare rooms were taken. To save us, the owners immediately bought some cables, drilled a hole and installed an emergency power supply line from their generator to our cottage. After another 40 hours with cold meals, power resumed again.

Snowfall ended and sunshine reigned again. After digging out our car, we ventured out to discover the fairytale winter wonderland. We didn't need to go far until it became obvious, how much damage the snow had done to the forest and consequently, also to uncountable power lines. Wherever we went, the Swedish power supplier Vattenfall was very busy fixing power lines. Army-like, they combed the forests with small tanks for broken power lines. Seeing that, we were pleasantly surprised we only had to endure three more power cuts, and those were all brief.

However, it was marvellous to drive on the white roads and to look at the pretty landscape, covered by deep snow. Thanks to the locals, who now mostly drove around with a chain-saw handy, so they could clear trees, in case the way would be blocked, we got through everywhere. The rivers and lakes didn't shine in their contrasty blue anymore, as they were frozen, but the nice Swedish houses appeared now in starker contrast, to their snow covered surrounding. The typical red and yellow houses shone in the golden light of the low winter sun. Trees were not only bending, they were also full of thick hoarfrost, which was ever so beautiful. We didn't mind the cold and couldn't get enough of exploring the surroundings. With our studded tyres, it was very easy to navigate on the small, snow covered, but well ploughed roads. They were very firm and we were never skidding.

Outside our cottage, we made use of the piles of snow; Brigitte excitedly built her own iceberg with a hole in it, to remember Greenland. And because there was more snow; she also honoured Iceland, and built a volcano, of which she illuminated the crater at night with a candle (albeit without consequences for airline-traffic).

Exploring Bohuslän and Dalsland

On a sunny day, we ventured out to visit two of the Bohuslän coast's prettiest villages: Smögen and Fjällbacka. It was strange to have Smögen's Bryggan (pier) all to ourselves. Now it was covered in a dash of snow, whereas in summer, it's overwhelmed by tourists. The only people we saw in Smögen's touristy area were those ice-skating on the ponds in the

rocky part behind the harbour. In the low wintersun, the reflecting houses along the waterfront were particularly charming. Smögen's waterfront is lined with tourist-shops and restaurants, but now none of them was open. At least in the village-centre there was business as usual, as locals went about their daily grind.

In Fjällbacka it was very similar; lots of closed tourist facilities and no tourists. We arrived around 3 PM, which was the perfect time for twilight pictures. The houses, which are glued to the hill above the water, were glooming in the last evening light - it was just magical. Fjällbacka has a large harbour for leisure boats, but it was empty now. The sea was steaming, indicating that it's just on the brink of freezing. Here, we didn't find the big masses of snow as in Färgelanda 70km inland, but it felt even colder.



Another excursion led us to the aqueduct and locks in Håverud on Lake Vänern. On this site, a road-, a railway- and a waterway-bridge cross each other on different levels. The aqueduct was constructed back in 1868 as part of the [Dalsland Canal](#). After crossing the aqueduct, the boats have to pass four locks, before reaching the level of Lake Vänern. In summer it's quite interesting to watch the boats, but now the water was just freezing.

We continued to Köpmannebro, where we saw some nice holiday- and farm houses. They were beautifully reflecting in the water that was not yet frozen completely. When we arrived in Mellerud, we were impressed about several big roundabouts that were illuminated by dozens of candles sunk into the snow. This made driving around those roundabouts feel like driving around giant birthday cakes. Later, we observed that various Swedish communities decorate their squares, bridges or roundabouts with burning candles every night. Swedes love to light candles during their long winter nights, be it in front of the doors to private houses or businesses. There are (IKEA) tea lights burning on every table and every window sill. We wonder, whether IKEA earns more money by selling furniture or candles...

Already New Year's Eve came. To finish off a wonderful 2009, we prepared a particularly nice dinner for ourselves; Fondue Chinoise with lots of different sauces. Quite unexpectedly, our Landlords lit a (semi) professional firework at midnight.

We enjoyed a few more days at Färgelanda, with many walks to the frozen lake and into the forest. To see roe deer, it was not necessary to leave the house. During the entire winter, we regularly saw them in front of houses or on open fields – often in the middle of the day. Those clever animals probably know when the hunting season is over...

As the weather remained beautiful, we also drove out again, discovered the ski slope for local kids, admired more nice Swedish houses, and got enchanted by low hovering fog over sunny landscapes.

Two days around Örebro

On January 5, 2010 we moved on eastwards to Örebro, which is halfway between the west coast (Gothenburg) and Stockholm. Örebro is a very charming city of about 130'000 inhabitants and it looks very appealing in winter. In the entire city centre, roads were cleared but still white and therefore, it was easy to take nice pictures even after sunset. Piles of snow could be seen everywhere, which limited circulation and parking space. We stayed in a Youth Hostel right in the city centre, which was handy, as the temperature was a mere 20°C below frozen.

The many squares and wide roads were framed by historic buildings and still decorated for Christmas. At the town hall, every window functioned as part of an advent calendar that had revealed a new picture daily. On another square, there was a huge "Jul Bok", a billy goat made of fir branches. It's a guardian symbol for Christmas. The town's non-seasonal attractions are Vasa Castle and Wadköping. The castle now functions as government office. In the museum village of Wadköping, people are employed during the summer to perform traditional life, wearing traditional clothing. There were no actors now, but the museums-village was open and we could not only walk among the nice tilted houses but also enter some, to see the exhibits and the frostwork on the windows. Wadköping was certainly very charming in winter.



After two days, we continued to **Nora**, where we first visited the disused iron-works Pershyttan with its pretty Bergsmansbyn (employee's village), of which the red buildings stood in good contrast to the snow. Nora itself is famous for its nice wooden buildings and it is very pretty indeed. Though, there are lots of pretty towns everywhere around Sweden. Nora is beautifully situated, on a now frozen lake. Consequently, this place has more than its fair share of restaurants and accommodation. Contrary to other touristy sites, all restaurants were open now. With so many offerings, but no tourists, competition drove prices for lunch deals even lower than they already are in Sweden. The cheapest lunch menus were SEK 45 (€ 4.50) and included a freshly prepared main dish (Pizza, Steak with French Fries and Sauce Béarnaise or Kebab on a plate), a salad, a soft drink and a coffee. Elsewhere, similar lunch deals would cost between SEK 60 and 75, maybe 95 if it's in a real gourmet-temple. You will not be able to get beef filet for that price, however, slices of beef filet on a pizza are quite common, even as part of a lunch deal. Salads are usually from a small self-help buffet and accompanied by rich creamy sauces, often made from yoghurt. Also meat comes normally with a creamy sauce. Sauce Béarnaise for example, is that popular, it's even served on pizzas. All over Sweden, cheap restaurants are often run by immigrants from the Middle- or Far East. Some locals told us, no Swede would ever work as hard and such long hours as they do.

Also Thais are surprisingly strong represented in Sweden. The further north we travelled, the more we met. Thais are obviously very attracted by cold climate that keeps them beautifully white (other countries – other manners). As in Greenland, Thais outnumbered Chinese by far. Thai restaurants and take-away's can easily be found all over Sweden. They offer a healthy alternative to fast-food. Thai food (and Pizza) are so popular, almost every restaurant feels forced to put some on their menu.

Many Swedes love Thai food, as they often go to Thailand for holidays. In most Swedish book shops, it's easier to find road maps of Thailand than of Scandinavia! Those 33% of Thai women from the north east of Thailand who are neither married to a German or a Swiss, are certainly married to a Scandinavian!

Two days around Västerås

Back to Sweden: from Nora we continued to Västerås, where we stayed for two days. The Youth Hostel here is part of the 4-star “Quality Hotel” and when we entered the room, the TV was on and we were welcomed by a personalized message on the screen. Hostel guests get ordinary, though not very well maintained single-rooms, but there is a small sofa that can be converted into a second bed. The window only looked into the giant hall with a glass roof. As in every Youth Hostel here, sheets and towels are not included (but rentable) and guests are expected to clean by themselves. The hotel was located about 2km out of the centre, but we still walked to town, braving the cold.

As special as our accommodation, was also the city centre (i.e. luxurious but weird). It was not much more than an assembly of ugly shopping complexes. The pavement and roads in the pedestrian zone was heated, and therefore absolutely free of snow. It was such a strange view with all the winter around; somehow totally artificial! A bit further out, we found two areas with nice old houses and snow covered streets. Between these parts, were a big park and a church: Domkyrka. In the park, dozens of tame ducks were running or flying up to every bystander. As the ground was icy, many ducks landed quite funnily on their belly and some even rolled over, just in front of our feet. Not enough of



curiosities: the river to the side of this park flowed over some steps and the shores were frozen with lots of icicles. The damping water was open in the midst of the riverbed only, and wherever there was a water swirl, pancake ice had formed. It looked like icy leaves of water lilies and was constantly bobbing up and down.

Near the Quality Ho(s)tel is the museum village Villby. It consists of a collection of red wooden buildings scattered around a park. Now with all the snow but no other tourist in between, it was easy to take some beautiful pictures.

Ängelsberg was a small detour on our way north. There is another iron mine from the olden days (1680), and it's even World Heritage listed. The used technology was “state of the art” at that time and the mine got quite important.

Holiday cottage near Falun

On January 9, 2010 we reached our next abode, where we spent the following two weeks: a nice holiday house in Svärdsjö. It was situated in the forest, next to the owner's house. As a big plus, it had a wood fired oven complementing the electric heaters. When we arrived, it was almost 30°C below frozen. The owner told us that it had been -33°C in the morning and he moaned that it was the first time that it got so cold! When we asked him, how cold “normal winters” get, he thought for a while and then said: “Minus 33°C is quite normal in February, but we never had this temperature in January before”. Well then, at least we knew now what to expect!

As Swedish houses are all well insulated, heating them up to comfort level was never a problem. Electricity is normally not included in the rent and wherever we had stayed before, there were electric heaters only. Obviously, heating from -33°C to +20°C is not cheap at all. With the woodstove we had here, it was another matter! For SEK 100/week (€ 10) we could use as much firewood as we needed. It was so efficient; we could switch off the electric heaters most of the time.

On 80 m², this house offered a huge kitchen, a generous living room and a bedroom. We also had a washing machine on our disposal, but the door wouldn't shut. No problem; the owner bought a new one the next day. In our Norwegian cottage, the washing machine hadn't worked properly either, and that one had been replaced on the very same day! With the internet connection, there was a problem too, but as the broken router was still under warranty, it took 10 days, until it was replaced. Well; it should have been a replacement, if it had arrived in sound condition. The new one had a broken antenna but worked temporarily, after glue tape had been applied.

Visiting famous Falun

First on our list of excursions was [Falun](#), another town that had grown around a mine. This was a copper mine and it's also World Heritage listed. In the 17th century, it produced as much as 70% of the worlds copper and it was operational

until 1992. In old times, Falun was as important as the capital. An impressive open cut, and several mine buildings are still visible, but parts of the mining estate are now used by other companies.

Sweden is famous for its red houses with white corners and gable ends. The colour used for the typical red coating, is called “Falun Röd-färg” a by-product of copper mining. Manufactured from ruddle (the red ochre from the mine), it’s very cheap and protective on the wood.

Falun’s wealth is visible in its many nice houses, but it also impresses with Elsborg, its old quarters of miners dwellings. There are many rows of neat but simple cottages. Often some special mirrors are mounted in front of windows. Those allow the dwellings occupants to observe life on the road, without opening the window. Without curtains, it is not only possible to look in; it’s also easy to look out!

As the weather remained beautiful, it stayed also very cold. That’s winter in Sweden; either you have sunny and very cold days (average -20°C to -30°C and sometimes even colder) or it’s overcast and only moderately cold (-5° to -10°C).

Unusual, compared to Switzerland, is the dry air. Therefore, cold temperatures are much easier to bear. Most of the time the car’s windows didn’t get an ice layer – not even at -33°C .

Our Dacia dutifully started even under such cold conditions. Preheating, before starting the diesel engine, took up to 30 seconds now. After it started, it sounded like an old tractor at first. After a few hundred metres on the road, the engine always drove very smooth again. If temperatures didn’t fall below -20°C , all sounded as it should, from the beginning. The locals couldn’t believe how easy our car always started. Cars sold in Sweden are equipped with an engine-independent vehicle heating system that runs on 220 Volt. Consequently, north of Stockholm, all carparks have plugs. Often, not only the engine, but also the passenger compartment is being electrically preheated and therefore nice and warm – ready to go. Luckily, also our passenger compartment got warm within reasonable time. The only problems we sometimes had, were the doors that froze up and couldn’t be opened again for the next few weeks – luckily this only happened to the back doors.

Touring around frozen lakes

On another excursion, we drove around the area’s many frozen lakes. The traditional red, yellow and white Swedish houses gloomed beautifully in the nicest sunset-colours, even at midday. As everything was covered in white, we could hardly make out where the lake shores were.

Our trip to famous Lake Siljan, offered a similar picture, with the difference that the trees were covered in pretty hoarfrost. The down-side of it was that the frost had built because of fog. Therefore, the huge lake was not only frozen but also befogged. Had we not seen this lake some years ago in summer, we couldn’t estimate how big it is. According to the custom of this area, the Maypole was left standing and offered an eerie picture, as it stood frozen next to a giant Christmas tree with huge red baubles. The touristiest place was Tällberg, where most hotels were open, as they had good winter business with conferences. Also Rättvik, the Siljan area’s commercial hub, looked very appealing with its Christmas decoration still in place.



Soon our two weeks around Falun were over and we moved north, stopping for lunch at Järvsö. The drive along Route 83 to Ljusdal was particularly beautiful, as it followed many frozen lakes. Driving along this road was not very smooth that day, as it had ice ruts all the way. Especially on minor roads, they are not easy to clean off the surface, as the ice gets very hard with temperatures regularly falling even below -20°C . Later, we turned into the busy E4 highway, which was mostly snow- and ice free. With a shiver, we noticed the many marks from snow-mobiles that had crossed this road, despite traffic thundering along with up to 110km/h!

Holiday cottage in Svedje north of Sundsvall

From January 23 to February 20 we stayed in a small house, next to a farm that is associated to “Bo på lantgård” (holiday on farms). It belongs to a young family that keep some farm animals as a lifestyle, but they make their living with other jobs. We got very friendly with the family and were even invited for a delicious dinner.

Our house consisted of two floors, of which the upper was one large bedroom under the pitch of the roof. The ground floor however, was divided into bathroom, living room and kitchen, which made it feel smaller than it really was.

During our month, there was lots of snow coming down, sometimes in blizzards. One day, a snowdrift had entirely covered the 30 metres long access path to our cottage. Heinz had to make his way through hip deep snow, to get the shovel that unfortunately waited at the wrong end of the former path. Although it took him quite a while, to dig a new path, it was not to be the only time. Between the snowfalls, we had also a fair share of very cold and sunny days.

Sundsvall

On the odd day, when temperatures rose a few degrees above freezing, we drove to [Sundsvall](#). The snow covered town presented itself in the nicest sunlight. Never the less, with the thaw it was dangerous to walk close to the buildings. Giant



icicles hung from many roofs. The townhall had closed those footpath sections, with the biggest guys hanging above. As everyone else, we tried to walk on the road, rather than on the footpaths. As Heinz was taking a picture, a big load of snow showered him from some 10 metres above. There he stood, thunderstruck, not knowing what had happened to him. Slowly, he realized that his hands were not holding the camera anymore, and that his glasses were not sitting on his nose anymore. As he looked up the house, he still couldn't figure out, where all this snow had come from, that now surrounded his feet and filled his collar. At least, the glasses were not broken and the camera worked again after drying.

Sundsvall is quite different to other Swedish towns of this area, as it has no wooden buildings in the city centre. After a devastating fire in 1888,

Sundsvall became a stone-city. It is very pleasant, with big squares and many great castellated buildings. There was a lot of wealth at the time of rebuilding, thanks to a booming forestry and sawmill industry. Architects from all over Europe were called in, to rebuild the town in what were the latest trends in architecture.

Visiting the surrounding villages

Apart from many long walks, we also drove out to the surrounding fishing- and holiday settlements quite often. Every time, we got astonished by something new. We met many locals, who readily explained us the different aspects of Swedish winters.

When we approached the frozen bay at Holmö on Åstön Island, three ice-fishers came ashore, with huge ice drills and their catch on the shoulders. As we asked them whether it was safe to walk on the ice, they just laughed and explained how thick it is, and that it would be o.k., to go on the ice until mid April. They told us, how strenuous it is, to drill a hole into the ice.

So now we were assured, and walked straight out to the harbour, which of course, had been emptied of boats as everywhere. To touch the moored buoy that had stayed atop the ice and snow was quite weird. Now, we (too) could walk on the ocean. It was great fun to see the pier from where normally only captains can see it. Many holiday cottages lined the frozen shore and they looked very charming.

In Svenskär we found a row of nice fishermen's cottages directly on the sea, as we ventured out another time. These were nicely restored and used as summer-cottages by those who are 'born to fish (but forced to work)'... Most were deserted, but we met a couple that had come here, to clean the snow off their roof. They were very nice and gave us a tour through their former fishermen's quarter. They explained us how the catch, along with the boat, is landed and lifted into the cottage, which stands on stilts above the water.

Snow and Ice

After a sports hall in Stockholm had collapsed, due to heavy snow on its roof, almost all Swedes suddenly stood on their roofs and started to remove the heavy load.

The snow did not only provide extra work, it also provided quite a few additional leisure options. The further north we travelled, the more snow-scooters could be seen. Once, when we stopped to picture some, the owners approached us and explained that some snow-scooter's engines have more horsepower than our car, and that their machines could do 160km an hour. After hearing that, we didn't dare to join them on the offered ride. To very few people, snow scooters are utility vehicles, to reach their island at a time, when the waters are frozen. For most, snow-mobiles are nothing more than joyriders used to scamper around the snow. The caterpillared vehicles, with vats at the front (with small wheels), can easily manage to drive on ice, snow or even on bitumen.



Now we headed to a spot, from where we could look out to the Bothnian Sea. All along the shore, it was frozen. Only if we climbed up to an elevated point, we could still see some blue water far out in the distance. We had to stick to ploughed paths though; otherwise we would sink hip-deep into the snow. Brigitte still had to try to believe it, as she always spotted rocks that could serve as photographer's podium.

The frozen sea was most unusual to us, and it drew us to its shores time and time again. This doesn't mean, there were not many inland sites, rewarding too. We imagined that the frozen waterfall Västanaåfallet would look great. But when we got there, the icelayer above it was almost covered by snow and therefore, we heard more than we saw. However, the drive up there was very scenic. It led past a pretty, old church in Viksjö. As with many Swedish churches, the bell-tower was freestanding. There were a few old stables next to the church and those looked particularly charming, with thick hoar frost on their façades. The road led along the shores of frozen Lake Graningesjön, in which a tiny island, with a tiny summerhouse rose from the mist, which was hovering low over the ice.

It was great driving on small, snowy roads, through thick forest. Often, we passed rock faces covered in a curtain of icicles. If there were different minerals in the water, they entailed various colours. The ~20 metre wide icicle wall along Lake Kramforsån was incredible! It shimmered in shades of green, blue, yellow and brown – apart from whites of course!

The Höga Kusten

Two impressive excursions brought us to [Höga Kusten](#). The famous suspension bridge with the same name spans Storfjärden. It looked looked very special above the frozen fjord. The impressive structure is 1'867m long, has two 180m high main pillars, with a span of 1.2 km, about 40 airy metres above the ice.



Minor roads with some more impressive bridges access Höga Kusten's coastal landscape. During summer, tourists will see lots of boats cruising between the islands but now we saw cross country skiers, snow mobiles and their marks on the snow-covered water bodies. The white landscape was bathed in golden light by the sun that was still very low in the sky, although it was now mid February.

We visited several coastal villages, and there was one, we returned to a second time: Bönhamn – the place we liked best. It is very charming with its row of look-alike fishermen's houses that all have differently coloured double-doors. Those houses are grouped around the harbour, which was the only part that was frozen, when we first visited end of January. Meanwhile, three weeks

had passed, and not only the harbour, but also the open sea, was covered in ice as far out as we could see. Now, there were several snow scooters parked in front of the local pub. Last time the village had been so quiet, deer and fox were roaming between the houses, even in broad daylight.

Despite the fact that Bönhamn is quite deserted during winter, it is not all that dark at night, as the lights in many houses are on, even if the owners are coming in summer only. This could be observed all over Scandinavia. Swedes like to leave the outside light, as well as the lights in the windows on, even if they are out. Oddly, people seem to use more energy to illuminate the outside of their houses than for the rooms they monkey around in, which are often only dimly illuminated.

Dealing with extreme winter-weather conditions

If we drove towards Sundsvall, we passed the huge shopping centre Birsta that really comprises several shopping-complexes, including a giant IKEA. The snow on the parking lots was piling higher than the buildings. This winter, Sweden was blessed with more snow and deeper temperatures than usually. However, last year, people complained that it was too warm and there was too little snow. Too warm, meant; temperatures were around 20°C below frozen and around here, everything was covered by snow from the end of November till mid April. So the only difference to this year was, that the snow piled higher, and temperatures went more regularly down to 25-35 degrees below frozen.

As a stark contrast to the countries further south, the Scandinavians are used to deal with such temperatures, and well equipped to cope with lots of snow.

We had a big smile, when we watched BBC news, reporting about cold spells of +2°C to -5°C and heavy snow fall in Scotland that caused the locals to ride supermarkets until shelves were empty. The Scots feared, road conditions would cause a collapse of supply, and it might become impossible to leave the house.

In northern Scandinavia, nobody ever panics, because of heavy snowfall and icy conditions, as it is just a normal part of winter up here. They drive safely on snow and ice, as most people have studded tyres. Snow clearing is well organized, and there seemed to be always enough Trucks and Tractors, equipped with ploughs and snowblowers. To get rid of the real thick ice on mainroads, they used also graders.

South of Sundsvall, we visited the charming fishing village of Lörudden, which is probably very touristy during summer, but was completely dead now. Pretty fisherman's cottages were surrounding the harbour, with some boats stuck in the ice. Here nobody had shovelled the snow away, and most entrances to the houses were blocked.

On the way back, we drove up to one of the two hills around Sundsvall. Both offer superb vistas and skiing possibilities.

Renting holiday cottages in Scandinavia

Normally, we found our holiday houses through agencies, in Sweden also on Web-sites, where the owners advertise their houses directly. In our experience, the most economical way of renting a holiday home during peak-season (mid June till mid August, except in ski resorts) or in areas that are not too popular with tourists, is renting straight from the owner. For Sweden, we found the following web pages helpful:

- **Bo på Lantgård** (holiday on a farm, or at least a lifestyle-farm): www.bopalantgard.org
- **Stugknuten**: www.stugknuten.com
- **Stugbo**: stugbo.se

Stugsidan: www.stugsidan.se
Hyrhyra: <http://www.hyrhyra.se>

During off-season (mid August to mid June, except in ski resorts) it's a different matter. Not only in Sweden, but also in Denmark and Norway, we found the best deals always with agencies. We booked all via internet and had made good experiences with the following agencies: **Dancer**, **Novasol** and **Interchalet**. They all have pretty user friendly websites, and give a wealth of information about each house. But more important: we could enter search-criteria that made it easy, to find a house in the desired region, during the desired time, and with the anticipated comfort and price. There is also **Casamundo**, a kind of broker mediating for a variety of agencies, including those mentioned above. As we often booked on rather short notice, it was easier to book directly with the original agency, though the price is the same.



The location does also matter: A secluded location may warrant some privacy, whereas the owner, who lives nearby, may give you a wealth of information and dutifully clear your driveway of the snow in winter.

For winter rentals, energy cost can also make up an ample part of the rental cost. Heating a house from a chilly minus 35°C up to a cosy 21°C isn't that cheap, obviously. The most economical ways are probably with fire wood or heat pumps (usually air-con with reverse mode). Unfortunately, many holiday cottages only have electric radiators or electric floor heating. We can tell you; without a fire-place, it gets 'rather uncomfortable' during power cuts. On the other hand; each and every house had been pre-heated for our arrival, what we appreciated very much.

Holiday cottage in Tavel sjö west of Umeå

On February 20, 2010, we moved 250 km further north to Tavel sjö, where we had reserved a holiday cottage for another four weeks. This was the first one that we rented directly from the owners.

The landlord showed us to the Finnish-style log cabin, located in the woods. It was cosy and comfortable and offered two bedrooms. There was a big veranda that was not completely cleared of snow, which Heinz changed very soon. However, he had to do it again and again, as we were blessed with quite a lot of the white stuff during our stage. Already when we arrived, the roof had to bear half a metre of snow and it got more soon.



During the first two weeks, temperatures were regularly down to 20°C or 25°C below frozen. Our Landlord Torbjörn, was busy cutting more firewood and clearing snow with his tractor. During the third week, there was a short warm-spell. On one day, the temperature reached 8 degrees PLUS. This caused the heavy snow-load on our roof to thunder down, which felt like an earthquake from above. It is quite frightening, when several tonnes of snow shoot down in a matter of seconds. As we run out to have a look, we realized that the bottom of the pile was about 5cm thick ice. Now we were glad we had parked the car further away, to make space for the tractor bringing more fire-wood. Soon, we saw the first rain in four months. Surely, it got cold soon again and we got new loads of snow. The pile next to our house accumulated higher than 5 metres, though it was too hard to sculpture! We heard, March often brings more snow than the earlier winter months.

Again, we learned a lot about life in Sweden, as we got together with the owners Torbjörn, and his partner Marie Louise, quite a few times. Thanks to them, we saw an elk closer than ever. We got 'one' served on a plate, as part of a most delicious meal. In return, we invited them into their own (holiday-) house and had some nice evenings together. They also enabled us to experience one of the most authentic Swedish winter-activity, by providing us with two "Sparkstötting" or short: Sparkens. Translated, it stands for kick-sled, but if you haven't seen one: it looks like a chair on ~2m long thin blades. You push it like a shopping trolley. The fit will stand on one blade and kick with the other leg, like you would use a kick board. It runs particularly easy on icy surfaces, and if it goes downhill, the courageous let it run and rest the second foot on the other blade. After Brigitte skidded on her back down the driveway like a beetle, she forgot about this Olympic discipline. Instead, she remembered that elderly or not so fit people, use kick-sleds as walking aide, like rollators for snow and ice.

Except on days with new snow, it was much fun to go walking with our kick sleds. In our cottage's surroundings, the sparsely used, but white ploughed road, was ideal for this. It passed by neat farms, frozen lakes, fields and forests. There was a crossing point of elk (Moose) along the way, but all we ever saw, were new foot prints.

Excursions around Umeå

Vindelns is a small town 20km north of Tavel sjö, and the rapids in its river Vindelälven were the only small area, where the water was not completely frozen. The snow on the boardwalks and viewing platforms was almost as high as the railing. Fortunately, somebody else had already stomped its way out here, thus sparing us from filling our shoes with snow. As it was quite cold that day, the river was steaming on the few open spots. The edges of the ice, on the fast flowing river, had wonderful shapes. Only a short distance from the rapids, the river was completely covered by ice and snow, obviously solid enough, as the locals were racing over the river with their snow scooters.

Another excursion led us to [Umeå](#), a pleasant student town. In the centre we found many beautiful buildings, like the town hall, the railway station or just some rich bastard's villas.

A snow sculpture-festival had recently been held, and the artwork could still be admired in a city square. In a town of 100'000 inhabitants, there is obviously not much empty space to put the ploughed snow. The footpaths and driveways were literally separated by piles of snow, several metres high.

There was a week-long Sami festival in Umeå, which consisted mainly of lectures, but the English brochure from the tourist information, advertised also some bigger events for the general public. We picked the day on which the brochure advertised that "the University Campus will be invaded by Sami people and their reindeers". Big joke! There was a Sami tent, two Sami, three reindeer and some twenty tourists from Asia, pointing their cameras on what should be an invasion... However, when driving in northern Scandinavia, you regularly see reindeer along the roadside. Those sections, where drivers are most likely to encounter them, are marked by black plastic bags on sticks. They warn motorists that Sami are herding their animals through this area.

The frozen Bothnian Sea: just a normal part of life

Umeå has regular ferry services to the Finish port of Vasa across the Bothnian Sea. As it was frozen, we were curious to see, whether the boats really sail or not, so we drove down to the ferry port near Holmsund. This was a very interesting excursion. We found the huge carferry moored in a harbour full of ice. A couple of icebreakers from the coastal guard docked next to it. The terminal building was packed by school children, all checking-in for the passage to Finland. The only thing we didn't see at all, was something that looked like open water. The [Bothnian Sea](#) freezes every year completely in its northern half. Further south it freezes at least along the coasts, but in harsh winters, the entire Bothnian Sea and also the Baltic Sea will freeze as far as the Danish Sounds.

In an average winter the ice km² and can be up to 1.2 crossing the Bothnian Sea ice-breaker qualities, get stuck. Then, real ice- This winter was especially breakers had to rescue more February day, 50 ships got once. Sometimes, [assisting](#) travelling cargo vessels to From there, they are led in ports of destination. In cold breakers are also used in the Swedish west coast



sheet will extend to 280'000 metres thick. The ferries during winter, have limited though, sometimes they still breakers have to be called in. tough, and therefore, ice-vessels than usually. On one stuck in the Bothnian ice at [ice-breakers](#) will ask assemble at a certain point. a convoy to their respective winters as this one, ice-several inland lakes and on around Gothenburg.

From Umeå's ferry pier, we ventured a bit further north through several small villages, one of which was Ratan. It had a handful of nice houses and a small island just off the coast. At first, it looked as if we could walk over, to reach the two buildings that gloomed wonderfully in the sun, but the snowblanket on the ice was too thick. This was no obstacle for the roe deer that peacefully walked over in broad sunlight.

Biomass or energy from wood

Walking and driving around Sweden, often brought us through forests. They are mostly cultivated, and deliver 16% of Sweden's primary energy supply. All biomass used in Sweden originates from forests and is mainly utilized for heating, sometimes also to produce electricity. Despite a big amount of timber being harvested, it is managed in a way that the forested areas are still growing.

We were very impressed to see how the Swedes harvest trees. A rather small device is attached to either a caterpillar or to a manoeuvrable harvester. These machines are able to fell a 30metres high fir, remove all branches, and partition the stem into equally long pieces – all within less than a minute. To us this was quite an impressive show.

With so much wood around, houses are well heated and they are also very well insulated. As it is always warm inside, people indulge in their love of ice cream even in winter. Those, who make business with ice-cream, know it too.

Therefore, the ice-cream-man comes by with his Hemglass (home ice-cream) van on a weekly tour, it doesn't matter

whether the temperature reaches 30°C above or below frozen. We were very astonished, but saw it many times during the winter. In a move to integrate into Swedish society, we joined the queue after hearing the Ice-cream Truck, playing the familiar rhythm “The Entertainer” of Scott Joplin, just next to our snow-covered cottage.

Conditions of illumination during winter

On March 21st, we continued our trip further north, exactly on the day of the Equinox. This meant: from now on we could enjoy longer days than the folks south of us! However, the “dark period” was by far not as bad, as many think. Surely, days were short and the sun rose only a little bit above the horizon. On the other hand, it didn’t go down that much below the horizon, which resulted in very long twilight hours. As northern Scandinavia was covered by snow, the dim light was reflected, and therefore, the days seemed brighter and longer than they really were. Therefore, we had ample photo opportunities in soft light.

The following chart shall give you an impression how far the sun rises in the sky, on the shortest and on the longest day, plus the number of hours the sun remains above the horizon. Caused by the long periods of dusk and dawn, summer-nights don’t get dark in Scandinavia even far below the Arctic Circle.

	21.12.		21.06.	
	sun above horizon	apex of sun's motion	sun above horizon	apex of sun's motion
N – Tromsø (350 km north of Arctic circle)	down all day	1,9° below horizon	up all day	43,8°
N - Bodø (70 km north of Arctic Circle)	44 min.	0,1°	up all day	46,2°
S – Umeå (300 km south of Arctic Circle)	4 h 17 min.	3,0°	20 h 50 min.	49,6°
S – Stockholm (800 km south of Arctic Circle)	6 h 03 min.	7,3°	18 h 38 min.	54,1°
D – Berlin (1'500 km south of Arctic Circle)	7 h 39 min.	14,1°	16 h 50 min.	60,9°
CH – Bern (2'100 km south of Arctic Circle)	8 h 30 min.	19,7°	15 h 53 min.	66,5°
E – Malaga (3'400 km south of Arctic Circle)	9 h 39 min.	29,9°	14 h 40 min.	76,7°

Charming Piteå

Our next destination was Piteå, a lovely seaside-town on the Bothnian Sea. During the (two) summer months, this area is popular for its warm beaches, and attracts numerous holidayers to its skerry coast. During July, temperatures often reach 30°C, but presently, the city council was working hard, to get the snow and ice out of the city. The tourist office was offering weekly tours with an ice breaker.

We stayed at the Youth Hostel, which is situated in a quiet spot within minutes of the town centre. There are many old and new wooden buildings that lend the place peculiar charm. Piteå is not particularly big and it has a heart and a soul. On a snowy (grass) verge, a huge head of an Easter Bunny had been modelled from snow. It was hilarious how its eyes were illuminated at night. The lower part of the snow sculpture was embedded in snow, and therefore, it looked as if the Bunny would just emerge from it.



The Church Villages Öjebyn & Gammelstad

A highlight awaits 5 km outside Piteå, in the village of Öjebyn. There are 175 old cottages surrounding a church. They form the 'Kyrkstaden' which simply stands for "church village". People slept there during the time, when it was a crime not to attend church, as many had to travel from far away, to fulfil their weekend duty. In 1860 this law changed but only in the 1990's, the Lutheran church was separated from the Swedish state. To us, the lovely cottages looked most beautiful in the snow, but there were no other tourists around admiring them too.

On our way north, we visited a second church village near Luleå: Gammelstad. As it is the largest and best preserved of its kind in northern Sweden, it got World Heritage listed. Its 424 wooden cottages date from the 17th century. They were also very charming, but we found, those in Öjebyn looked just as nice. They had unpainted walls but doors and windows of various colours, whereas in Gammelstad, all houses were uniformly red, with white frames around doors and windows.

Luleå: unexpected excitements on ice

On March 23rd, we reached [Luleå](#), situated almost on the top of the Bothnian Sea. Even before we reached our hostel in



the town centre, we noticed, how many people were walking and skating. It looked, as if they were on ordinary strolls with kit and caboodle. The only difference was that they were on the frozen sea. Luleå's centre is superbly located on a peninsula, surrounded by the now frozen sea. Every winter, the town prepares a 10 km long network of ice rinks on it. Those are framed by foot paths formed from snow, so people can also walk on them, an opportunity which the population happily took advantage of. We joined in and went for a 7km long walk on the sea.

Walking on the sea is not the only unusual winter attraction, the town has on offer. Luleå also prepares annually about 30 km of drivable roads on the sea. These so-called "isvägn" (ice roads) become part of the public road network, and cars driving on it, are therefore fully insured, as on any other road.

Hundreds of kilometres of such ice roads are probably prepared all over Scandinavia every winter, but most of them are unofficial. Everyone seems to agree that 10cm thick ice is enough to carry a car, and 15cm to carry a truck. Official ice roads prepared by the government, have to fulfil much stricter criteria. They will only be opened, if the ice is half a metre thick. Ironically, the roads are prepared by heavy trucks and when they are ready, a weight limit of 2 tonnes is implied, if the ice is "only" half a metre thick, but it can go up to 9t if the ice is about 80cm thick. This thickness is quite common in the north of the Bothnian Sea, but occasionally the ice can be as much as 120cm thick.

Ice roads are built to access inhabited islands, which obviously can't be reached by ferries in winter. People who live out there, can bridge time before the ice roads open, by driving with their snow mobiles to the mainland. Normally, the sea around Luleå starts freezing beginning of November and the ice roads usually open around Christmas or January. They will be closed again by mid April, but often, the last pieces of ice will only disappear during June.

As soon as we had heard about the ice roads, we wanted to experience them for ourselves. So we organized an ocean chart, where the ice roads were marked, and put with our car out to sea. With a funny feeling, we drove over the 45m wide ploughed track on the ice, to an island 20km off the coast. Most other drivers we encountered observed the 30km/h speed limit, but the "no stopping-sign" was often ignored. Some people were sunbathing on deck-chairs, or ice-fishing besides their cars.

The only challenges were, the very narrow roads on the island, and the water on the ice, at the point, where we drove onto the sea. Luckily, the lady from the tourist office had warned us about this. She said, it is a natural phenomena, but never the less absolutely safe, as the icelayer underneath is very, very thick.

Icehotel in Jukkasjärvi

On March 25th 2010 we continued on dry tarred roads, past the Arctic Circle, all the way to the iron mining town of Kiruna, where some more icy attractions were awaiting us. The [Icehotel](#) in Jukkasjärvi, 18 km southeast of Kiruna, is certainly the area's top winter attraction. After being almost the sole tourists during the last months, we were suddenly surrounded by people from all over the world. Twenty years ago, a crazy idea started to take shape, and meanwhile it's become a profitable institution, which even runs some branches outside Sweden. A team of 150 cold-resistant workers starts shaping ice and snow every November. Corner pillars of solid ice blocks are harvested already in spring, from the river Torneälv, right besides the hotel. For a few years now, a cold storage house allows work to begin, before new ice is thick enough. The roof and walls are cast, just like concrete, onto form boards, but instead of concrete a mix of snow and water is used, called snice.



Once the icehotel opens in the middle of December, it is run as a museum during the day. After paying a hefty entry free (€ 30), visitors can stroll around all rooms and join a conducted tour. Therefore, hotel guests (who pay much more) cannot enter their rooms before 6 P.M. In winter 2009/10, the icehotel consisted of 70 rooms, 10 more than the previous year. All beds have a mattress on a slatted bed base, covered by reindeer skins. LED lamps illuminate the rooms that can only be "locked" by a curtain to the corridor. A small hole in the ceiling, assures that there is always enough fresh air, and for the heat of the sleepers to escape. The carpet on the floor; that means the snow, is being changed weekly. The simplest rooms were called "snow rooms". They are very plain and have a bed, sculptured of snow. Depending on the season, a double room like that, goes for € 250 to € 410 per night. Then there are so-called "ice rooms" which have a bed modelled of ice, an ice table and a couple of ice chairs. You realize soon, that you cannot even sit on them, as the ice is not only cold but very slippery! However, they look very unique. A double in this section costs € 270 – € 540.

Those rooms are all just plain! If you want to stay at the icehotel, you really wanna stay at one of those fancy art rooms that have made the icehotel so famous. The price for those will set you back € 340 to € 640 for a double. This year, there were 22 art rooms, and they were all individually designed, by artists from all over the world. Their names and the theme of their work are engraved into illuminated ice plates, next to the room's entrance. In this section, every room is spacious and a feast for the eyes. It is impressive to wander from one art room to another, and the themes the artists came up with, are totally different and some quite weird.

Jukkasjärvi is one of the coldest places in Sweden, but no matter how cold it is outside, inside the ice hotel, the temperature is always a cosy 5°C below frozen. It took us almost half a day to wander around, but our feet got cold after one hour already. We wouldn't want to know, how often people who sleep here, must run to the toilet. Those are really quite far away from the rooms – but they are in a very well heated building. It must be complicated, to sneak out of the special icehotel sleeping bag and into ice cold shoes.

Cold Feet!

Very impressive was also the hotel's 4 metre high entrance hall, supported by pillars made from big blocks of semi-transparent, bright blue ice. There were also several chandeliers, of course also made of ice. Very cool was also the ice bar! Bottles of all colours were displayed on ice shelves, and drinks could also be ordered in glasses made of ice. However, there was neither coffee nor tea on the menu to warm up. The bar was a large and very bright hall, with lots of (icy) sitting space and a dance floor. Here, many wedding dances were performed, as 2-4 weddings are held daily at the hotel's



own ice chapel. Probably, most of those who came to tie the knot here, literally got cold feet on that occasion! Many couples have very romantic ideas about their wedding here, and they are keen to have pictures with a great background. Most just forget to consider that it's not that much fun, to pose for at least half an hour, in a backless dress for their photo session, when the temperature is below frozen. The brides usually start shivering and crump, their feet in high heels certainly numb, producing a frozen smile in the direction of the photographer who wears hat and gloves plus heavy boots. The tour-guide told us that only very seldom, a bridal couple opts to get married in skiing suits...

Luckily, the sun was warming us outside. We got the chance to see how the big ice blocks for next season's icehotel were being cut from Torneälv River. It was most interesting, how the heavy machines sliced the ice on the river, with a sort of giant chain saw blade, mounted to an arm on a caterpillar. Then a kind of hook is lowered into the water, lifting blocks of approx. 2m x 80cm x 80cm. During these operations, the heavy caterpillar is standing right besides the newly cut ice edge. Rows and rows of heavy blue ice blocks stood on the frozen river, awaiting transfer to the cold storage house.

As we were watching the harvest of the ice, every now and then dog sleds and motor scooters were passing by. The ice hotel offers a big variety of tours and activities. So, many of their guests probably didn't have time to see all the various rooms, as they were busy with tours to enjoy the snow and northern lights (if they can be seen). The idea of the icehotel-management is, that guests sleep one night in a cold room and some additional nights in their cheaper (but more comfortable) ordinary (heated) hotel rooms or cottages.

Kiruna

For our part, we had booked a room in the same Kiruna hostel we stayed already 10 years ago. Although, Kiruna counts more than 20'000 inhabitants, it feels more like a big collection of houses and big apartment buildings, than like a real town. In contrast to the cute traditional Swedish houses, many towns have big rows of rather ugly apartment blocks. The government owned iron mine is the biggest employer, and as the mining area expands more than initially planned, the entire town will be shifted in phases to a new site nearby.

Being so far north, the climate is harsher than further south. There was considerably more snow, and many buildings were almost hidden behind huge snow piles. During the 4 days we stayed there, more of the white stuff was coming down. It seemed, most people make the best of it and they all seem to own a snow scooter.

As the clouds opened up again, we could admire the majestic mountains that surround the town. The lady from our guesthouse told us: "May is the only frustrating time up here, as the landscape is neither white nor green but grey". There is too little snow to use the snow mobile, but still too much ice on the water to go boating. The piles of snow melt, and everywhere there is grey slush, swamping everything. At the moment however, there were still huge piles of snow everywhere, but also ice sculptures in front of many shops, hotels and the tourist office in Kiruna.

Abisko National Park

As we continued even further north, we approached the mountain range known as Lappporten. Eventually, we passed them all and arrived at Abisko National Park. Despite the fact that this is a very cold area, there was not that much snow, as it is regularly blown away by strong winds. The most obvious this got, when we walked on the 70km long Lake Torneträsk.



The snow on the ice was thin and rather hard. The wind had blown pattern in the surface, as sometimes can be seen on sand. Every now and then, a patch of ice was shiny blank, looking like a thick window with some cracks, through which we could see down. Although the ice was quite clear, it was not possible to see the water, as the ice cover was very thick. We curiously approached some of the many huts, caravans and even tents that were dotted all over the frozen lake. While we crossed the lake, we realized that they are used as shelters by ice fishers. The wind here often blows so strong, those winter-"dwellings on ice" needed to be tied down to the "lake surface" with thick ropes and giant pegs that simply were drilled in the ice. Some huts stood on giant vats, so they can be towed over the ice and back to shore, before the ice gets unstable. We later heard from the locals, that icefishing on the lake will most probably be possible until the end of May.

As the lodgings in the area were very well booked out, we had to stay at two different places. First we stayed at the “dog camp” a backpacker’s hostel that offers lots of tours, many with dog sleds. In the evening, the owner invited everyone to the sauna. On that day, we were only three guests that joined him for a sweating session. He told us that on some evenings, he even has to do three sittings, as so many guests want to come to the sauna. Since a Chinese travel guide mentions, this hostel offers dog sledding tours, and a mixed nude sauna, hordes of Chinese come up here. He told us that meanwhile 70% of his clients are Chinese students, studying somewhere in Europe. Obviously, the world of tourism changes and alternative lifestyles slowly get foothold in Asia as well.

Traditionally, the vast majority of visitors to Abisko national park are from Sweden and Norway. Especially Norwegians don’t come here only to admire the true wilderness, but also to take advantage of the much cheaper Swedish prices. Although, the settlement at Abisko has only 150 permanent inhabitants, there is a big supermarket selling almost everything in wholesale-style bulk packets. We thought, it was a rather expensive shop, but looking at the overflowing trolleys of the Norwegians, this must be a real bargain hunter’s paradise to them. Not only their trunk, also roof boxes were filled up to the rim, as was the stomach and the petrol tank!

On the last day of March, we continued towards Riksgränsen on the border to Norway. The road was very icy and huge masses of snow lay on the ground. In some places, there were high snow drifts, whereas in other places, the bare rock could be seen, as the wind had blown away all the snow. Camp grounds were dug out of the snow masses, obviously popular, as we were nearing the Easter holiday. It was a stark blue day and a perfect farewell to Sweden.

Final thoughts about our winter in Sweden

To spend the winter in Sweden was a very rewarding experience to us. Although temperatures fell several times to 33°C below frozen, it didn’t feel that cold, as humidity is much lower than further south. On a sunny day, -10°C felt mild and the absence of fog made the winter experience even more rewarding. Freezing conditions have also their good sides; you can go sight-seeing after shopping, for hours, there’s no need to worry for your meat, fish or deep-frozen products: they will still be cold or frozen once you get home. You should only remember that salads and fresh herbs will be frozen to death within less than half an hour. If you’re unfortunate to spill some liquid, there is no need to sponge up the mess, as it will be solidly frozen within seconds!

After such experiences, we gladly entered our accommodation to warm up. Here in the far north, houses are all very well insulated and after stuffing some bio-fuel e.g. a few trees, into a wood-fired oven, it was always cosy and warm inside our holiday cottages.

We didn’t perceive the dark period as negative as its reputation. Surely, in November the days got shorter very fast, but in February, they also got longer at the same pace. Thanks to the snow, even the shortest days didn’t feel totally dark. The many Xmas decorations and lightings in the villages made this time particularly charming. As long as there was still snow in the trees, we felt comfortable driving in the dark, as an emerging animal would contrast with the white. Roads were better ploughed and maintained than we had anticipated. It was definitely safer to drive on ice-cold days, rather than on the odd day, when it started to thaw, because then the snow became mealy instead of being anti-skidding, and slush blurred the windscreen. We had lots of precipitation, but as it came down as snow, it just helped to make the winter wonderland even more picture perfect on the clear days after.

The Swedes are very hospitable and open for chats. They helped us to assimilate knowledge and to understand all those unfamiliar cultural identities. They showed us as well, that even under perishing cold conditions, life can be very well-arranged. Scandinavian roads and airports don’t get closed just because of coldness, ice and snow.

Sweden is a very worthwhile country to visit, and many sites appear even more beautiful while they are surrounded by snow. Somehow, it was a privilege to have major tourist attractions all to ourselves and to admire them in the soft light of the low winter sun. We were impressed to see how rivers, big lakes and even the sea freeze. Whereas here in Sweden, solid ice is just an ordinary part of winter life, in Switzerland however, a frozen lake is the event of the century, and the one who thinks of driving on it, would probably be delivered into a mad house!



Norway in spring: between snow and intense green

We crossed the border from Sweden into [Norway](#) on the E10 north of Abisko, on March 31, 2010. At first, the scenery didn't change much. We were still surrounded by heaps of snow, but on the Norwegian side of the border, there was even more ice on the road and the snow piled even higher. There was also much more traffic, as many Norwegians were flocking to the mountains for the upcoming Easter holiday. Every few hundred metres, parking spaces had been literally carved into the snow, which resulted in cars being parked behind several metre high snow walls. It was almost impossible to see these parking-compartments from a distance, but if you found the narrow entry to one, you certainly didn't find space. Many locals came up here for cross country skiing, motor-scooting or ice fishing. Those who had a holiday cottage came up to spend Easter here. For some "would-like to be holidayers", it was almost 'mission impossible' to dig a path to their house. More than once, we saw a poor bugger with a small shovel, in front of a 4 metres high snow wall, attempting to reach his cottage, situated a few hundred metres away, before the end of the holiday. Each looked sort of like a dying duck in a thunderstorm!

Further down the road, we met a Troll giant guarding a restaurant, though it was literally embedded by snow, awaiting summer. He looked quite funny, how he "balanced" half a metre of snow on his concrete nose. Less than 50km behind the border, we reached the coast near Narvik. Here, we sighted the first blue water for several months. The fjord that welcomed us to Norway was not frozen! However, the surrounding landscape was snow covered as well. Within this short drive, the climate leaped 1-2 months forward. Due to the Gulf Stream, the climate along Norway's coast is much milder than inland or in Sweden and Finland. Soon, we discovered that despite higher temperatures, all lakes and also the far ends of many deep fjords were covered in ice. Also here, ice fishing and cross country skiing were very popular on frozen lakes. People later told us that lakes do freeze every winter, for the fjords, however, it needs an especially cold year, as this one. Obviously, along the Gulf Stream blessed Norwegian coast, winter isn't all that mild.

Holiday house on the Vesterålen Islands

We headed to the [Vesterålen](#) Islands, north of the Lofoten, where we had booked our next holiday house. It had a fantastic location and sat enthroned above a fjord near **Myre**. It was well equipped and quite spacious. Apart from a large living-dining room, it had two bedrooms upstairs and even a cellar.



Here, the days got longer quickly, with the sun setting around 8 PM on April 1st. At 9:30 PM, it was still not entirely dark and every day, the sun shone 10 minutes longer. Therefore, this was our last chance to spot northern lights and here we did, as the sky was clear most of our 10 days. Almost every night, these flickering beams of light were visible, and offered fantastic shows in the sky. Some nights, we could observe the polar light even before it was entirely dark, and if they were appearing strongly, the lights of the village on the other side of the fjord, didn't even disturb the eye. We spent a lot of time watching them from our terrace. After some fiddling on our tripod and camera, we even managed to capture some appearances of the Aurora Borealis on pictures. It was just a shame that the best ones appeared so late. Due to the beautiful weather, we were out sight-seeing almost daily. The location of our holiday house was perfectly central to discover the various islands of the Vesterålen. We often came home late, cooked, had dinner, sorted through and named our photographs, and then the lights started dancing ... well, we didn't have too much sleep during this time!

Discovering the snow-covered Vesterålen Islands

The long days, in combination with the beautiful snow covered landscape, made it really rewarding to venture out. On our first trips, we discovered northern Langøya. The islands and fjords are interconnected by small roads and fascinating

bridges. There are high rugged mountains and many small fishing communities. In some places, the cod, which is caught in these waters every winter, was hanging on big wooden racks to dry.

On the map, it looked as if the road would lead over dams, connecting the outer islands. However, around us it was all covered in snow and ice and we couldn't figure out, where the land ends and the sea starts. We were still surrounded by an amazing winter wonderland. On some fjords, we could see that the thawing process had just started. Big shields of ice were breaking off and floating over the blue shimmering water. The roads were snow-fringed but black and already dry, except at night, when melt water froze.

In the beginning of April, temperatures often reached about 5°C during the day, but got regularly freezing again at night. Due to our wind-protected balcony, we could sometimes even sunbathe in the buff, while looking down to the fjord-arm that often refroze during the night. Heinz was even shovelling snow in the raw and really started sweating.

At the end of a very narrow road was Nyksund, once a whaling village that had been abandoned, but is being repopulated and nicely restored these days. As the calm water allowed the houses to reflect beautifully, even the last ramshackle buildings looked nice. Also many seagulls call Nyksund their home. Those birds must be so dick-driven, they already started nesting in March, despite the snow. Some didn't even realize that they built their nest on a spot of snow in the steep rock face.

Several times, we sighted some of the famous Hurtigruten Boats, as they passed between the islands. Initially, they were introduced as coastal connection, delivering mail and desperately needed items to remote communities along the Norwegian coast. Meanwhile, they function more as cruise liners with some public services. Sometimes, we also saw pretty old crawler type snow-vehicles that looked like snow-groomers from pre-war times. We were a bit surprised to find such old fashioned vehicles in an otherwise very advanced and wealthy country.

After passing the bridge outside Sortland, we spent a day exploring the Vesterålen's north-westernmost island: Andøya. Apart from pretty Nordmela, the landscape was much more rewarding than the villages. During the summer season, Andenes, the biggest village, is very touristy because of whale- and puffin watching tours, but now it was quite dead. The island is dominated by a big mountain range, sloping down to flat land before it reaches the sea. Of course, the light had changed by the time we were on our way back, and the white mountains had taken on a golden shimmer. As the wind had ceased, their reflection was magnificent, which we enjoyed best from the Hognbridge on Hinnøya. Also the arch bridge itself looked great, even more so with the pink clouds above the blue fjord.



On another daytrip, we visited the western part of Langøya. The road followed several partly frozen fjords, flanked by snow-covered mountains. This landscape was absolutely astonishing. Our first major stop was in Ringstad, where we found the former Youth Hostel, a place we had stayed 10 years ago. Already then, it had an inviting terrace above the water. We remember that twice, some passers-by asked us for a coffee, as they thought it is a restaurant. Meanwhile, it had been converted to one indeed, and what the foreign chef served, was outstanding!

As we continued, we reached the picturesque fishing village of Nykvåg, where colourful houses and boats reflected in the still water. Also here, seagulls tried to secure the future of their species in nests built on snow-covered rocks.

During our time in the Vesterålen, the weather was so favourable, it was hard to decide, whether we shall venture out again, or stay home in our beautiful holiday house and enjoy what, outside Norway, would be "a million dollar view".

Holiday flat on the Lofoten Islands

On April 10, 2010, we drove on to the [Lofoten](#) Islands. Using many bridges and undersea tunnels, we moved over countless islands, passing by many frozen or thawing lakes. After briefly stopping in the town of Svolvær, we reached Mølnerodden. We had prearranged a holiday flat in this hamlet but we didn't meet the owner, who normally lives upstairs in the same house. His return to Norway was delayed due to the Icelandic volcano underneath the glacier Eyjafjallajökull.

Luckily, there was a nice neighbour who took care of us. This apartment was rather small and a bit more basic, but we had probably been luckier than deserved with all the others. Nevertheless, its location was just perfect for excursions. However, we had to wait for a week, until the good weather caught up with us again. It was very moody during our first week and we often had snow-flurries. It was not uncommon that we saw sunshine, if we looked through the front window, but snowfall when we looked out the back window, or vice versa. There was a tiny lake just behind our apartment, and we were under the illusion, we could watch its thawing process. Instead, when we left after two weeks, it was more frozen and again completely snow covered, although, the first crocuses were meanwhile visible.

Hangman: an ordinary job in Northern-Norway

Wherever we went around the Lofoten, there were huge wooden racks, often A-frames, where cod was hanging to dry. For 1'000 years already, it's known that immense schools of Arctic cod visit these waters annually in winter to spawn. Catching them became very important for the whole of Norway and it got known as 'Lofot fisheries'. This still attracts thousands of additional workers every winter. Although, it has become necessary to regulate taking of stocks, ten thousands of tons of cod are still harvested every year. Those fish, unfortunate to get caught, get decapitated and their tongue removed for a local delicacy. The heads are thread by the dozen and hanged on ropes. The bodies are tied together in pairs on their tails, and hung over racks to dry. This way, it becomes stockfish and it's the ideal Lofoten climate that ensures their quality during the 16 weeks of drying. During this process, the fish lose 80% of their weight.

The smell of drying fish was abundant in northern Norway. As fish, preserved through drying, remains edible (if not enjoyable!) for a long time, it was important for long journeys at sea in ancient times. Stockfish has already made its way to Italy in the middle ages, where it was adopted as fasting fare by Catholics. At least, eating reconstituted stockfish is real religious suffering, whereas eating fresh fish, is rather feasting than fasting. Most stockfish is still exported to Italy, whereas the customers for dried heads are in Africa, notably Nigeria where it's being used in soups.

Nowadays, the chief- executioners in the fishing industry are still mostly Norwegians, but most of those working as hangmen and beheaders are guest-workers from Eastern Europe and the Baltic's. Most other seasonal jobs in Norway are also staffed by migrant workers from former Eastern Bloc countries; even at the tourist office. Most locals go fishing and hang a few stockfish in their backyard. Often, we could see some cod hanging on laundry lines along with T-shirts, bras or carpets...



Scenic Lofoten villages among rough landscape

Å at the south western end of road E10, is one of the most famous Lofoten villages. Å is also the last letter of the Norwegian alphabet: hence the name. Today, it functions as a museum village and the doors to many houses are open during summer. Then, visitors can witness what life once was like here. Now in April, not even the restaurant was open, but fish was hanging to dry and work was in progress, to get the rorbuer ready for tourists. In old times, rorbu were basic cottages, where fishermen lodged during the (stockfish) season. Nowadays, most of these cottages, which stand on stilts above the water, are nicely restored and complemented by en-suite facilities and other luxuries. Most are rented out for a premium during the tourist season. They got so popular, entire "Rorbu-Colonies" are being built, just to house hobby fisher and other tourists.

The high and steep mountains were still snow covered, and a spectacular backdrop to the colourful fishing villages. Most of Lofoten's working fishing villages are very picturesque. Many times, we visited some, strolled around and soaked in the atmosphere. Best we liked: Hamnøy, Sakrisøy, Moskenes/Reine, Sørvågen, Napp or Henningsvær. There is also [Nusfjord](#) that made it onto the reputed World Heritage List. Today, it is mostly a museums village and its harbour was devoid of fishing vessels. Instead, we saw signs everywhere, how much it costs to visit and roam around. However, in April, there were no other tourists around and consequently nobody to collect money.



Many of the roads connecting the Lofoten islands are very narrow. We wonder how they can cope with the 300'000 tourists that all visit during the two summer months. Touring around those narrow roads in all weather conditions, made us realize, how much the locals have to cope with the strong forces of nature. The islands are barren and very narrow, and the road often leads very near the water's edge. We were impressed to see, how rough the sea could be and we heard about incidents, where the waves had swept cars from the road, like toys. The road sections closest to the shore, are newly equipped with an automatic system, which brings a barrier down, when the sea gets too wild. If you get trapped behind a closed barrier, you can pray to Neptun for mercy or check into the next guesthouse. No doubt, the Lofoten Islands are very beautiful, but it's a rough beauty!

On April 24th, we waved farewell to the Lofoten Islands and headed for Norway's mainland. We boarded the car ferry in Lødingen that belongs to the Ofoten Islands, and sailed to Bognes. The ferry passed impressive, snow covered mountains with the bizarre shapes that are so typical up here.

Kystriksveien Road Nr.17

Also on the mainland, lakes and many fjord ends were still solidly frozen. If for once, there was a small unfrozen section, it was because a power plant drained water that had run through the generators.

In the evening, we stopped on a campground in Bodø, where we rented a cabin. As we looked out the window in the morning, we were greeted by a snow flurry. Therefore, we didn't hurry to get going but had a leisurely breakfast. Meanwhile, the sun came out, and we started our fantastic trip along the coastal road number 17; the [Kystriksveien](#).

Less than 35 km south of Bodø is [Saltstraumen](#), one of the world's most powerful maelstroms. Because the sound is only 150 meter wide, the tidal water forcing in and out of a huge fjord system (over 40km deep) behind this three kilometres long strait, speeds up to 20 knots. The resulting whirlpools can be 10 m in diameter and 4-5 m deep. Only when the tides change, the water in the sound stands still for a short while, but every six hours, up to 400 million cubic metres of water rush through the strait. This gives the impression of a river, running once upstream, once downstream. In its middle, the water body bends visibly upwards, and causes very dangerous whirls and currents, that have been challenging to many a boat.

After crossing the 7,6km long Svartisen Tunnel, the glacier with the same name came into view. Across the fjord, from a settlement called Holand, two arms of the huge glacier creep over the mountain slope and reach the fjord. To please tourists, great pick-nick and viewing areas have been built along the road, that is one of many "National Tourist Routes", designated by the Norwegian government.

On that day, we had to cross two fjords by ferry. The second one brought us from Jektvik to Kilboghavn, and herewith south of the Arctic Circle. We were impressed by the high standard of the ferries that often had a cafeteria, selling snacks or even full meals. The food on those ferries, was neither overpriced, nor did it taste better or worse than what you would get in ordinary Norwegian restaurants: neither cheap nor particularly creative.

Not far from the ferry pier, we found a real nice cabin for the night. It was more of a holiday house than just an overnight cottage. As it was off-season, we got it for NOK 500 (€ 65), but in summer this house almost costs double.

South of the Arctic Circle

Although, we were now below the Arctic Circle, it was still obvious that the warm impact of the Gulf Stream does not reach far from the fjords. The coast was now snow-free, but less than 50m! above sea level, the landscape was still dominated by snow. This was our second "day of the elk", as we sighted some of these giant animals almost near every sign "stor elgfare" (high moose risk). Those animals are a big obstacle to road safety, but we were lucky to see them from a safe distance only. Surprisingly, we often saw them roaming near houses.

The road led us over 3 more ferries, plus the impressive Helgeland Bridge near Sandnessjøen. With 1065m in length, it is one of the longest cable-stayed bridges in the world. Over artificial dams the road swings in a curve up to the bridge, 45m above sea level.

Again, we stayed overnight in a camping cottage, this time near Brønnøysund. It rained when we got there, but during the night, it turned into snow. So we had to clean the car of a 5cm thick white layer, before we could set off again. It was now April 27th and the weather blessed us with everything it had on offer, except thunder. It was sunny, when we stopped to picture the famous Torghatten mountain that has a big hole, though, we couldn't see through, as it was presently clogged by ice. Soon thereafter, it snowed and hailed, just to start the weather-menu anew.

Again, we saw more elk, and also yellow flowers, that withstood the battering of the weather. The road led again through spectacular coastal landscapes and over several carferries. We made a detour from road N° 17, to reach the pretty seaside village of Rørvik, with its old harbour-houses. A new landmark, designed by an Icelandic architect, is the super modern "[Norveg Museet Midt](#)", with its front resembling three sails. It is almost too modern for Norway, where most buildings are functional, rather than pretty. The same simple shapes of houses can be seen again and again, all over the country.



We continued along very scenic roads. The combination of sunshine, snow flurries and dark clouds that could be seen from the same spot, gave this landscape a mystical touch. The red rocks near Ytterbysund appeared even redder, in the last sunlight. Soon we had to look for accommodation again, and found another camping cottage. Although it was the end of April, the tourists hadn't arrived yet, and we were, once more, the first guests of the season. This campground was near Steinkjer, where the "Kystriksveien" ends.

We were glad, we had ordered the handy brochure "[Kystriksveien RV17](#)", from the tourist office in Namsos beforehand. On 160 pages, it gave detailed information about ferry timetables and accommodation options. We only had to be careful with our choices, as many places to stay only opened in May. On the other hand, we often got a bargain (without bargaining), paying much less for accommodation than if we had come in peak-season. The journey leads along small roads, follows the fjords, and is immensely scenic. The complete drive along Road N° 17 requires 7 ferry crossings; some of which are short 10-20 minutes sailings but also two of one hour. If the weather cooperates, those crossings are of particular enjoyment and offer additional possibilities for pictures and breaks. The 7 crossings added up to ~€ 140 (for 1 car+2 passengers). Considering the high cost of living in Norway, that's not too bad.

Along our way to Trondheim, we felt that spring is definitely on its way. The more we came south, the warmer it got. The lakes were still all frozen, and as soon as we got some 50 metres above sea-level, there was often still quite a lot of old snow. In other parts, flowers and green grass were sprouting through the brown landscape that was left behind by the melted snow. Along Skauga River, we found one area, where a meadow was dotted with huge dirty ice chunks. They could be found several hundred metres away from the river bed. Somebody explained us that floods regularly lift the ice blanket on the river, and distribute the ice in the surroundings. Obviously, the ice melts much slower on the ground than in the water, where it mingles with the melt-water from the mountains.

Trondheim

We arrived early afternoon in [Trondheim](#), and after checking into the Youth Hostel, we had plenty of time to explore this beautiful city, as the days were already quite long. With 170'000 inhabitants, Trondheim is one of the country's largest towns. Its many old wooden buildings, retain lots of charm. Particularly picturesque are the wharf houses along the shore



of the River Nidelva. Very big and colourful, they line both sides of the water for about 700 metres. The wharf houses are all built on stilts above the water. Most are well restored old buildings, but others are brand new, with only their façades built in the old style. Today, they house apartments, offices, shops, restaurants and parking spaces. Also the other parts of town are very appealing and we wandered around for hours. At night, the area of Nedre Elvehavn got quite lively, as people flocked to its many waterfront restaurants. This area is framed by a big boat harbour and Solsiden, a shopping centre. We would have liked to spend more time here, but as we had changed our arrival day for the next holiday cottage, we had to go on the next morning.

During our month in Northern-Norway, it was a big exception when we had to pay road tolls, but from Trondheim southwards, this changed rapidly. Along the 200km from Trondheim to our next destination near Eide, one camera after another recorded our cars number plate at automatic toll stations, called “Bompenger”. Most locals have an electronic device installed in their vehicle that bills the toll directly to their account. Foreigners are threatened to receive an invoice to their home-address. Theoretically, it is also possible to pay at certain petrol stations, but those we tried were not in charge of collecting the toll we wanted to pay, and always suggested that we shall wait for the bill. If a bigger amount is due, there is often a manned toll-boot. If a ferry gets replaced by a bridge or an undersea tunnel, parts of the construction cost have to be borne by road tolls. The road-fee is often higher than the ticket price for the ferry it replaces, but after a few years, when the structure is paid off, it can be used for free. Many tourists are outraged about the high road tolls, but they should feel pity for the locals who have to use such roads to commute, even if they can obtain a small discount.

Holiday house near Molde

We arrived at our holiday house in **Eide** on April 29th 2010 and stayed for 10 days. This house was a cosy little Bijou and the owners had placed fresh fruit and flowers on the table. It was tastefully decorated but for our feel a bit darkish. On our arrival day it was rainy, but in the first week of May, there was often some snowfall. About four times, we woke up to a white landscape. If the sun came out later, the snow melted quickly, and in the afternoon we could sunbathe without many clothes on the patio, which could be embedded in snow again the next morning.

The village of Eide, with four supermarkets, was only seven kilometres away. Except on Sunday, when Norwegian supermarkets are strictly closed, they were all open until 11 PM. As the village has only 2'500 inhabitants, there were not many customers roaming around, and many items had already expired. What you buy in supermarkets, is generally of good quality though not always matching foreign taste buds, as e.g. fish or meat that can be very salty. Some items can be quite expensive; as the packets of soup that often cost more than € 3. On the other hand, Spanish oranges or mandarins are a fair bit cheaper than in supermarkets of their country of origin. For around 16 Kroners (2 €) you can often find half a kilo of frozen fish, like salmon, or a whole kilo of frozen shrimps to shell.

Dramatic roads and pretty villages: from Bud to Ålesund

The surroundings offered lots to explore and we started with the shoreline in our vicinity. The fishing village of Bud is particularly picturesque around its old harbour. Many traditional fishing houses reflected in the blue water. It must be very touristy in season, but presently we were almost the only visitors. A fort from WWII towers above the village and offers great vistas of the surrounding skerries. Somewhere else, we saw a big herd of deer, grazing along the road side.

Only 10km north of our holiday cottage, i.e. 40km north of Molde, there is a famous stretch of road that connects several islands: the [Atlantehavsvegen](#). On a clear day, it offers spectacular views: in the west, to the open sea with its skerries, and to the east, to high dramatic mountains. The most outstanding structure along this 7 km long road is Storseisund-brua, an arch bridge that is swung and bended. It is shaped like an S-bend with a hunchback in the middle. Behind it, we drove along the rugged coastline of the island Averøya. There are some tiny, but charming fishing villages, like picturesque Sveggen. In the very east is Kvernes, with two beautiful churches, one of which is a Stave Church from 1300 AD.

[Molde](#) is a lively little town with a new landmark; the Rica Seilet Hotel. This tall building is shaped like a sail, and we had the best view of it from the carferry between Molde and Vestnes. We had also great views to the still snow-covered mountains. Considering, it was already the beginning of May, we were astonished to see that Norwegians still went cross country skiing and even more so, that they only had to go a few hundred metres above sea level.



Very impressive was also our visit to [Ålesund](#). After a devastating fire in 1904 destroyed the entire city centre, a law was imposed, that new buildings in the centre, had to be made of anything but wood. Within seven years, the town was re-built, this time in Art-Nouveau style. The centre looks now very beautiful indeed, and the waterfront is particularly

picturesque, when the façades reflect in the water. As pretty as most of the houses are, government buildings like the town hall or library, are concrete constructions from the 60-ies or 70-ies, crumbling already; a very ramshackle impression!

For the wealthy country Norway is, it's very surprising in which bad state many public buildings and many roads are. Norway makes a fortune with its oil reserves, but taxes are still very high. The oil money is not spent, but invested in government managed oil-funds, meant to secure the pensions of future generations. To prevent overheating of Norway's economy (and to retain the countries obsessive virtue to be modest), oil-funds invested abroad only, and only in companies and governments, which follow very strict ethnic guidelines.

We experienced the Norwegians as modest by heart and also rather reserved. Instead of arguing something out with somebody, they seem to accept the status quo. Our impression about the Norwegian society was also shared by several immigrants we talked to. As an example: this holiday-cottage in Eide, which we rented through an agency. As we wanted to arrive two days early, we phoned the owners. Each time we rang them, they replaced the handset already before we even had the chance to explain ourselves. Maybe they didn't speak English or German well, so we tried again with an SMS. Immediately, and in surprisingly good English, we got the reply that this was all right. Besides, we were being asked, whether we intend to do the final cleaning by ourselves or not?

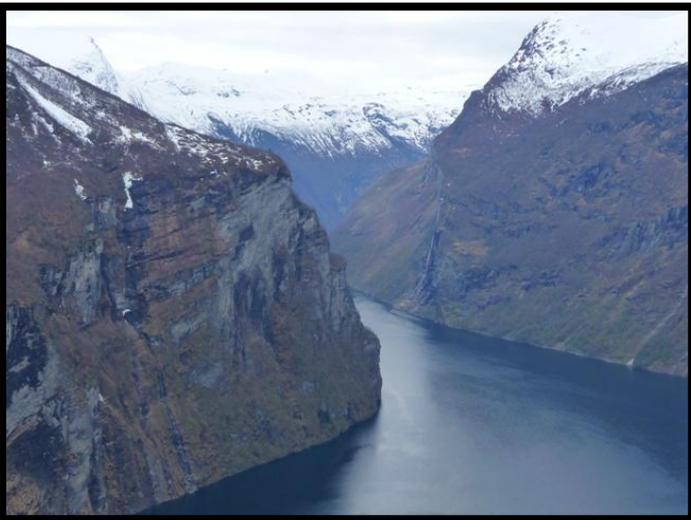
We didn't react on that question, as we thought we can sort it out later in person. They had placed the key, a posy and a plate with fresh fruit on the table. However, apart from an SMS, wishing us a nice stay, we didn't see and hear anything from them. We didn't even get an answer, after we requested via SMS, how much the additional nights cost, and whether we shall meet to pay for it. While joking, whether they let us stay for free, rather than meeting us for the payment, the phone rang. A lady from the agency enquired whether we have an argument with the owners who live nearby. It seemed weird to her, that she - in Oslo - was asked to query us, whether we do the final cleaning ourselves?

Less than five minutes after sorting that out, we received an SMS from the owners. We were informed that we don't need to pay for the additional nights. Furthermore, we were asked to send an SMS, just AFTER our departure; most probably to let them know, when the coast is clear again...

Geiranger Fjord

When we left Eide we decided for a zigzagging trip through Norway's inland regions. After two ferry passages, and a scenic drive along several frozen lakes, we reached the popular [Geiranger Fjord](#).

The drive along the hairpin road down to the fjord offered spectacular views of the narrow valley. Now in the middle of May, it was still an exception to see other tourist vehicles touring around. At Geiranger village however, it was suddenly



teeming with foreigners, as the Hurtigruten "postal boats" and other cruise liners call in. We traversed the full length of the wormed fjord with a tourist oriented car ferry. As we sailed past one of many waterfalls, we could witness the christening of two ships, destined to service Norway's offshore oil platforms.

Our ferry was quite full, but apart from ours, there was only one Norwegian vehicle and a bus on the car-deck. The other passengers were package tourists that had been bussed or shipped to Geiranger. They were happy, the sights along the way were being explained by loudspeaker announcements. We noticed that the ice-cream freezer on this ferry was empty and switched off, whereas all the ferries gearing to locals, make big business selling ice cream, no matter how cold it is and how much snow is around.

Geiranger Fjord certainly is spectacular, but Norway is packed with many less touristy fjords alike. Back ashore, we continued towards Sogndal.

Impressive but simple tunnels

Along the way, we passed many tunnels. With so many fjords and mountains, tunnels are often the best solution to build a fast and short connection. Norway has many undersea-tunnels and uncountable holes through the mountains. One of them is Lærdaltunnel, with 24.5km the longest road-tunnel in the world. As the Norwegian government only spends money on

the bare essentials, most tunnels are no more than a barely lit hole in the rock. During the cold time of the year, icicles regularly hang from the ceiling and build icy humps on the roadway when dripping. Only in those sections, where it drips a lot, the tunnel wall is clad; not with a concrete cladding; only with a plastic film. It's really the bare minimum: there can be cladding for only 0.5 metre and naked rock for the next 2 metres, followed by short clad sections.

Even the longest tunnels aren't complemented by any kind of emergency exit. On the other hand, Norwegian tunnels are being built quickly and very economically. While Switzerland spends so much money gilding its tunnels, Norway could invest a bit more in safety. Whereas the construction of the 24.5 km long Lærdaltunnel took 5 years, and came at the cost of 130 million Euros, the renovation of the 17 km long Gotthard-Tunnel is projected to take 3-7 years, at the cost of 380 million Euros, or even more than double, if the cost to detour traffic during the time of renovation, is also included.

In **Sogndal**, spring became apparent. This village is situated on [Sognefjord](#), which is, with more than 200km in length, the second longest in the world (after Scoresbysund in Greenland). Caused by the impact of this huge fjord and some warm winds, the valleys around Sogndal have a more modest climate than other Norwegian inland places. After spending the night in a lousy guesthouse in Sogndal, we followed Lustrafjorden with its turquoise green water. The freshly opened leaves were of such a tender green colour, it appeared yellowish and could almost be confused with autumn colours. Around this valley it was spring, but only a few hundred metres higher up, we came back into winter wonderland. As we followed [Sognefjellsvegen](#) (road nr. 55), we passed beautiful landscapes, dominated by the mountain peaks of Jotunheimen Nationalpark. They are mostly around 2'500m high. The road reached an altitude of 1'400m above sea-level. Even up here, the road was dry, but often flanked by several metres high snow walls. Down in the next valley, we reached the beautiful stave church of Lom, where we had a good look around.

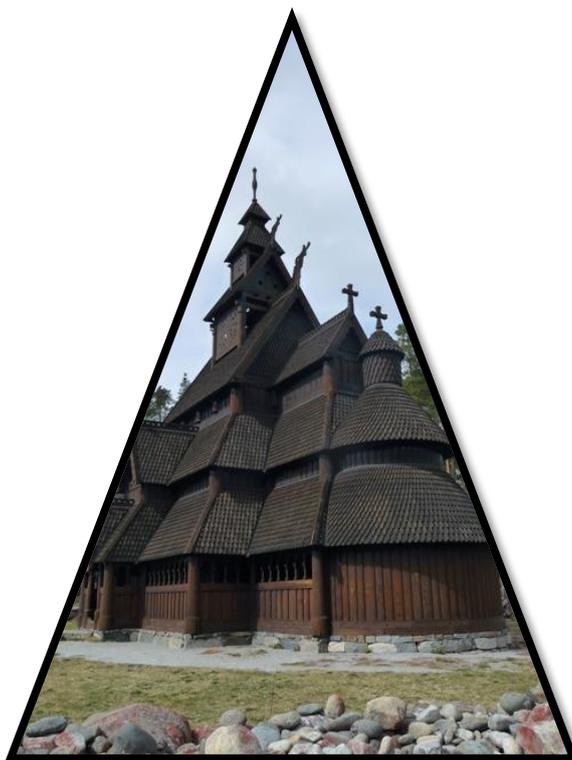
From there we took the **Valdresflya road** (nr.51) to [Beitostølen](#) where we stayed overnight. This ski resort, 900m above sea-level, was still snow covered in the middle of May and people were cross-country skiing. The village consists mainly of holiday cottages. Despite the fact that only a few hundred people live there permanently, it had three large supermarkets. As many Norwegians holiday up here, every retail-chain believes it has to be represented, as a matter of prestige. Apart from many huge hotel- and apartment-complexes, there are also several campgrounds open year around. Even they make the bulk of their business certainly during winter seasons. We got a camping-cabin surrounded by snow, which still piled up several metres high, between the neighbouring caravans.

When we left Beitostølen, it started snowing quite heavy, and it didn't clear up for quite a while. This certainly brought some more insulation onto the frozen lakes, so the ice could withstand the approaching spring a bit longer. Our road led through many forests, which were being cleared with heavy machinery.

Historic Stave Churches

Soon we reached the village Gol, stave church. The original was [Folkemuseum](#) in Oslo, but now built by a commercial enterprise, paid, but as in many other places, therefore no money-collector. overlapping each other, each shingle roof. The middle tower, roofs, is the tallest. Apart from a church is made of wood, right up roofs are ornamented by dragon Epoch. Therefore, stave churches "Pagodas of the North".

In Torpo, only a few kilometres church. It's placed right next to a serves for worships. The stave beautiful monument. It is quite Gol, but it's still constructed in It dates from 1192 and is almost of Gol's stave church. Torpos's with slated stones of different



where we admired the beautiful moved to the "[Norsk](#) there is a replica here. As it was there is usually an entry to be there were still no tourists and Square and round towers are being partly covered by a steep with 6 interlaced monopitch stone foundation, the entire to the shingle roof. The different heads, symbols of the Viking are sometimes referred to as

to the west, there is another stave white stone church; the one that church now serves "just" as simple, compared to the one in the traditional stave architecture. 200 years older than the original stave church has now a roof tiled colours, but initially it must have

looked different. Through the centuries, the wooden walls of the old church had faded to a yellowish colour, although, they once were tarred black. There are many carvings ornamenting the entrance door and the interior, where some paintings can be found.

All over Norway, there are only 28 stave churches left. Those are mostly between 700-900 years old and well preserved. As we were now so much tuned in to churches, we stopped again in Hol. There is a newer style red wooden construction that looked beautiful but has, as yet, no historic significance.

From Geilo's lido up to Hardangervidda

Only a bit further down the road, we reached Geilo, a village 770 metres above sea level. As it was meanwhile the middle of May, we followed the sign to the lido. Despite its beautiful yellow sand beach, we weren't even tempted to strip off. The inviting sunny beach was still framed by snow and the lake solidly frozen.



Sorry we continued along road nr. 7 westwards and crossed [Hardangervidda](#). With 8'000 km², this is Europe's largest high plateau and parts of it, at the same time, Norway's largest national park. The entire plateau lies above the treeline, and the road reaches an altitude of 1200 metres above sea level. Up here, we saw snow in even bigger masses than ever before. Of the few houses along the road, we could barely see more than the roofs, as said above: mid May! It was a sunny blue day, but sometimes the wind blew so strong, that the otherwise dry road was entirely covered by snowdrifts, forcing the snow-plough to come in action. The snow rods which lined the road were about seven metres high, and in some sections they were hardly higher than the snow walls.

Just before the very steep descent from the Hardangervidda, there is the double cascade waterfall named Vøringsfossen. It attracts some 600'000 tourists annually, but now, there were barely a handful of cars, and not a coach on the huge parking lot. Also the many souvenir shops were still empty. This waterfall is so popular because nearby Eidfjord can be reached by cruise liner. However, between here and there, a succession of narrow cork-screw tunnels has to be passed. We were just glad we didn't need to mingle with big coaches, bussing some 2'500 cruise passengers up here.

Green valleys and white mountain passes

Down in the valley, it was much warmer and already getting green - an impressive climate leap! We stayed overnight in the still very quiet village **Eidfjord**. The owner of the guesthouse told us, that we were among the first guests of the year, though, the first cruise liner with 2'500 passengers was already on its way.

When we continued along Eidfjord and later Sørfjord, both offsprings of Hardangerfjord, we were amazed how narrow the road was. It was mostly necessary to stop when we had to cross another vehicle. We were quite glad, that the motor-home and caravan-season hadn't started yet. Also here, the water glistened in beautiful pastel-green colours. The hillsides between the mountaintops and fjords were dotted with orchards, and that's what this area is famous for. Right now, the fruit trees were about to blossom. Almost all meadows were teeming with hilarious baby lambs.

Shortly after Odda, we passed several tall and picturesque waterfalls. Surprisingly, the nicer ones neither had parking, nor an information board. Less beautiful cascades were framed by just that and more. Maybe, the recipe to become a famous waterfall is an innovative landowner, who builds a parking lot, café and souvenir shop at the best available photo stop.

Next, we took the turnoff to Røldal, which again has a stave church. It is a rather plain church, and some investigators are not even sure, whether it was built as stave church, or as post church. Røldals church was very famous during the middle ages for its miraculous crucifix, which was said to have curative effects and therefore, attracted many pilgrims. Each midsummer night, large numbers of pilgrims witnessed how drops of water emerged from the crucifix. It was believed, these drops had healing effects. However, later Scientists proved that the "sweating" of the crucifix was no more than the result of the high humidity, caused by the presence of the many people...

Now we followed road nr. 520 towards Sauda, which climbs to 850 metres above sea level. From the climate, this altitude is equivalent to some 2'500-3'500 a.s.l. in the Alps. It was a very narrow road up there, and it was as dry and clean as all

the others, except during the short snow flurries. Never the less, the snow walls on the road side were even higher than those on Hardangervidda! Between sometimes more than 6 metre high snow walls, the road seemed like one long narrowing – at least it had some passing bays. The large artificial lake Svartavatnet (Black-Water) was still solidly frozen, and the only thing thawing, were the thick ice layers, resting on black elevated rocks. As we drove in beautiful sunshine towards the edge of the mountain, we sighted some very black clouds over the next valley.

We didn't get wet, but even blacker than the clouds, were the dirty factories of Sauda. As before in Odda, many ugly industrial complexes are placed right in the middle of the town. As often in Norway, manufacturing buildings are functional, but no money is spent for luxuries like paint or anti-corrosion treatment. Ironically, we found one of these industry-giant's self-portrait*, which advertises: "our site in the midst of Hardanger is looked upon as one of the most beautifully situated in the world surrounded by fjord, glacier, mountains and waterfalls". Well then: for once Brigitte's favourite saying should be turned around. In this case: "look at the mirror and stop looking at the world around you"!



When we continued towards Haugesund, the landscape presented itself very mystical, due to a stormy atmosphere, with some sunrays breaking through the clouds. It was less of a surprise that it snowed here near the mountains, a few hundred metres above sea level, but that even the coastal town Haugesund got snowflakes on May 11th was rather a surprise to us.

* Boliden A/S

Holidayhouse near Haugesund

By the evening, we arrived at the next holiday house, which was situated on Karmøy Island near [Haugesund](#). It was a big old house that had been nicely renovated and equipped with modern amenities. Upstairs, it had five bedrooms, hence offering much more space than we needed. The house had a big veranda where we spent a lot of time. It belongs to the small hamlet of Ytraland, where everybody seems to own a horse and a boat. Our house stood on a hillside, from where we had seaview through a gap between houses and hills. The large property was covered with flowers, flourishing bushes and trees that put forth fresh leaves. This was spring in full swing, even if daffodils only bloomed for Pentecost.

We rented also this house from an Agency via internet. In Norway, we rented either through Dancenter or Novasol. In the last Sweden-Chapter, there is more detailed information under the title "renting holiday cottages in Scandinavia". As the owners of our holiday house were on vacation during our first week, they sent their friends to give us some tourist advice. Following their recommendation, we visited the beautiful seaside village Skudeneshavn. There are mostly white houses on stilts above the water and they look very pretty. Just a shame, there's no continuous boardwalk along the water.

As we started to discover the surroundings, we realized, there was much more traffic down here, than in the areas we've visited previously. Even where it looked sparsely populated on the map, it was teeming with cars on the road. Automatic "bompenger" (toll stations) abound. As we circled South Karmøy, we observed that the west coast was densely populated, whereas the east coast was only settled by solitary farms and the road here was very narrow.

Northern Karmøy's most interesting sight is the copper mine in Visnes. There is a mini-replica of the statue of liberty in New York, to remember that its copper was supplied by this mine. Ironically, this monument is not even made of copper, but of plastic! At the top of Karmøy Island, we could see to the city of Haugesund, which appeared rather disappointing, as the seafront is lined with big impersonal apartment blocks and factories. Also on the tip of the island, are several old ugly factories. Once more, we couldn't really see, whether they are still in use, or just left to crumble.

May 17 is Norway's National day and as good tourists we joined in. On this day, many women wear traditional dress, whereas most men honour this day by wearing a suit. The celebrations centre upon children, who assemble at schools. In the afternoon, there are processions in most villages. Traditional costumes are worn on many occasions all over Norway. Strict guidelines exist, about who can, and how to sew them. Many traditional costumes are inherited from one generation to the next. Obviously, traditional costumes can also be bought. Although they are quite pricey, they will only be sold to people who have close affiliation to the place where the dress comes from. The costumes' patterns vary from area to area.

In the meantime, the pastures had all turned rich green. Up here in Scandinavia, spring arrived suddenly and intense, just as locals predicted. The time had come to swap our studded tyres against summer tyres. As Norwegians don't buy second-hand tyres, we were recommended by a tyre dealer, to remove the nails, and keep driving our tyres that were still in good

condition. So, one warm afternoon we equipped ourselves with tongs, sat around our car, and removed some 600 of those noisy nails. Three hours later, the mission was completed.

One last time over snow covered mountain passes

We left our holiday house on May 25th 2010, and followed road nr. 46 to Ropeid, from where we took the ferry to Sand on road nr. 13. It led again past very scenic landscapes and often followed some side arms of Boknafjord. Sometimes, the rock faces were very steep and very tall, especially near the ferry crossing at Nesvik. Near Stavanger, we turned inland on route 45, which led us to the ski resort in [Sirdal](#) on 500-800m a.s.l.. Overnight, we stayed in a cottage on a campground in Sulkeskar. Taking advantage of the long daylight hours, that lasted now well after 10 PM, we still made a side trip to famous [Lysefjord](#). First we crossed a high plain with many small lakes. They were all thawing now but a thin layer of ice still covered parts of them, whereas the ground only had last patches of snow.



The real highlight was the spectacular drive, down to the narrow fjord. The descent with 27 hairpin bends is so steep, we started to fear, our brakes would get too hot, but obviously they didn't. The view was breathtaking all the way down to the bottom of the valley.

On the next day, we continued along small roads towards Norway's capital. In the beginning, the road was often lined by banks of snow. The weather wasn't that great and sometimes it rained, but sometimes the rain turned into snow. On that day: May 26th, snow was even predicted for some of southern Norway's coastal cities. Though, these were now definitely the last snowflakes we experienced this winter!

Further east, the sun came out again and we got nice pictures of many old storage lofts, situated beside farms. These small wooden buildings were often ornamented by wood carvings. The little houses contrasted greatly with the green pastoral landscape full of spring flowers. As we were inland now, we passed lakes rather than fjords.

Our next highlight was the [stave church at Heddal](#). Now on the end of May, we had the huge car park almost to ourselves, but soon this will have changed. Heddal's stave church is not only Norway's largest, it's also one of the most beautiful indeed. Its roof is built on three square levels, topped by three round turrets. Since it's been built in the thirteenth century, the church had been epoch-spanning, handed through various religions. It's still in use today and stands proudly in the middle of a very neat lawn with age-old grave stones.

Oslo, Norway's beautiful seaside capital

We seem to have a talent of choosing the wrong place at the wrong time. [Oslo](#) had already been on our list when we passed through last November, but due to an (to us) unknown event, the town's accommodations were booked out and we postponed our visit. Well, we gave it another try now, but sure enough, all was booked out again. This time the "Concours Eurovision de la chanson" crossed our path and sure enough we didn't know about it. A day before we left Haugesund, we spent hours, bothering all hostel receptions and B&B owners with e-mails and phone calls. Finally, we were lucky and got a room that was cancelled on short notice by somebody, who had booked it light years ahead. So we ended up in a nice B&B that was even situated within walking distance to the centre.

Arriving to Oslo from the west, we passed several kilometres of leisure boat harbours. It's obvious: Norwegians live with and on the sea.

As we arrived Downtown, it was just time for our dinner, and we managed to find an excellent Sushi deal. Norway is not really a foodies dream; eating out is neither fancy nor cheap. At least the capital offers a few exceptions to the norm. As we stepped out to the streets again, it was 22:30h. The sun had just set, and we could enjoy the city in beautiful twilight. Oslo has a good mix of everything: old and modern. It's well maintained and very clean, maybe a bit functional. Never the less, there are some outstanding and worthwhile sights to visit.

Oslo has a new landmark on its seafront; the opera house that was opened in April 2008. The façade of the ultra modern building consists mainly of glass, but also aluminium. A 300 m² section of the southern glass façade is made of solar panels. The shape of the opera looks like a giant laying tart slice, with a smaller slice laid in the opposite direction, on top of it. Therefore, you can walk up to the top of the building, as the entire roof consists of nothing else than huge marble and granite terraces. Most are slightly tilted, others flat. All roof terraces are interconnected and even designed to be skate-board friendly – probably a clever marketing trick to bring youth and opera together.

Not far from the opera, starts the area with Oslo's newest and tallest buildings. Those are all very modern, though somehow out of harmony with Norway. Located just at the doorstep of this modern area, is the main railway station. Nearby is the royal castle, right in the middle of the cake. As the Scandinavian royals are meant to be "folkselig" (down-to earth), the royal park around the castle is open to the public, and any commoner can roam around the royals' house.

To us, Oslo's top attraction was the big, impressive [Vigeland Park](#) with sculptures by the artist of the same name. Altogether, there are 600 nude people shown in 212 sculptures, worked in granite, iron or copper. The biggest structure is the 17m high monolith that consists of 121 intertwined bodies of all ages and shapes. Most of the nudes are depicted life-size and very realistic. The visitor can easily recognize the portrayed situation of life, like the mother comforting her teenage daughter, the children playing together or the old man holding his dying wife in his arms.

The completion of this big park took several decades. Gustav Vigeland died 1943, seven years before his lifework was completed. A little museum illustrates the creation of the statues in the park. It shows sketches and pictures, how the figures were sculptured and then mounted to their final position in the park. A statue of Gustav Vigeland stood at the entrance in a sea of yellow tulips, ironically the only one with clothes on!



Final thoughts about Norway

Well, we spent three winter weeks and two spring months in this unique, troll inhabited country. It's true: the people are a bit reserved and very modest, everything is a bit pricey and the food is not that good. Modest as it is, Norway shows only its natural wealth, but manmade things often look a bit ramshackle and badly maintained - but the landscape is just spectacular!

We never got tired of admiring its unique mountains and the fascinating coastline with its deep fjords. As we rented several holiday houses along our way, we got the chance to discover the surroundings of each, always in good weather. If it was not favourable, we just stayed inside or went shopping. On the other hand, if we had a reservation for the next cottage, we had to go on, despite the moody April-weather in May. Therefore, we didn't experience the Kystriksveien as the same highlight as last time.

When we arrived in northern Norway on March 31st, the climate felt much milder than before in Sweden, due to the Golf Stream. Never the less; almost all lakes were still frozen until May, even in southern Norway. In the middle of May, some of Norway's roads were still lined with snow-masses, bigger than we had ever seen during the entire winter in Sweden! The last snow fell end of May, but spring had come suddenly and with full power. Nature developed as quickly, as the days got longer. Already in the beginning of April, we had fascinatingly long daylight hours and since the end of April we never had seen a real dark night, despite driving south.

Visiting in off-season was very rewarding. It was just great to be in the coastal villages among fishermen, rather than masses of tourists. Although, quite some tourist accommodations had not yet opened for the season, with a little planning, it was no problem to find places to stay. Some attractions, like Trollstigen or Preikestolen were not yet accessible, due to snow, which on the other hand, was also responsible for the winter-wonderland we enjoyed up in the highlands. Some stave churches were still locked, awaiting the high season. We didn't mind, as we could always get on their ground and enjoy the churches from the outside – there was no need to pay entrance fees, but we could take pictures without busloads of supernumeraries in it.

Norway is a great and very exciting destination. To us, this visit in winter and spring was even more rewarding than our previous trips during summer!

A warm summer in Sweden

From Oslo, we headed north-east to Kongsvinger. From there, it was only about 50km to the [Swedish](#) border near Torsby, which we reached on May 28, 2010. It was a sunny day and Sweden presented itself in the nicest spring colours; exactly the way tourists think, Sweden must look like. The clouds reflected beautifully in the many lakes and ponds.

We enjoyed our lunch greatly; in Sweden we got again good food for a small price, instead of grub that costs a little fortune in neighbouring Norway. Around 5 PM, a giant elk promenaded on the road in plain sunlight. We were so surprised, we didn't even manage to get a focused picture, before it disappeared into the woods.

Overnight, we stayed in Mora, in a cosy cabin we had found thanks to a sign by the roadside. Mora is embedded between two lakes; Orsasjön and Siljan. We had seen the latter last time in January, when it was solidly frozen, wearing a hat of fog. In winter, Mora is the finish of the famous 90km Vasaloppet, the cross country event that is honouring Gustav Vasa, the Swedish equivalent to Wilhelm Tell. An old steam engine stands at Siljans lake shore, as Mora is the southern

terminus of the Inlandbana, and starting point of the Dalabana to the south. The town is also the birthplace of painter Anders Zorn, whose water colour paintings have earned him a name and Mora some fame.

It didn't take long, and we were looking for a nice place to eat, which was not too hard to find in touristy Mora. So we enjoyed a Swedish gourmet dinner; the first of many more to come.

On the next morning, we drove to Sollerön Island in Lake Siljan. Several dams connect this island to the shore. Further east, we visited the village of Siljansnäs that sits enthroned majestically on a hill. The scene was picture-book perfect, with rich green flower meadows, dotted with typical red Swedish houses. The village was very tidy, and people engaged in typical spring activities like gardening, painting or repairing fences.



Holiday house as private naturist retreat at Svanskog

In the evening, we reached our holiday house near Svanskog, which we had booked on the internet the previous week. It was an old house that had just been renovated and extended. The owner had planned to finish his work this week and didn't expect that somebody would book the house on such a short notice. We told him that we decided to come here, after our chosen naturist club in Norway had still not opened the season.

He replied that he never wears bathers, when swimming in the lake and we could do likewise. He permitted us "to be ourselves" even on the lawn
apple tree in full blossom, and there. Hard to imagine, that end of April, this lawn had still
All over Scandinavia, spring power. During the two weeks everywhere, and decorated

A few hundred metres from the Eldan. Here we had a fire-place
Almost daily, we went boating.
the lake and paddled around the
One was no more than a few

the favourite look-outs of birds. Rowing on the lake was very peaceful and we felt one with nature. The sun set around 10 PM now, and so we went sometimes on a 'sunset-cruise' after dinner. Skimming over the waves, when the water was at its calmest, was just magnificent. One night, as we walked back up to the house, a young elk was standing right in the middle of our path, staring at us for the longest time, as if to ask: "is this enough to be happy tourists?"



around the house. There was a beautiful
we really enjoyed worshipping the sun
only four weeks ago, that means at the
been covered by two metres of snow.
comes very suddenly and with full
we stayed in this house, Lupines grew
every slope in their diversity of colours.

house was the shore of oblong Lake
and a private pier with a rowing boat.
If we were energetic enough, we crossed
small islands near the opposite shore.
rocks with some dead trees, which were

As the nights now didn't get really dark anymore, the animals of the forest didn't have any chance to hide under the screen of night, when looking for food. So, we were lucky that we could regularly see roe deer or foxes roaming around our neighbourhood. In late spring and early summer, even Southern Sweden's sunsets are followed by long colourful twilight hours and dusk transforms itself into dawn, without nightfall.

Svanskog belongs to the [Dalsland](#) district, which is one of Sweden's most lake-dotted areas. It offers a lot of sight-seeing possibilities on, and along the water and is incredibly scenic indeed. Heinz' sister and her hubby were due to visit us soon, so we were motivated to venture out, to evaluate the top highlights we could show them in a few weeks time. On those trips, we learned how short the Swedish high season lasts. It was the beginning of June and when we asked at the tourist information in Bengtfors, about rental possibilities for boats during the following months, the employee replied: "I would not recommend you to rent a boat during July, as the lake and all the canals around here will be crowded. Why don't you rent one now, in this peaceful time? You would probably be the only tourists on the lake." Later in Dals Ed, we stopped at the "[Moose Ranch](#)" to ask for some leaflets. The owner informed us that the brochures were still at the printers, as the farm is still closed. He was only there for a short while, but as we turned up, he let us see the elks for free.

Another excursion led us to nearby [Åmål](#), a small appealing town that got famous by the award-winning movie, unfairly calling it "fucking Åmål". Thereafter we went hiking at Yttre Bodane Nature Reserve on Lake Vänern. We also ventured out to the famous aqueduct at Håverud, and to the inlets of Lake Vänern at Köpmannebro. We have visited both sites already in winter, and it was interesting to see them now again. Obviously, it was a completely different picture with boats sailing on blue water, instead of a locked ice cover. However, the atmosphere with the white blanket and the golden light had made those sights also very appealing in winter.

We enjoyed our excursions very much, but it was also nice to stay home. Thanks to the persisting warm weather (between 20°-25°C), we were very often outdoors, enjoying sunbathing and boating. At our holiday house, we had lots of luxury, including a sauna (with tiny benches), a dish-washer, a washing machine and tumbler. In one of our two beautiful bathrooms, the shower was one of those high-tech shower-cabins with steam and water jets. It almost scald Heinz, while he was standing in there, the remote control in hand, trying to figure out, how this modern thing works without getting all the water jets directed to his head...

Graduation Day

After we left Svanskog on June 11th 2010, we devoted our first stop to what is one of Sweden's most famous icons: IKEA. After our boost to the Swedish, the Chinese and the Turkish economies, we encountered a celebration of those carrying the hopes of Sweden's future. It was graduation day for scholars finishing the gymnasium at Kristinehamn. Watching those guys didn't really promise a too bright outlook for the country. Big decorated trailers were towed around town by tractors. The graduates were cheering the watching crowds, singing and dancing on the trailers, while obviously getting drunk. Once a while, a student fell off the carriage - but some will always fail... But in a special word of praise, we should mention that an impressive 99.5% of Swedish youth attend gymnasium.

We continued along a nice country road, passing many lakes. Later in the day, we arrived in Nora, where we stayed at the naturist club. The weather outlook made us decide to head for Stockholm pretty soon and come back to relax here later.

On the way from Nora to the capital, we saw often Lupines on the roadside. With their many colours, they gave the area a special touch. For lunch, we stopped in Arborga, a picturesque village with nice wooden buildings. We got a delicious meal for SEK 79 (€ 7.90) including salad, drink and coffee, plus a beautiful riverside location.

Stockholm: a capital studded with islands

On June 15th 2010, we arrived at Zinkensdamm Youth Hostel in [Stockholm](#), which we easily found thanks to "Google Map and Google Street View". Those tools are a great help and we can't understand, why so many people oppose it, worried about their privacy rights. The Youth Hostel is situated at the edge of a park and within easy walking distance of the city centre. Scandinavia usually has no security problem at all, but at this hostel we were warned, not to park our car in the street. That's probably because of



the nearby bars, and so we paid the fee for the in-house underground car park.

As it looked like it would start raining any moment, we armed ourselves with raincoat and umbrella, before setting off to discover the city. As always, when you're forearmed, the sun came out soon. So, we could leisurely enjoy this beautiful city of 800'000 that never got really dark now. The city of Stockholm spreads over 14 islands that are interconnected by bridges. It does not really give an island feel, as the water between the islands is often no wider than a river. As serious tourists, we concentrated first on the old town "Gamla Stan", and this not only, because many of the city's gastronomic delights can be found there... The cobble stone streets and alleys are lined with well maintained merchant houses, leading up to Storkyrka (big church) on top of the hill. Just behind it, the Royal castle stretches down to the shore.

Our first evening was a great introduction to the capital, and it was one o'clock in the morning, by the time we were back at the hostel. The next morning was bright and sunny. We were lucky to discover "Montelius Vägen", a small path that offers great views over the city, as it slopes down Södermalm's north, approaching Gamla Stan from the west. Today we continued from the castle to Helgeandsholmen, a small island mainly occupied by the Swedish parliament.

Continuing straight over the next bridge, we reached the bustling pedestrian street "Drottninggatan" (Queensstreet). It is a very long shopping street, and for those addicted, it's easy to shop till they drop – but for their salvation, there are also many roadside cafés and restaurants. East of this pedestrian street is Sergelstorg, a busy town square with the culture centre, more shops and a pleasant open-air market. Then our sight-seeing program led us to some nice, old buildings, like the post-office, police, theatre, opera and the town hall. This latter one occupies a very scenic spot on the water and has wonderful gardens, where the public is welcome to stroll around. The central station consists of a few very modern buildings supplementing the older main complex.

Paparazzi polluted Stockholm

The Royal Palace (Kungliga Slottet) occupies quite a big lot in Stockholm's Gamla Stan. With its 608 rooms, it's the world's largest Royal Castle still used for its original purpose. Presently, they were busy times for the Royals, with less than a week to go, until the wedding of Crown Princess Victoria to her fitness trainer Daniel. Almost every parking lot around the castle was already occupied by high tech equipment that was brought in by Swedish and international TV and radio stations. They were all preparing to broadcast the big event. The TV lorries almost mushroomed by the hour, and many main-roads within the city were only kept open for government vehicles and taxis.



Many royal receptions were already held before the royal wedding ("Kungliga Bröllop"), but the press was not always invited. Twice we observed how paparazzi were lifted with cranes frighteningly high into the air, to point in some direction with their camera. We just shook our heads in disbelief and continued our walk. After a few hundred metres, we came to the anchored sailing yacht 'A/F Chapman' that has been converted into a Youth Hostel. Years ago, we had spent some nights there, so now we pried to see if it was busy. It was, but in a different way than we'd expected! The deck was packed with paparazzi that all pointed their oversized telephoto-lenses to the tall ship "Gothenburg" that moored nearby. Just out of curiosity, Heinz took our compact camera and pressed the magical zoom button, pointing into the same direction. Without knowing what was going on, we managed – just as passersby – to get a few shots of Royals. Out of curiosity, we compared our pic's with those in the papers the next day. Amazingly, ours were not worse than those printed under the headlines, but we had invested neither time, nor money, to get them – unfortunately didn't get any out either...



The (host) city of Stockholm invited, together with some major sponsors like IKEA, Ericsson and Telia, to the two-week event "LOVE 2010". There were actually lots of small events, like concerts and happenings for kids.

All over Stockholm, 'royal wedding souvenirs' could be found as easy as the water surrounding the cities islands. As a good son, Heinz sent a royal postcard with a couple of special issue royal stamps on the way to his mother. But he couldn't resist complementing it with some funny remarks about the depicted family. Sure enough, Heinz's mother later worried that the Swedish police would arrest us on the matter of "lesè majesté"!

But: we left Stockholm just one day before the Swedish commoner Daniel, traded his private life to the world press, against a princess...

Only 60km to the north we visited Uppsala, a big town of 180'000 inhabitants. As it rained here, we headed straight for lunch. So we could tell you in detail about this gourmet restaurant and the many shops we sought shelter in, or we could simply mention that the town looked quite pretty. Uppsala was not only drenched in rain, it is also drenched in history. But we won't bore you with this, we only mention it, because later, after the sun came out again, we visited old grave mounds. They originate from pre-Viking times and date back to the 6th-12th centuries. Human sacrifices had been offered to the gods at this sacred site.

Late afternoon, we continued on small roads westwards back to Nora. It was very pleasant to explore the countryside, but consumed more time than rushing past on the highway. Therefore, we stopped for dinner at a nice country hotel in Norberg. We enjoyed an excellent fish, and a typical Swedish speciality: a plank steak. This is a steak or a fish-fillet, baked and served on a wooden plank. This comes surrounded by mashed potatoes, neatly arranged with a pastry tube. Sauce Béarnaise and often another sauce complement the dish.

Gustavsberg Naturist ground in Nora

Nora is a picturesque village with many nice wooden buildings that are so typical for Sweden. Our travel guide (Lonely Planet) mentions that Nora is "... clearly confident in its ability to charm the pants off anyone". When we had visited this January, we had admired the houses in the snow, but the minus 25°C were definitely too cold that we would even think about taking anything off at all... However now, it was another story, and we didn't hesitate to take everything off while we stayed in Nora – not only because of the charming village, but rather because we discovered there is a nudist club.

[Gustavsberg Naturist ground](#) is situated on the shores of Lake Norasjön, only 2km north of Nora's village centre. We stayed in one of their 20 economical rooms available in two big club houses. The rooms are small and functional, but the communal facilities are spacious and very comfortable. Huge living rooms can be enjoyed, and the terraces offer fantastic views over the campsite down to the lake. Each house has a communal kitchen, where every room has a large fridge and freezer compartment on dispense. Two computers and a printer are another goodie provided for guests, and wireless internet can be received all over the large campground.

When we arrived at Gustavsberg on June 11th 2010, we had one of the big houses all to ourselves, and when we came back from Stockholm on the 18th, it was still the same situation. We had already been advised upon arrival that all the rental rooms and apartments, as well as all caravan sites, were solidly booked out for the midsummer celebration. Only for tents, there would still be some space. So we were surprised that before midsummer, apart from those club members who stayed permanently, only foreign tourists could be seen on the grounds, despite school holidays having started already on June 12th.

This year, Midsummer was celebrated on June 25th. On June 24th, out of the blue, a few hundred Swedish guests arrived within a few hours, patiently queuing at the reception. By the evening, Gustavsberg naturist camping was full to the rim. There were caravans and motorhomes standing on little spaces, we had not even imagined that it would be possible to navigate there – mind you: it's on a hillside. We were lucky that we could still stay in our room, but the next day we had to pitch up our tent, whether we liked it or not. At least the tent space was not that much in demand, just as the camper's kitchen. Also in Sweden, what is commonly referred to as "camping", really means "caravanning".

Swedish Midsummer celebrations on June 25, 2010

According to Swedish tradition, a birch tree is "sacrificed" in the morning of Midsummer Day for the Midsommarstången (Maypole). The thin branches with leaves are wrapped around the birch trunk. A crossbeam is mounted to the upper part, so the maypole looks like a cross. Later, two rings will be attached to the outer edges of the beam, representing fertility, as the cross is of pagan, not Christian origins. Then, people go to the meadows gay with flowers to pick posies. These will become the decoration flowers around the pole and especially the two rings.



As on most Swedish naturist grounds, also at Gustavsberg in Nora, a Midsommarstången is risen, as part of the [midsummer celebration](#). So, here we saw all the preparations but we were, for this occasion, keen to watch traditional dancers wearing traditional costumes, rather than birthday-suits!

Therefore, we drove out to experience a traditional midsummer celebration. To our surprise, there was no festivity in Nora itself, but the tourist office advised us about several historic sites, where people gather and dance. So we picked the midsummer celebration at Siggebohyttans Bergsmansgård, some miners buildings that have been turned into a museum.



Hundreds of families flocked to the place and made themselves comfortable on blankets. Many had brought along a pick-nick, others were queuing at the cafeteria for midsummer cake and coffee and, at some point, everybody seemed to queue for ice-cream. Alcohol was neither sold nor drunk, and therefore, it was a very pleasant atmosphere. Many children and women wore flower wreaths in their hair. After a while, a small band played and a folk dance group in traditional costumes started performing on the lawn between the buildings. After half an hour of amusing, and very theatrical dances, we followed the flock as it moved over to a bigger lawn. At 3 PM, the big moment had come and the Midsommarstången was raised. Now, a lead-singer stroked up the midsummer song (about frogs), and most parents with children joined in the ring-a-ring-o'roses around the maypole. It was very sweet to watch how the small children concentrated on the dancing.

As we had liked this happening very much, and it was only mid afternoon by the time it got quiet at Siggebohyttan, we moved on to nearby Uskavi, where we could enjoy another midsummer celebration. The festivities here were held a little later, so we arrived just at the same time as the dance group. On one hand, the scenery on the lakeshore with its islands was much nicer, but on the other hand, the setting of the scene was on a holiday park with campground, which was less idyllic than the setting between the historical buildings before at Siggebohyttan.

To round up this perfect day, we wanted to indulge in some Swedish gourmet cuisine. As we could eat out in Nora every day, we decided to look somewhere else tonight. As 'stor' means big in the Swedish language, we hoped to get a nice selection of restaurants in the town of Stora. To our surprise, the place was that small, we could hardly find it, not to mention any restaurant. The situation was no better in the next few villages and finally we ended up in Lindesberg, which does have a fair share of restaurants. This didn't help; soon we found out that most eateries are closed on Midsummer Night, as everybody celebrates with friends, be it at home, or rather on holiday in a campground, at a hotel or in a cottage or summer house. They don't want to drive afterwards – they want to get drunk! In the end we were lucky however, only two restaurants were open and the one we chose, cooked very good indeed. The day after midsummer is a different matter; an exhausted waitress complained later, that the restaurant was empty on Midsummer Eve, but got raided completely and sold out the day after.

The Swede's real addiction...

After a very eventful day we went back to the naturist club around 11 PM on Midsummer Night. The campground was surprisingly quiet, but when Heinz decided to check out the sauna at midnight, he sort of stepped into a hornets' nest. It was packed with about 40 drunks of both genders. Obviously, most didn't realize that their after-sauna dip in the lake could be their last one...

Extensive drinking, like on Midsummer Eve, is rather an exception than the rule. On some strange reasons, Scandinavians just seem to drink the whole statistic at once. Sweden (and also Norway) has very strict alcohol laws. As a result, the two countries have Europe's lowest alcohol consumption and alcohol dependency rates. This



means, the Swedes drink 4,9 litres and the Norwegians only 4,4 l pure alcohol per capita annually. The inglorious world champion Germany, drinks with 10,2 l more than twice as much! (figures of 2009) In pre EU times, Sweden's alcohol consumption was even some 20% lower, but a rather stupid EU regulation forced the country to soften its import restrictions for booze.

In fact, not many Swedes are addicted to Alcohol, but most are probably addicted to Ice-Cream, like all Scandinavians. Also at Gustavsberg Naturist Camping, we heard again the familiar rhythm "The Entertainer" of Scott Joplin. It didn't take long and the "HemGlass" ice-cream van was surrounded by kids and adults alike. Even though, most of them stayed only for 2-3 days, it didn't hinder them to buy the handy family-packs with 20-50 assorted ice cream-specialities. We remembered, how we saw one of these vans during winter at minus 25°C appearing out of the snow, but still doing good business. When we mentioned this to some fellow naturists around, they just said: "of course we appreciate ice-cream during winter as well, we just don't go walking on the street with it".

Convivial times at the club

After experiencing Sweden during the coldest winter for years, it was also happen that the summer following it, was one of the hottest – sometimes temperatures rose up to 33°C. Fortunately (to us) on June 26th, the day after the midsummer party, it rained in the morning, leading a few holidayers to leave the club earlier than planned. So we could get a room in the club's house again, after only one night in the tent. During the next few days many people left, only to be replaced by other naturist families that came to spend their one or two-weeks summer holiday here. For us this was quite pleasant, as we got to know most people and regularly sat together at the BBQ or over a coffee (from our Espresso machine) in the kitchen or on the terrace. Often, these gatherings involved half the guests of the house, while the other half tried to sleep. This wasn't a worry really, as one lady put it: "my husband sleeps in the room next door and he doesn't hear very well, and I don't go to bed before you all do, so WE have no problem at all..."

The atmosphere was great, as we were usually a totally mixed group; older and younger people, Swedish and foreigners, rich and poor. For English speakers, it is just great in Sweden as most locals do speak English very well and love to socialise.

We also often sat together with Robin + Ray, two Dutch guys that stayed in a tent. Those two were our neighbours during our one day camping intermezzo. They were a bit puzzled, as they realized they were the only ones that really *wanted* to tent. Robin + Ray came to the point: "apart from us, everybody else seems to consider the tenting area as a waiting room only. They all move to the house as soon as a room becomes available." Other than that, we had a lot of common ground, as those two also belong to the specie of globetrotters. Currently they were on a 6 month trip, and they had also done some longer 'round the world' trips. So we had lots to talk about.

Gustavsberg Naturist Camping is a club ground owned by "Naturistföreningen Bergslagens Solsport". During summer, many members stay on the ground permanently. They take turns maintaining the facilities and keeping the ablution block spotless clean. Even those members, who are physically not the fittest anymore, help whenever they can. Sometimes, the big lawn is mown daily. Every building is regularly repainted, often with the typical Falu Rödfärg. The playgrounds recreational facilities, as well as the rafts and two piers for bathing, were mounted again, just in time before the crowds arrived. As the lakes freeze every year, all floatable facilities in Scandinavia have to be brought ashore annually, before winter comes in.



As a self imposed rule, club members should not occupy more than half of the 20 rooms and 100 campsites. The others are reserved for casual guests; locals and foreigners alike. The club made the experience, that it creates a much better atmosphere on the grounds, when the permanents regularly mix up with holiday-folks. The atmosphere is great indeed.

Gustavsberg is very popular among foreigners as well. Its superb lakeside location reminds somehow on the very essence of Sweden, which we could experience at this lovely location in its two most extreme forms: during winter, we wore thermal underwear and enjoyed the view over the frozen lake at minus 25°C, whereas now in summer, we sunbathe stark naked and jump for cooling dips into the 25°C warm lake!

Gustavsberg was now very lively and everybody engaged in activities like sunbathing, swimming, playing sports or sweating in the lakeside sauna. In compliance with Sweden's 'allemansrätten' (everyman's right), those who enter the grounds just for swimming and sunbathing, but not for an overnight-stay, don't need to pay an entrance fee.

We appreciated it very much that Nora's centre is only a pleasant 20 minutes stroll away. Here we found not only some very well stocked supermarkets and a good selection of restaurants, but also Nora Glass. This is a local institution selling three different flavors of home-made ice-cream that change daily. We felt, Nora was even more picturesque during winter, but now in summer, it was rather the naturist club that charmed our pants off...

Excursions to Pershyttan and Örebro

Many lakes with islands can be found in the area around Nora. Although it is a bit touristy, this region is not overran in summer like many coastal areas. The same can be said for **Pershyttan**, a well preserved iron work from the 14th century that is now a working museum. In summer, this old mine with its workers quarters can be reached from Nora by steam train. Guided tours are offered and many workshops have small exhibitions about the iron production of the time. Quite impressive is the 11 metres high waterwheel that transfers its power through interconnected poles, moving back and forth, as they are attached to opposite sides of the wheel. The two lines of joint poles are incredibly long. They are laid up the hill and transfer the wheels power to two different shafts. This impressive construction had been renovated in 2005.



Örebro is a nice town about 4 Swedish miles south of Nora. For those who haven't heard about it: if a Swede mentions that something is 4 mil away, he really talks about 40 kilometres, as 1 Swedish mile is equivalent to 10 (correct Swiss) kilometres (or 32'808 smelly English feet).

Back to Örebro. Now in summer it had a totally different atmosphere than during our visit in winter. Not only the streets, but also the roadside café's were bustling with people. Restaurants that were near empty in winter were now full to the rim, and many additional restaurants had popped up. Obviously, al-fresco dining is a popular pastime during summer. Before joining them, we felt the urge to trudge all the sights of the city again. The moated Vasa Castle reflected beautifully in its surrounding water. Continuing along the river, we were soon led away from the houses into a park. Here, rows of colourful flowers were growing, and the playgrounds were packed with children. Soon we reached the museums village Wadköping, with its many well maintained old wooden houses. Now, the windows that were covered with fern frost in January had been "re-decorated" with something contemporary. As we were there quite late, most shops had already closed and the actors, who demonstrate traditional life in plain-old dress, had already left, but we still enjoyed a wander around.

Back in the centre, we admired the wonderful building that houses the theatre and reflected in the river. Not far from there, we turned into **Ågatan 3**, which is not only an address, but also the name of a superb Swedish gourmet restaurant. It's highly rated in the "White Guide". This, we found out (only now), is the Swedish equivalent to Gault-Millau or Michelin Guide. So we indulged in a truly delicious meal.

On our way back to Nora, we sighted a big elk along the roadside and were glad, we only drove quite slowly while the highway passed through forest.

On July 3rd we said good-bye at Gustavsberg Naturist retreat, and slipped into the T-Shirts we got as farewell presents. So we could take more than just good memories of Gustavsberg with us, while heading to the West Coast. During our drive along Lake Vänern's north-shore, we were puzzled to sight already the first autumn colours on some trees and on fern fronds. It's amazing how quick nature progresses in Scandinavia!

Renting holiday cottages

Our next holiday house was the second we've rented directly from the owners and not over an agency, as we had mostly done. How we usually found our Scandinavian holiday houses is explained a few dozen pages up (north) under the subtitle "Renting holiday cottages in Scandinavia".

Family meeting in a holiday house near Hunnebostrand

Late afternoon on July 3, 2010, we reached the holiday house near Hunnebostrand on the [Bohuslän coast](#). It was not really a classical holiday house, as the owners rent out their own house while they go on holiday. So they put a few personal things aside, marked a few cupboards as “private” and hoped we wouldn’t run off with the lot. After we were met and shown around by their adult daughter, we soon made our way to the airport in Gothenburg. There, we welcomed Heinz’ sister Edith with her husband Karl, who were to spend the next 15 days with us. As it was 2 o’clock in the morning, when we finally got back, we postponed our inspection of the house and its environment until later that day.

The property stood all by itself between forest and meadows and had a nicely landscaped garden. There were very few houses and a golf course in the neighbourhood. From a photo album we learned that the house had constantly been extended. Presently, it had two bedrooms, an open-plan kitchen with an attached living room, split in three sections on different levels. There was a giant bathroom, a generous conservatory and a huge terrace. Not all appliances were working or meant to be used, as the air-conditioner and the sauna, whereas, we could benefit from dish-washer, washing-machine, tumble dryer, a small hot tub and a huge fridge with ice-cube maker.

Soon we discovered, how crowded and bustling some of the nearby jewels of the Bohuslän coast were, and so we really enjoyed the tranquillity around our house, where we could relax after busy sight-seeing days. The only “nest invader” was the allegedly shy cat, of which we were told that it never shows up, if strangers are around. Obviously, it had not been fully satisfied with the feeding machine in the garage and soon sought our company.

Weather-wise there was nothing to complain about; lots of sun, high temperatures and about every 3rd day some rain, so we could get those books out as well. Extensive cooking was not high on the agenda (this time) – either Karl lit the BBQ, or we had the “White Guide” leading us to some highly scored gourmet temples.

Touring around the Bohuslän Coast



Surely, we ventured out to discover the highlights of the Bohuslän Coast that stretches roughly from Gothenburg north to the Norwegian border. It’s a dramatic and beautiful skerry coast. The smaller islands typically consist of smooth red granite boulders with nothing growing on them; just bare rock. They stand in stark contrast to most little islands in the Swedish lakes abound with vegetation. Bigger islands and the coastal landscape along Bohuslän’s coast often have bare rock faces as well. Impressive bridges and free car ferries connect the inhabited islands and the mainland. The Bohuslän is a top holiday-destination for beach life and fishing, but we concentrated solely on sightseeing.

Many picturesque fishing- and holiday villages are dotted along the coast. Most have popular leisure boat harbours in addition to commercial fishing harbours. The most touristy villages have a “Bryggan” (promenade along the shoreline) lined with cafés and souvenir shops. Never the less, all are very charming and evolved naturally. There were so many we liked, it’s rather unfair to only mention a few outstanding ones: Grundsund, Fiskebäckskil, Mollösund or Klädesholmen. Others like e.g. Bovallstrand glint because of their fantastic viewpoints or lidos on natural settings on, and between rocks.

Unsurprisingly, our long-time favourites Smögen and Fjällbacka were discovered by others at the longest. Though, we

knew them from quiet seasons, they were still worthwhile to visit indeed. We had last been here just before Christmas and we had neither seen an open souvenir shop, nor any other tourist. Now in July, the atmosphere was totally different of course; Smögen's Bryggan was bustling with people, to say the least. In the guest harbour, there were up to seven boats moored next to each other on every landing. Probably, most yachties were there to see and to be seen. As most were partying all night on their boats, none was probably fit to leave early next morning. It would have been a major task to navigate a single boat out of this maze.

Despite all this, the colourful fishermen's sheds at the end of the long pedestrian pier, were still reflecting in the water, as majestically as ever. If we ventured even further to the rocks behind the harbour, we could escape the hustle and bustle entirely. Apart from unlimited views to the sea, we found here also large sea food processing plants. Smögen is famous for fishing of lobster and shrimp (Smögen Råkor). In summer, those delicacies are offered in many eateries. By the way; in Sweden it's quite common to find excellent restaurants nestled into the middle of very touristy areas.

Many of the leisure boats that moor at Smögen are owned by Norwegians. When they make their way along the coast, they often choose the Sote Canal's calm waters as passage. Motorboats can pass unhindered, but the bridge out to Ramsvikslandet is not high enough for sailing yachts. As it's constructed as a rotating bridge, yachts and cars have to wait in turns. Now in summer, you never had to wait long to see the bridge opening and letting some yachts pass. Of the 7 km passage some 4.8 km are manmade. Now in 2010, 'Sotekanalen' celebrated already its 75th anniversary. Around 60'000 leisure boat captains use the picturesque, 15 metres wide canal annually, but it doesn't have commercial significance.

Also Fjällbacka, a bit further north, has a big boat harbour that was now full to the rim. This pretty seaside village was helped to popularity by Ingrid Bergman who used to holiday here. A few decades later, Astrid Lindgren wrote the children's book "Ronja Robbersdaughter" that was filmed and partly recorded in Kungsklyfta (Kings Chasm). This spectacular chasm is situated in the rocks above the picturesque village and made accessible by stairs and boardwalks. The walls of this narrow cleft are quite high but what makes it real frightening to clamber through this crevice, are the big heavy rocks, jammed between the chasm walls. If you're brave enough to pass and no earth quake causes the boulders to squash you, you'll be rewarded with breathtaking views over Fjällbacka and its coastline, from a viewpoint above the rocks. To celebrate our survival, the four of us headed to an award winning Restaurant on the seashore and indulged in some Swedish gourmet cuisine.

Wherever we went on the Bohuslän Coast, we were always excited about the outstandingly beautiful scenery and about each and every of the picturesque villages. We stopped time and time again for pictures. Some of the best were taken on tall bridges and on car ferries.

Meeting elk

We made sure, our short-time visitors meet the Swedish emblem of the forest "the elk". So we headed for the "[Moose Ranch](#)" at Dals-Ed again. During our year in Scandinavia, we saw this impressive mammal quite irregularly; sometimes only every few months, but sometimes daily. While tourists are keen to see them, locals are happy not to meet them at all, as they are a major accident hazard. Solely in Sweden, elk are responsible for an average of ten road accidents daily, often ending fatally for all participants. Swedes would never ever put an 'elk-sticker' onto their cars, as many tourists do.

Of course, wild elk never pose until desperate tourists can take a picture. Stopping on the roadside did not only make the elk run away but also other drivers mad. Therefore, the elk-farm was also our first chance to approach these animals without danger for either side, and with ample time to take pictures.



On the Moose-Ranch, there was 1 big male-, 4 teenage-, and 4 baby-elks. The owner of the farm readily shared his knowledge with his visitors, of which we were about ten at the same time. Most people are surprised how tall the animals are, although the Scandinavian specie is smaller than its North American relative 'the moose'.

Males here can weigh more than 500 kg and the span of their antlers can reach up to two metres. Today, about 400'000 elk are roaming the Swedish forests just before, and about 300'000 after the hunting season. The animals reproduce very quickly, but humans try to keep the population growth in check to limit damage to the forests and risks to motorists. These were the figures for Sweden, but in fact, elk are present in the entire

northern hemisphere; from Alaska and Canada to Scandinavia and all the way to Eastern Siberia. The cold war didn't bother them, as they like cold areas. Between 10°C plus and 20°C minus zero suits them best, but even temperatures of 50°C below frozen don't pose a problem to them.

Excursions to Dalsland in the interior

To get a better picture of typical Sweden, we led Edith & Karl also inland to the Dalsland district, where forests and lakes dominate. The "Moose Range" was just a nice introduction, but to enjoy lakes and forests was the goal. However, of the latter we got more than we sought for. While we followed, what we thought was a well marked forest trail near Färgelanda, we got completely lost in the woods. Suddenly, we came into an area that was being logged to an extent that neither the markers, nor the trail was visible anymore. It took us quite a while until we got out of that maze of pick-a-stick tree-stems and, with scratched legs, back to civilisation again.

We didn't lose heart and came back to Dalsland another day, though, we stuck to manmade attractions. We stopped at a [glass-blowing work-shop in Mellerud](#), on Lake Vänern's north western shore. Here, we followed a demonstration how glass is being formed, but successfully resisted the temptation to buy anything in the attached souvenir shop.

Riding a draisine

After a superb Thai lunch buffet, we continued north to Forsbacka near Åmål. Here we were in for a truly touristy experience that is lots of fun, and as synonym for Sweden, as Volvo (before it was saved first by French-, then by American-, and now by Chinese companies): we [hired draisines](#). After a brief introduction, we were handed over two rail trolleys that were powered like a bicycle and had a bench for the passenger. The abandoned railway track led through typical Dalsland scenery, past several blue lakes and forests that reflected beautifully in them. We were lucky to encounter only two parties, because one of the quite heavy trolleys has to be lifted from the rails to cross. The "traffic" in one direction has priority, and this was ours – so we were lucky twice! In a bit under two hours, we pedalled 14km through very scenic landscape, all the way to Svanskog, the village, where we had rented a holiday house a month ago.



The station was currently not operating, as the tourist steam-train had been temporarily suspended, after the track was washed out. We enjoyed an ice cream and took some group pictures around a steam engine, before we lifted the two draisines back onto the rails. It was already 6 PM, when we headed back and the light was now more beautiful, except in the short tunnel, where it was as dark as before...

Now the trolleys were going almost by themselves on those sections, where we had to puff and blow before on the way up, and vice-versa. On the whole, it was an easy ride, though, it was ideal that we could change the manpowered engine every now and then. This tour with the draisines was a great way to enjoy the Swedish countryside at a slow pace. It was truly enjoyed by all of us; four "youngsters" around fifty!

After returning our draisines, we still felt energetic enough to take a look at the aqueduct and the locks at Håverud. It was now the right month to see boat traffic, but 9 PM when we arrived, was certainly the wrong hour. Never the less, tourist businesses were now in full swing and people enjoyed al fresco dining along [Dalsland Canal](#). We joined in, and ordered some typical Swedish summer delight, with hand peeled shrimps. On our 2 ½ hour's drive back to Hunnebostrand, we sighted some deer, a fox and even an elk on the roadside.

The following days, we ventured again out to some nice fishing villages on the Bohuslän coast, went for some hikes or walks, if we didn't just relax at our holiday retreat.

Brief visit to Gothenburg; Sweden's second largest city

On July 17th, we packed and sacked and drove south towards Gothenburg – but not without stopping for lunch at [Villa Sjötorp](#), a gourmet restaurant outside Ljungskile. After satisfying our taste buds, we continued to Mölnlycke. Situated in a beautiful park, we found the impressive old Mansion Wendelsberg that functions now also as Youth Hostel. The beautiful wooden villa from the mid 19th century, houses the “Vandrarhems” reception and the dining hall. The rooms we were given, however, were in a modern building. We got a so-called ‘family unit’ where two rooms share one bathroom – just perfect for two couples. The price was very modest: SEK 370 (€ 37) for a double room, plus SEK 70 p.p. for breakfast. Linen and cleaning could be ordered for a small fee. Wendelsberg is one of countless Swedish high-standard budget accommodations, associated to Hostelling International. Conference and banquet facilities are as common, as internet-access in every room. The buffet breakfast at Wendelsberg and many other Scandinavian Youth Hostels, can easily compete with many star-rated hotels and even Caviar is commonly served.



But we anticipate time; we still looked around [Gothenburg](#) the previous evening. We liked the waterfront along the river Göta Älv, with the impressive tall ship ‘Barken Viking’ that’s now a hotel. Another landmark is visible just behind it: Utkikken, a tall red and white office- and shopping complex that is commonly referred to as Lipstick, due to its shape.

The very modern opera house is situated just on the other side of a leisure boat harbour. The impressive building plays with colours and shapes, giving the onlookers completely different impressions, depending on where they stand. A bit further down the river, the maritime museum Maritiman consists of 19 vessels with exhibits, from submarine to barge.

A few blocks away, we found one of the larger versions of a typical Swedish institution: a ‘Godis Shop’. It’s probably not listed in any city guide, but we find it’s definitely worthwhile for tourists, to see and smell: it’s a chocolate and candy shop. Customers can mix and match from an unbelievable selection of sweets. It’s a colourful land of cockaigne with overflowing boxes and carriages full of small sweet treats; from liquorice to jelly belly and colourful candies, from simple chocolates to sophisticated pralines – just think about it and you’ll find it! To keep it simple, there is only one price and that was, in this shop: SEK 7.90 (€ 0.79) for 100 grams of ‘Godis’. The Swedish population has developed such a taste for it, no kiosk and no supermarket can exist, without selling loose ‘Godis’ at least in a small corner. Bigger supermarkets usually have a corner with cheap, loose sweets at a rock-bottom price, and another section with some more sophisticated goodies like Lindt’s- or Mozart’s-Balls(!) or Bouchée for a premium price.

After we managed to bring Edith out of that shop again, we continued our sight-seeing and ventured to ‘Gustav-Adolf’s Torg’, a big square in the centre. We strolled along beautiful buildings, sat down for a drink and then slowly started to look for a suitable place for dinner. Göteborg proclaims itself as the “Gourmet Capital” of Sweden, and there were an awful lot of restaurants indeed... Several roads were lined with eateries. The locals obviously enjoyed the long summer days, and often queued for al-fresco dining. As we were too hungry by now, we opted to eat inside.

Eksjö; pretty town with an ineffable name

On July 18, 2010, we drove to Landvetter airport and said farewell to Edith & Karl who had truly enjoyed their stay in Sweden. As their flight left early, we still had a full travel day ahead of us. For our route eastwards, we chose small roads, to better enjoy the landscape with its many lakes. By late afternoon, we arrived at our destination; [Eksjö](#), a well preserved little town, with alleys lined by beautiful wooden buildings. As pretty as the



place is, pronouncing its name correctly is a night-mare for most foreigners. If you attempt to get a bus- or train ticket to go there, write it down – just like in China.

Part of the town was wiped out by a blaze in 1856 and replaced by neoclassical stone buildings. The nice wooden buildings in the old part of town date back to the 17th century and line several cobble stoned streets. Also our accommodation in the Youth Hostel was housed in such an atmospheric building. As it's a landmarked building, not many things could be altered, and there were strict rules for fire protection. To burn candles was an absolute no-no, which must be hard to accept for any Swede. Upstairs, we had to remember to duck down, each time we went through a door, whereas the ground level had more than three metres height, as it was probably built as a stable. We wondered why the reception accommodated all dwarfs in the basement and all giants upstairs.

It was nice to wander around town, by day and by night. We experienced Eksjö as quite touristy during the day, but very quiet in the evening. Most of the many restaurants closed down on Sunday evening, but luckily, the one that gave us refuge on that certain night, had an excellent chef.

Time honoured castles and canals



After two days in Eksjö, we continued north to Lake Vättern. Along the way, we passed mainly meadows and cornfields. We arrived in Vadstena around midday and enjoyed a nice lunch, before we ventured out to discover the touristy highlights. It was a very hot day and we were glad about every bit of shade. First, we had a look at St. Birgitta's Abbey, founded 1346, a bold symbol of former church power. The village of Vadstena was founded together with the monastery and its town hall is said to be Sweden's oldest. At the other end of the pretty village, is a very impressive moated castle, built by early Vasa Kings in 1545. Today, the huge water ditch around the castle is used as sports harbour. Boats from all over Europe are mooring here, as they can travel to Lake Vättern through various manmade canals.

The most famous of these is [Göta Canal](#). Its first section connects the Baltic Sea with Lake Vättern, and the second section was dug out between Lake Vättern and Lake Vänern, Sweden's two largest lakes. From the latter, the [Trollhätte Canal](#) connects with the North Sea. Using this sophisticated canal system, at the time of its construction 200 years ago, Sweden's biggest civil engineering feat, boats can shortcut from the Baltic to the North Sea, by crossing the Swedish inland. The distance of the entire crossing measures 390 km, which includes five lakes and several rivers. The boats have to conquer a height difference of 91.8 meters by manoeuvring through a total of 64 locks.

Göta Canal has 58 locks, a draught of 2.82 metres and a total length of 190km, of which 87km are manmade.

Trollhätte Canal has 6 locks, a draught of 5.40 metres and a total length of 82km, of which only 10km are manmade, for the remainder, the vessels use the river Göta Älv. Trollhätte Canal, that had been built between 1793-1800 is still of commercial importance today, as it is manageable by freighters of up to 4'000 tonnes. By contrast, Göta Canal that had been built from 1810 to 1832, lost its commercial value to the railway. Though, it could re-establish itself as tourist magnet and attracts meanwhile more than 3 million visitors annually.

We joined the crowds of canal tourists, and visited a very scenic section of Göta Canal at Bergs Slussar. Here we could watch how the boats pass a flight of 7 locks, with a height gain of 19 metres, then two smaller flights of just two locks and a bascule bridge. It's a very interesting place to pursue the leisure-boats, passing the different lock chambers and while the time away, as the water flows in and out and the lockmaster clears the way – uphill and downhill.

Naturist Club Vikbolandet

The Göta Canal reaches the Baltic Sea south of Vikbolandet, a peninsula east of Norrköping, dominated by farmland and forests. [Vikbolandet](#) is also the name of a naturist camping, situated on this peninsula and that's where we spent the next week. With a minimum of landscaping, the ground is well integrated in its natural setting. It's a small club ground, where the majority of guests are the members themselves. There were not as many visitors, as on other grounds. We rented one

of two rooms that share a tiny kitchen. The Club has also two comfortable cottages to let, but they were already taken.

During our first few days, it was exceptionally hot, and so we ventured often out to the small piece of woodlands that belongs to the place. It's a natural area of tranquillity, with many boulders overgrown by lichen. It was so dry, they were crumbling under our shoes. Soon, the rain brought them relief and us a good excuse to visit the large sauna, which was always very sociable. Often we chatted with some members or other tourists, who were mainly from the Netherlands.

We heard that the premises were bought by the club some 15 years ago. Since then, it had constantly been upgraded and members are still working on getting it shiny. Every night, somebody was in charge to light the wood fired sauna, as well as the BBQ, what we appreciated. The gatherings around the fire often lasted until late at night and got quite boozy. Apart from the large ablation block, there was also a club house, a swimming pool with a solarium and (of course); ice-cream sale at the reception.

Our time passed quickly and we felt the urge to swarm out and explore the surrounding woods. Farmland dominates the area around Vikbolandet. The many grain-fields were now, mid July, already shimmering golden and seemed almost ready for harvesting.

One afternoon, we went sight-seeing to nearby [Linköping](#), a pleasant city that has a museums village at the outskirts; Gamla Linköping (old Linköping). It's a lovely place, where wooden buildings dominate. During summer, employees of the different tourist businesses and museums wear folk costumes. As everywhere in Sweden, such places roll up the sidewalks rather early. At least the old fashioned bakery still served us coffee and cake.

The newer part of Linköping was built in stone and had generous wide alleys, probably because it had been devastated by a fire in the year 1700. Its proper cobblestoned streets were lined by restaurants and they (too), were bustling with people sitting outside, enjoying the long days.

On July 26th 2010, we left Vikbolandet and continued southwards. As often, we drove along many lakes, dotted by sweet little islets. For lunch, we stopped at the village of Atvidaberg. It has many nice "Falun Rödfärg" buildings, as we discovered coincidentally upon leaving. Further south, the landscape was dominated by green meadows, flower fields and irrigation canals that were covered by duck weed.

Glasriket ; the Swedish Kingdom of Glass

Meanwhile, we were in the province of Småland, in the south-east of the country. For the next two nights, we stayed in Nybro, a town of 20'000 inhabitants that was disappointingly dead in the evening. Never mind, we had chosen Nybro because the '[Glasriket](#)', which literally translates into 'Kingdom of glass' is situated in this part of Småland.

Sweden established itself a reputation for quality glass. We took the opportunity to visit some of the ~11 glass works (glashyttan) that are open to the public. Some of them are big factories, mass producing utility glass that still requires lots of handwork (or shall we call them 'blow jobs'?). Others are small designer workshops, with only a few employees. In all of them, visitors are invited to watch the glass blowers at work. Peak summer is not really the best time to visit, as most public viewing areas are packed with tourists, but ironically, most glass blowers are on company holiday. Our last visit in autumn had somehow been more interesting, as all factories had been in full swing. Then, a few visitors were often outnumbered by more than one hundred workers who pursued their daily duty. However now, in each factory, two to six glass blowers volunteered to shape some liquid glass, just to make the tourist clusters happy. Sometimes, there was a tribune and a commentator explaining the process. Because it costs money to operate this "show" during the annual closing, there was always someone collecting a small entrance fee.

Outside the company holiday, we could watch how up to five glass blowers were working on one sophisticated item, whereas now, there were never more than two craftsmen working on the same product. As reward for their summer work, they are free to produce whatever springs to their



mind. Sometimes, this resulted in quite interesting objects, with lots of shapes and colours. There were great masters of their trade, as well as juniors at work. We watched the demonstrations in various glass works, including some famous producers like Pukeberg, Orrefors or Kosta and Boda. The latter two belong together. All had factory-shops but at Kosta it was not only big but huge. It was also surrounded by other big outlets, offering anything that bears a brand name. They had easy play to separate fools and money: the giant car-park was full to the rim. Of those visitors, only very few followed the demonstration at the glass-work - but all seemed to raid the outlets!

On our second evening, we visited Kalmar, a seaside town of 60'000 inhabitants. It was much prettier than we had hoped for, with parts of the city centre actually situated on an island. The impressive Kalmar castle, once Sweden's most important, occupies its own islet. Nearby, a tall water-tower reflected idyllically in the water and the town's many beautiful buildings gloomed in the evening sun. We enjoyed a stroll around town and as we reached the northern shore, the 6km long bridge out to Öland Island got visible. Very soon we discovered, why nearby Nybro was so quiet: it seemed that everybody was here in Kalmar! The boulevards were bustling with people and the uncountable roadside cafés were packed. A cultural summer program brought concerts and dramas to town, and that night, people enjoyed live music on the main square. We indulged in a nice dinner and listened to the music in the background.

Paradiset-Partisanen : a tranquil naturist ground

Only about 100km to the south we were booked into paradise! Or: [Paradiset](#), Partisanen's naturist ground, as it's called now. At first sight, the ground near Olofström, looked exactly the same, as we had seen it 9 years ago. Except for one improvement; there was now a brand new room for rent, an offer we couldn't resist. The campground is scenically situated in a wood glade, right on small Lake Slagesnässjön, just the way tourists like it. Some twenty couples and families were present, almost all of them foreigners. Many chose Paradiset for their annual summer vacation. Though not many people from central- or southern Europe would consider Sweden suitable for a beach holiday, some have come to realize that it can be perfect, even for a naturist holiday and therefore return regularly. Here at Paradiset, tourists get long warm summer days and a lovely ground, embedded in picture perfect Swedish landscape.



The days were still very long on July 28th, when we arrived here, but since last week, nights have started to get pitch-dark again, if only for a short while. In the very north of Scandinavia, the nights don't get entirely dark anymore about one month after the beginning of spring. Here in southern Sweden, nights start to get dark again, about one month after midsummer. So in between, we had had about 4 months without real nights.

The water in the lake was very warm and inviting to swim. It is of a copper reddish colour, and even the cheesiest swimmer looks instantly suntanned – as if he jumps into a paint pot. There is a pier, a raft, a diving platform and rowing boats for the guests to enjoy. Brigitte was very happy she could convince Heinz to get on the water, but before that, Inge the caretaker, came to our aid, pumping the result of last week's rain out of the boat.

We learned from Inge that after Partisanen's previous owner died recently, long-time club member Sonje spontaneously bought the ground, to keep it alive for the naturist movement. The naturist camping was then renamed to Paradiset. Because the new landlord is an elderly man, he asked Inge for help, to maintain and run the place during summer. Both are very modest men and work for naturism as a matter of the heart. Months later, we found out that Inge is also the editor of the Swedish naturist magazine "Tillsammans", as well as the president of the Swedish "Naturistförbund" (association).

Inge and Sonje think that excessive consumption of alcohol and naturism don't go together well. They don't want nightly parties at Paradiset, where the same old members drink together and cause problems, not only for themselves but also for other guests. The two men successfully discourage regular parties by limiting the number of seasonal sites. By purpose, there is no cheap long-term rate. They rather rely on holidayers that come, regularly or irregularly, for a few weeks' vacation. They know what they are doing, and the atmosphere at Paradiset is very good indeed. This does not mean that people don't socialise. Most nights, the BBQ was lit and those who liked joined in and ate together. Depending on the bunch of people, they exchanged stories, their travel experiences (that was us of course) or tried to re-shape the world...

Among them, we met Gabriela & Dietmar, a cheerful artist couple from Germany. To share our philosophies was very interesting, as they also lead a life out of the ordinary.

Excursion to Karlshamn

Twice we drove to Olofström, a village that serves as service centre for the area.

A bit further south, we visited the small town of [Karlshamn](#) that has, as the name suggests, a harbour. According to the town's website, Karlshamn must have been "the devil's workshop" some 100 years ago. It produced large quantities of alcoholic drinks, punch, tobacco and snuff. On top of it; almost all game cards used in Sweden, were printed here.

As the Swedes don't communicate too straightforward, but rather diplomatic, Karlshamn's town-hall took into consideration that most of the non-Scandinavian Tourists are Germans. Apparently, some have a tendency to overdo it a bit, when it comes to alcohol- and tobacco-consumption. What the English version of their Website translates as „The Devil's workshop“ and the Dutch as „De werkplaats van de duivel“ is in the German version, belittled to something equivalent of : "early manufacturing of semi luxury products" (frühe Herstellung von Genussmitteln)...

Karlshamn started as "village Bodekull", but was renamed in the 17th century in honour of King Karl X., who had given the place town-privileges after a visit. Now it's a pleasant town with about 30'000 inhabitants and a very nice town hall. There is a big modern harbour, but the well restored wooden buildings in another part of town are the nicer sight.

While sitting on a bench and enjoying an ice-cream, a family with a large American-style old timer, navigated into a car park. Since summer started, we had seen such lavish fuel-guzzlers regularly. All over Sweden, those 'American Dream Cars' from the sixties are very popular, not only with singles who want to attract attention, but also with young families.

A broken Stove and the Swedish radio at Paradiset

Back at Paradise(t) we enjoyed the good walking possibilities; shorter forest strolls in the buff or a longer hike around the lake. For the latter, Inge provided us with a superb map which made it easy to find the track, though, we were glad a farmer showed us a hidden turn-off, which he said, is often missed by those staying at Paradiset. The path leads among interesting flora and fauna. Once we came across a small snake, among more common and less frightening animals. We had seen small snakes in other places and were surprised, they can survive in a climate with such cold winters.

Now it was far away from freezing, but we often enjoyed heating up in the rather big sauna, which is situated in the very clean kept sanitary block. It was up to the guests, to switch the electric heater on whenever they felt like, but it was common to let word go round, and so it got always very sociable. The small pool was ignored in unison, as everyone fancied the lake for an after-sauna dip.

Our room was equipped with a small kitchen, but if we wanted to use a baking oven, we had to go to the camper's kitchen next door. Though, the stove looked quite new, it took ages until the oven got hot. As we lamented with other guests in the kitchen, a Dutchman mentioned that the stove's ceramic hobs were equally slow in heating. As Heinz, he too used to work as electrician and after rough examination of the stove, they concluded that it must be wrongly joined to the power supply. After informing the caretaker, the problem was fixed within 10 minutes. An astounded Inge explained that a professional company had revised and re-connected that stove TWO YEARS ago. He couldn't believe that nobody ever complained, not even those who baked fresh bread twice a week! Well, he paused for a moment, and then remembered that one person actually did; but it was a notorious moaner, so Inge didn't take him serious...

One morning, while we had breakfast under the trees by the lake, we noticed a car marked with "Swedish Radio" parked near the reception. A (celebrity?) reporter was interviewing Inge. Later, when he showed the lady around the naturist campground, she took some pictures for the radio's website. Together with others, we spontaneously proposed to pose as supernumerary actors, to give the picture of Paradiset a lively touch. Initially the reporter hesitated, but in the end she even brought out her microphone again. Now WE got interviewed, as she found our thoughts might be interesting to the listeners and it might give an international touch, as we of course, were interviewed in English. The outcome was probably a bit surprising to her, as she didn't expect that the two Swiss nudies,



sitting in front of her, had not only spent the cold winter in Sweden, but also travelled around the world for more than 11 years. When asking, whether we support the camp management's philosophy of limiting alcohol, Heinz was more than happy to affirm to the Swedish radio listeners the positive impact of a booze-free lifestyle that also creates a very pleasant atmosphere at our club in Switzerland.

A few weeks later, acquaintances showed us a copy of the Swedish/Norwegian Naturist Magazine containing a picture of us (by Inge), while we had been interviewed.

After six very enjoyable days at Paradise(t), we left on August 3rd 2010. Now we had only two days left in Sweden, as the ferry to Germany was meanwhile booked.

Skåne : torn between Sweden and Denmark

During construction of the Öresund bridge between Copenhagen and Malmö (that opened in 2000), evidence was found on the seabed that the Öresund developed only 7000 years ago, as the sea level rose. If it was still landmass, the construction companies would have missed out on some 4 billion Euros in construction cost. The region had not only been connected geographically, but until 1332 the area of today's [Skåne](#) province, had belonged to Denmark. During the next 400 years, it was embattled between Swedes and Danes and changed hands various times, but finally fell to Sweden. Today, Danish influence is still alive in architecture and dialects.

As we travelled along Skåne's southern coast, even the flat landscape appeared somehow Danish. Windmills and thatched brick houses are abound. Overnight we stayed at [Simrishamn](#), a pleasant seaside town. Now, in the beginning of August, it was bustling with people and the street café's were overflowing. It took us quite a while to find accommodation and whilst asking for cottages on a campground, so many mobile homes joined the queue behind us, we could hardly back-out. Only after looking outside the town, we found something; a pleasant garden shed, to which we were referred by a youth hostel employee. After driving back and strolling the streets of Simrishamn again, we continued to the nearby village of Brantevik for dinner. This is a small village with rows of holiday houses. Many of those look exactly like traditional Danish village houses, and the location on the sea is very charming. The same can be said of the old [Bykrog](#), which translates as "village pub", though it is a real gourmet temple.

After mentioning to the waiter that we had spent the winter in Sweden, he said that snow is rather an exception down here in the south. Never the less, lakes freeze every winter and once a while, the Baltic Sea freezes in front of the village as well. He mentioned that this March, pack ice had piled up three metres high along this shoreline.

Next morning, we continued along Skåne's south coast. The lonely road was lined by golden grain-fields, interspersed by poppy and cornflowers, as well as meadows, full of oxeye-daisies. We were surprised, how many tourist-related businesses like souvenir shops, cafés and bakeries, little museums and farm shops popped up during the short summer season. Only junk shops (Loppis) could be found everywhere and all year round.

Mystical boulders and pretty villages

Nineteen kilometres before Ystad, we took the turnoff to **Kåseberga**. To our surprise there was a huge carpark that was full to its capacity. Parking attendants marshalled cars to the few empty spots. The reason for this crowd: [Ales Stenar](#) a megalithic sun ship of the type you find at Stonehenge. It is still unknown why this mystic monument was erected, but presumption is that it served as ritual site. 59 boulders are laid in a oval of 67m length and 19m breadth. They represent an exact sun calendar, which even considers leap years and several star constellations. A brochure explains: "The alignment of the stones in relation to the sun is such that the sun sets over the North West tip of the monument at midsummer, and rises at the opposite tip at midwinter". Scientists vary widely in dating this impressive site, but have mentioned that it was possibly created around 600 AD. Whenever it was, it shows the complex knowledge ancient cultures already had. Two similar sun ships exist nearby and each lies in a straight line, exactly 18km from each other.



Soon we reached **Ystad**, one of the beautiful towns in southern Sweden. There are many rows of Danish style houses, either half-timbered with red bricks, or plastered stone buildings. The market was bustling with people. The fire brigade had polished up their old fire engines and offered rides, as part of a fund raising event. They were highly popular among the summer holidayers with children. Ystad is a very proper floral town, with a nice park around a monastery.

Passing some more golden grain-fields and also some modern wind generators, we arrived in **Skanör** some 75km west of Ystad, at the very tip of Falsterbo Peninsula. With the help of the tourist office at Höllviken, we found a perfect B&B in Skanör. By pure coincidence, it was located less than 50 metres from the restaurant we had chosen for tonight. After checking into our room, we still had ample time to look around the village and the beach. Skanör has a nice harbour that does not only attract yachties, due to its scenic setting, but also foodies, because of a famous fish smokery with a restaurant.



Just north of the harbour starts a long stretch of white sandy beach. A sign indicates that the first 1100m are reserved for the prude, and all the rest is free for the nude bathers. Down there is also [Solhejdan Naturist Camping](#), but for the one night we didn't dare to pitch up our tent, as there was no accommodation available.

A few hundred metres behind the harbour, the beach is lined with uncountable colourful beach cottages, situated just in front of the sand-dunes. Those tiny lovely huts are just meant to store beach gear, and as nobody was around anymore, we could picture and wander around them freely. Each of the little cabins is painted in a different colour. Together with the Öresund Bridge, visible in the back, they give Skanör's beach a unique character.



Unfairly, Sweden is not world-famous for its gourmet cuisine, but we experienced that it absolutely deserves to be! Because we love to celebrate special days with great food, we wanted to get spoiled tonight. We celebrated our 20th anniversary and it was, at the same time, our last evening in Sweden, after a great year in Scandinavia. Luckily, [Skanörs Gästgifvaregård](#), a restaurant highly rated by the "White Guide", was one of the best places we'd ever splashed out! We ordered a 7-course meal, which in fact was being served in 10 courses, all brought to the table between 19:30h and 00:30h. To our big surprise, the nice Swedish waitress spoke Swiss German, as she had worked in our home country for three years. Thus she was preparing us already a little bit for our visit to Switzerland.

August 5th 2010 was definitely our last day in Sweden, and so we drove off to Trelleborg, where we were booked on a car-ferry to Rostock in the former GDR. As the Huckleberry Finn of [TT-Line](#) only sailed at 15:30h, we still had time to look around Trelleborg and go for lunch. One problem arose: we had already spent our last Swedish Kroners and relied on the credit card, which usually isn't a problem at all. However, the ticket-machine at the carpark had a malfunction and refused all credit cards. People had to revert to small coins, but we couldn't, as we hadn't... Would you believe it? Some little old lady donated us some change and we were fixed. A last wonderful experience of Sweden...

Final thoughts about our Swedish summer

To us it was a good experience and absolutely worthwhile to spend also the summer among the hospitable and communicative Swedes. After winter-temperatures here often dropped below minus 30°C, they rose now, in summer, often above plus 30°C and this could be on one and the same place! What was a departing port for ice-breaker tours in winter, turned into a popular beach in summer. Meadows which still rested under a two meter thick snow-blanket end of April, turned into perfect sunbathing lawns by end of May. Nature progresses incredibly quick up north. Shortly after mid April we didn't have dark nights anymore, and this lasted for four months. It would have been even longer if we had stayed above the Polar Circle. To us, it was striking, how fast the short days turned into real long ones, and how long twilight hours lasted.

Summer-Tourist season is very short in Scandinavia. Apart from a few weeks between end of June and the beginning of August, we had most sights almost to ourselves. July is different; all tourist businesses are open and running, some popular attractions are so overwhelmed by tourists, it's hardly possible to tumble over. Only a few kilometres from such sights, peace reigns as usual.

The many summer restaurants that popped up were almost nightly packed to the rim. Never the less, except on Midsummer Eve, the Swedes didn't party all night, but usually disappeared around 11 PM.

Just as nice as it was to amble along the streets of those pretty Swedish villages or towns, and to indulge in the excellent cuisine, just as much we enjoyed the tranquillity out in nature. To us, the very essence of Sweden was the landscape dotted by lakes, forests and flower meadows.



Gliding with a rowing boat over a tranquil lake is simply awesome! Distinctive are also the pastoral landscapes with rapeseed- and grain fields, mainly in the south, and everywhere: red houses with white window-frames.

... by the way: it was a perfect decision to spend a whole year in Scandinavia. Experiencing this region not only with pretty hot, but also with freezing cold temperatures - not only with bright nights, but also with rather dark days - not only with a glimpse of time, but with plenty of it, helped us to understand the peculiarities of Scandinavia.

We can well imagine coming back, be it summer or winter...

Brigitte & Heinz



more pictures on our Homepage

