

## Days 06 and 07 – The Sweden Adventure – Magnificent Stockholm

My Dear Fellow Travelers

We have reached the halfway point of our incredible journey.

It has been nothing short of wonderful to have had you by our side as we explore this side of planet earth, and all it has to offer us curious adventurers.

Thank you so very much for taking the time to read what we have shared, and for all the kind comments you have graciously made to make our trip less homesick, and to make the three of us feel more loved and cared for.

After leaving Denmark, our magic cruise ship the Silhouette pointed north once again, and began to venture more deeply into the cooler waters of the Baltic Sea.

On Saturday, Day 06 we spent a full day at sea, upon mostly open ocean, with only the sea animals and or fellow cruisers for companions. Most aboard the ship appear to be from the United Kingdom. A few of us Americans are scattered in, but we are definitely in the minority. There are even fewer from countries like France, Germany and Ireland.

The crew of our fine ship, however, is like the United Nations. They are from all over the world. The captain is from Greece, the head of the food service is from Romania, many of our coach drivers have been from Russia, our waiter at the restaurant we frequent is from India, our room steward is from Indonesia, and we have met crew people from Ukraine, Ireland, Moriches, Pakistan, Philippines, America, Somalia, Angola, South Africa, Egypt, France, Spain, Portugal and still others. All have been extremely nice, helpful, friendly and very skilled at what they do.

Saturday, Day 06 was a very lazy day at sea.

For my part, I spent most of the day catching up on writing my reports, and enjoying the beautiful views of the ocean. The weather was very nice, in the mid 70's and I took a very long (5 mile) walk upon the upper deck. Sadly, one of the hazards of a cruise, is all the opportunities you have to eat, and often unhealthy foods. Getting some exercise up top on this 14 story ship, is an opportunity I try not to pass up every evening, usually after AmazingHugh and the Geddi Master have heading into bed. (Which most nights is around 830 pm).

On this Saturday, however, I did it in the bright sunshine of the late afternoon. When doing it in the late evenings, I have been hoping to catch a view of the Northern Lights, which is a phenomenon unique to these upper latitudes, where the sky lights up with streamers or magnificent colors, which represent the dancing of electronically charged particles captured by the earth's magnetic field.

Thus far, mostly because of overcast skies, I've been out of luck, but please know I won't stop trying and will hopefully have my camera ready to share it with all of you, if and when they do appear and make their presence shown. We shall see.

The kind of show I was able to see on Saturday, Day 06, as I walked along the deck, however, was less of one to look forward to.

Many people packed the lounge chairs along side the walking track at that time, to sun bathe, due to the warm beautiful day.

No definitely not being a model of Arnold Schwarzenegger myself, I don't wish to cast aspersions about anyone's fitness, nor lack thereof. But to put it mildly, there were a great deal of people, I would dare say the majority, who should not be showing the amount of skin in public, who chose to do so.

The demographic of this cruise, like most, is older. I get that. I know we are not all as handsome and as fit as we were back in our younger days.

But when you see so many really large people, wearing such a little amount of clothes, getting even more wrinkled in the sun, one really has to ask themselves, why are they doing this? Have these people never looked in a mirror? Holy smokes.

The passengers aboard this ship contain an inordinate number of really, really heavy, senior, British, ladies. I am sure they are all lovely people (albeit do seem to be really kinda pushy), but picture a 40 lap walk, hour and a half walk, on the top deck, with most of the views being semi clothed Maggie Thatchers.

Two things that did make this adventure beneficial besides the exercise. First, it makes one pause the next time you approach the menu at dinner, and definitely gives you the incentive to pass on some of the delicious desserts that are offered on this cruise, or indeed, at any other future time in your life.

Always one to look on the bright side of life, the Geddi Master explained that having an overweight spouse was actually quite a blessing in the "old days" as they could be used, in the event you could not afford to have a horse, mule or oxen, to pull a plow as you worked the fields. As I am neither a farmer, nor ever plan to actually be one, his comment did seem to lose some of its value.

My wife is an exercise fanatic, and has the same attractive figure as she did when we were married back in 1987. As I look the part of the grandfather I just became, and perhaps should be the one to pull the proverbial plow, perhaps I shouldn't be even initiating this line of discussion.

To my limited credit, however, at least with my less than Adonnis figure, I wasn't showing an over abundance of skin (as I wore a short sleeve collared shirt, long docker pants and sneakers – I know not ready for GQ – but I wasn't also making any person look at me want to throw up in their mouth at the sight either).

Anyway, onto something more enjoyable.

After my walk and spending time on my pictures and emails, I went back to the stateroom to shower and change my clothes, due to the fact that it was hot on my walk, and I needed to do both.

While I was topside, the two remaining Jolly Boys found the wonderful rocking chairs in the Sky Lounge. Bob took two great pictures of Dad enjoying the relaxation that only such a rocker can provide. You can find them here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0793.jpg>

and

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0794.jpg>

When we all had returned from our upper deck activities Amazing Hugh and Geddi Master wanted to go to a restaurant for dinner rather than the trough on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor.

So we ventured down to deck four. Dad and Bob ordered Schnitzel and Prawns, while after what I saw, I got a salad and a small steak (of which I ate half).

Upon finishing our dinner, we then went to the theater, where the Shamrock Tenors, were making a return engagement.

They never fail to disappoint, and were once again fantastic. Dad was so happy, and was singing and clapping along with the rest of the audience. Bob was signing only. Due to his philosophy about otters and monkeys.

Next to me sat a lovely senior lady from Ireland. She introduced herself as Madella, and told me how much she enjoyed these lads from the north (they hail from Belfast, in Northern Ireland). This nice lady sang and clapped with the rest of the crowd, and it was nice to see someone of her age, like my Dad, really enjoy the show. It was also nice when she called me a nice young boy (at 62 I sure don't get that much any more).

After the show, I went back up to the top deck and caught some pictures of the amazing sunset at about 10pm, as Dad and Bob had chosen to return to our stateroom and go to sleep.

You can find them here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0797.jpg>

and

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0798.jpg>

Next I ventured to the Skydeck Longue where I played two rounds of trivia (one of which I won – on general knowledge, and one of which I performed miserably – on music trivia).

It was, however, a good time had by all with all who played. The nice British couple who had sat next to us at dinner a few nights before asked me if I wanted to join them on a future night, as they came in second place in the general knowledge and felt I could be their American ringer. Not on music trivia I told them, for I would be their anchor. With smiles on their faces, they told me, they just wouldn't listen to me on that category. Smart folks.

As it was still daytime back home, before walking back to the stateroom, I reached out to see how the baby and Katie were doing. Here are some more pics of my amazing grandson.

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0799.jpg>

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0800.png>

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day06/0801.png>

And with that report, and as it would be an early morning tomorrow, I slipped back down to the room and amidst the slumbering Jolly Boys, went to sleep myself.

Day 07 – Sweden here we come.

I arose early around 330 am.

A special event had been planned for all hearty passengers who wished to partake to view the entering of the Swedish Archipelago from the ship's helipad at 5 am. Never one wishing to miss out on such an opportunity, I was there firstest with the modest, as Bedford Forest would say.

You can see the photos of this opportunity at Day 07 on our website at numbers 0802 to 0815 here: <http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day07/>

Sweden, which is on the eastern side of the Scandinavian peninsula, separated from Norway by the Scandinavian Mountains, has over 20,000 islands off its shores in the North and Baltic Seas.

The trip to Stockholm, its capital, where we were heading, is through a channel with many of these islands, and it is as scenic as it is beautiful.

As I stood on the helipad, which is on the fifth deck front of the ship, offered an amazing, up close and personal view of this experience.

As I said, I got there first, and as our ship nearly silently cut through the incredibly still water, I heard the nearly silent morning broken by what appeared to be mooing.

I turned to a nice young, red headed crew woman, named Mariska, who was the only person on the pad, and sheepishly asked her, “is that cows mooing”?

She replied, “yes, but of course, don’t you have cows where you are from”? “Do you think your milk comes from the supermarket”? I said, “yes, there are cows where I come from, but I don’t personally own any, and I didn’t expect to hear any this morning, especially on islands this close to shore.”

Mariska then replied, “well I am from Ukraine, and I own two cows, and that is what they sound like.”

After being thoroughly embarrassed, I thanked the kind Mariska, told her how sad I was that her country had undergone such misfortune, and suggested I would offer some prayers for the safety of her family. When I said that I was hopeful that her nation would emerge from their current plight, better and stronger, she offered skepticism, to which I responded, “well that is my hope anyway, my new friend”. At which Mariska offered me a doubtful smile and nodded.

The islands we were seeing reminded me almost exactly as the same views you see in the St. Lawrence River of our thousand island chain. Rocky, heavily forested and punctuated in spots by green lawns and a few intermittent beaches. Although the 1000 islands are in freshwater, these are off the main coast of Sweden in the Baltic sea. It is however, interesting that even this far from home, some things aren’t all that different, even the cows.

I sure hope that Mariska’s home and family will be okay. She seemed like such a nice young woman, about the same age as my Lizzie. That too was a reminder of how lucky we are to live in the relative safety and security of the United States.

Like I had mentioned previously, I have wanted to visit Scandinavia my whole life. Taking this trip has been a true adventure, and one that I could not feel more blessed to be on.

The beauty of the scenery, the interesting places we get to see and learn about, first hand, and the simply beautiful and fascinating people we get to meet, could not make this trip more fantastic.

And Sweden is without question a real highlight of the trip.

Located, as we said, on the eastern side of the Scandinavian Peninsula in Northern Europe, on the flip side of Norway, one would think, that due to Sweden's similar Viking Heritage and nearby location, the two countries would have a great affinity to each other. Sadly however, despite being comprised of similar demographics, and being from a similar climate and location, these two countries have not always played wonderfully together in their proverbial sandbox, indeed, even declaring war against each other at times in the past.

All that said, from an American perspective, Sweden, the land of Abba, the Volvo, Supermodels, IKEA and ice sculptures, does share a lot in common with our previous destination of Norway.

Both have a heritage of the Vikings. But where the Norwegian Vikings Set sail principally to the West (such as England, Iceland, Greenland and North America), and the Danish Vikings Set sail principally to the South (the European Continent), the Swedish Vikings focused largely to the East (Russia, Poland, Finland, and Estonia).

Also, the Swedes, after the age of the Vikings, became a much more powerful and militaristic independent country than the others in Scandinavia.

Sweden is the largest Nordic country, the third-largest country in the European Union, and the fifth-largest country in Europe. At 173,732 sq mi, Sweden is the 55th-largest country in the world, and is slightly larger in geographic size than the state of California.

Sweden has a population of 10.5 million people, nearly the same size as the state of North Carolina. Its largest city is the capital of the country, Stockholm, at 975,551 people.

Sweden, a nation of large forests and abundant agricultural lands, has a relatively low population density at 57.5 inhabitants per square mile (66/sq mi), with around 87% of its people residing in urban areas.

Fifteen percent of Sweden is above the Artic Circle (66 degrees above the equator), and has 20 hours of sunlight in the summer and as little as 4 in winter. Despite its northern latitude, like Norway, because of its maritime location, and due to the influence of the gulf stream, it has a milder climate than many other countries at similar latitudes.

A maritime based culture since the time of the Vikings, Sweden has an extensive coastline and most of the population lives near a major body of water. Almost one out of ten Swedes own a boat, making that percentage the highest in the world. For Sweden not only has an enormous amount of ocean front, ut it is also populated by numerous lakes and rivers as well.

After the Age of the Vikings, in 1397, Sweden formed the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Norway. In 1523, it left the Union forming the Swedish Empire by 1611, under King Gustavus Adolphus. This empire remained as one of the great powers in Europe, dominating the Baltic region until early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

An independent minded people and country, Sweden has long maintained an official policy of neutrality during wartime and non-participation in military alliances during peacetime. That said, Sweden secretly relied on U.S. nuclear submarines during the Cold War, and starting in 2008, joined EU battlegroups, and provided intelligence to NATO. For the first time, in 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sweden has announced its intent to join NATO.

A highly developed, prosperous country, today Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a unicameral parliament.

Although traditionally a very liberal country, marked by universal health care, strong social services, and public pensions, in the past election, the Swedish people elected a conservative governmental majority in parliament for the first time in its history. With a tax rate of over 50 percent, it is a nation whose economy has been argued to have been depressed by its high, confiscatory taxes, that often are not seen to match up with its generous public government benefits.

At 9am, after pulling into the Port of Stockholm, Amazing Hugh, Geddi Master and I all went downstairs to board our bus for the Tour – Destination Highlights of Stockholm and the Vasa Museum.

Once onboard the bus we drove through many on the Stockholm neighborhoods, seeing first hand the old and the new of this wonderful city. We saw the balcony from which the singing group Abba addressed their adoring fans, the apartment building in which the Wimbledon Champion tennis player Bjorn Borg lived, the parliament building, the opera house, a local amusement park, the famous citadel, the Nobel museum where all Nobel prizes (except the famous peace prize) are awarded, the palace (where the King Carl and Queen Silvia live) and the old town of Stockholm.

A thoroughly modern city, based on several islands, it is crisscrossed by trolleys, busses and water taxis, with an active, clean and affordable public transportation system. The home of numerous parks, adorned by several statues and sculptures, it is a very pretty city, filled with vibrant, very attractive people. One of its main bridges is adorned on each corner with a large statue of a Norse god.

Swedes are fond of telling Americans that the days of the week are a legacy of their former Norse gods, with the days even today retaining such names.

Sadly, at least to me, Sweden is also a very, and almost exclusively, secular society. Although a Sunday, we could find no place to attend a Catholic mass. Indeed, although listed as a majority protestant country, there are very few active churches of any sect, and none seem to be regularly attended. Religion is somewhat eschewed as an anachronism of the distant past.

Such lack of religion, however, has not seemed to effect the kindness and friendliness of the people of Sweden or Stockholm. Smiles and happiness tend to be everywhere, and such only makes the people more loveable and respected.

And just like Norway and Denmark, part of its Viking legacy, is the handsomeness and beauty of Sweden's men and women. Merely looking on the street, one can't help but admire persons with platinum blond hair (toe heads) who we would all consider super models back home.

People in Sweden are also very active, and everywhere one might look, you can see people of all ages, running, biking, sailing, using scooters, and participating in all sorts of outdoor activities. It is evident that they love the summer sun, and really wish to go outdoors and enjoy it.

These wonderful, friendly, active people are all vibrant and filled with life and vitality.

After touring all aspects of this beautiful, active, clean and safe city, we next ventured to the famous Vasa museum.

The Vasa was a very famous, massive, Swedish War Ship, built between 1626 and 1628 by Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus, a militaristic commanding leader known as the Lion of Sweden. The 54 gun, 1210 ton ship was 226 feet long, 38 feet wide, and 172 feet high. Two Danish ship builders, Henrik Hybertsson and Arendt de Groote, designed (without drawings) and constructed the ship in the Stockholm dockyards.

The ship, which was hoped to frighten opponents with its massive firepower, and its two decks of gun carriages, however, was very poorly designed, top heavy, and unseaworthy.

Ornately painted with oak preservative, red and gold, and highlighted with dozens of sculptures and paintings, this heralded, highly expensive undertaking, soon became a huge embarrassment to the King who was determined to make Sweden a massive military power.

For on its maiden voyage, about a quarter mile from its launching point in Stockholm's harbor, the ship suddenly began to sway back and forth, take on water, and sunk in about 300 feet of water. The incident proved a national disgrace for Sweden, a nation of master sailors and boat builders since the time of the Vikings, who should have known that the ship's beam was too narrow and its height and weight were way too much.



Because executing the Danish boat builders would have caused an international incident that the King was desirous of avoiding, he appointed his brother in law to conduct a board of inquiry, and not surprisingly, it found no wrong doing, despite the huge loss and expense.

For over 300 years, the mighty Vasa lay at the bottom of the Stockholm harbor. In 1956, however, Anders Franzen rediscovered her location by using home made depth probes. He then organized a major and historic salvage effort to bring the Vasa back to the surface.

Amazingly well preserved due to the cold brackish water of the harbor, Franzen designed and implemented a salvage system, which sealed holes in the Vasa's structure, pumped out water, tunneled under its keel to place support ropes, and slowly lowered it to the surface. By 1961, five years after its rediscovery, the Vasa was back to the surface, almost completely intact. The few parts of the ship that had been detached, were collected and salvaged after the main ship was raised. The group then spent the next several years reassembling and restoring the ship to its former self.

Today the Vasa sits in its own museum, and one can go and see and touch history. It is nothing short of breathtaking, and an entire building has been constructed around it to allow visitors to experience the majesty and enormity of this ill fated vessel.

Color representations as well as a smaller scale model can be viewed to experience what the ship actually looked like when it was built and under sail. From its multi deck gun ports to its two gargantuan crows nests, and its countless spans of rigging, this was one big ship.

But sadly, even a landlubber like me can see just by looking at it why it was so poorly designed. It is hugely tall and quite narrow for its size. One can easily picture water streaming into its lower gun ports, and also understand how that all the weight of those iron guns would cause stability problems with all the weight. This really was a case of an emperor's new clothes.

Decedents of Vikings and master ship builders should have known better. What a shame.

This was an event, unknown previously at least to me, that really changed history.

At a time when Britian, from which we in the United States were derived, was becoming the world's naval super power, this naval disaster took place. The Swedish King had plans to build fleets of this ship, with which, he had ideas of being able to dominate much of all Europe. Who knows what would have happened had he been successful. All such plans by the Swedish King were scrapped after the Vasa sunk. And as a result, England was left largely unchallenged in this domain.

All and all however, this is an amazing museum, to tell an incredible story. Inside we were all able to not only view that actual ship, but also see a re-enacted movie of what actually happened and why. It was all really well done.

As we all jumped back on the bus to return to our cruise ship, our minds drifted sadly to the 30 sailors in the 450 Vasa person crew, who lost their lives in the disaster. Thankfully their bodies were recovered for proper burial after the 1961 raising. Still a rather sobering thought.

After returning to the ship, the three jolly boys went to dinner and then to the theater to see a cacophony of Broadway show tunes. Something that would never be my cup of tea, but much to my surprise, AmazingHugh loved it and was as happy as a clam as the singers belted out their songs from the last 100 years of musicals from the great white way.

After the theater, Dad and I went to walk on the 14<sup>th</sup> deck, while Bob took his slumber. After a few times around the track, Dad's knee started to hurt, so he soon joined Bob to go to bed.

While I continued to walk the ship, a lady from outside of London approached me about my podcast. Apparently upon searching the internet, she has become a fan of the show. We walked around the track together for a while and I filled her in on all the upcoming episodes, and why the effort is so important to me and my wonderful and dear cohost Vinnie Asaro.

How incredible it is that we actually have a listener from across the world, and a Brit no less.

The internet is a simply amazing thing, and it has made Vinnie and I want to redouble our efforts to post more high quality episodes and build an even bigger audience.

That last event simply blew my mind. Who'd a thunk it huh?

Tomorrow is Tallinn, Estonia.

We are all looking forward to it.

Thanks so much for reading.

Please be well.

My Warmest Personal Regards,

*Bob*

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