

A photograph of a woman standing in a stone doorway. The doorway is set into a wall of rough-hewn, grey stone blocks, some of which are covered in yellowish lichen. Above the doorway is a rectangular stone relief featuring three figures. The woman is standing on a set of stone steps leading up to the doorway. She is wearing a dark jacket, a light-colored top, and blue jeans. The scene is outdoors, and the lighting suggests it might be late afternoon or early morning.

**Exchange Aboard**

**In Sweden**

**Submitted by: Nancy Yun Xu**



## Intro

There are many ways to travel. You can play the tourist, where you hit as many sights in a day as your foot can carry you, wake up the next morning and do it all over again in a different city. You can backpack through Asia, through Europe, and let the uncertainty of tomorrow drive you to your next adventure. You can be an explorer, trekking through the arctic, the Alps, and the wonders of the wilderness with a compass and camping skills you learned from days of the Scots. I do not belong to those groups of travelers. I travel by living among, and with, the ones that I am visiting. And I encourage all of you to do the same. And here are a few helpful words to get you onto the path.

Sweden is the destination of choice for today, enjoy.

## Let's start with a Swedish Sport... Brännboll

It was my first week in Sweden, I was an excited student in a foreign place with a lot foreign people. My



mentor called all of us out for what he promised to be a very Swedish sport. I was eager to meet everyone especially since I missed our first outing already, where I was lost (it was hard to find the town center without a map) and could not call (dialing a Swedish number using a Swedish public telephone and a Swedish phone card and only Swedish instructions were inconceivably difficult).

In any case, this was a sunny afternoon, one of which I remembered well, because as you would soon experience, Sweden didn't have many long, perfect sunny days. In the winter the sun

would be out for about 4 hours a day, and most days when you were out partying all night, you would miss the sun the next day. And most other days, it would be mild and cloudy.

We walked out to the park together, the mentors with bats, balls and booze; the rest of us just chatty with each other. I met Rosa, Swedish by birth but Chinese by heritage. Rosa stuck to her roots when it came to choice of partners, as she and her Chinese-Swedish boyfriend were living happily in their Ikea furnished apartment in upper Lund. Rosa was really outgoing and fun, which contrasted with the more common Swedish personality, which was friendly but reserved.

We walked by a Sony Ericsson building as one my mentor Mats, from Electrical Engineering, told me that it would be his dream job to work there. Most engineers I have met in Sweden either would like to work for Sony Ericsson, or Ericsson or ... they were already working for them. Today, Rosa had graduated from Lund University, and was working for Ericsson despite the fact that she was in business administration. What does this say about Sweden's dream compared to the American dream? That it was more likely to come true I guess.



**Note of caution:** it's very important for you to know that Sony Ericsson is a very different company from Ericsson. Swedes get really angry if you mix them up.

Back to outdoor sports. I suppose no sports or any form of activities was done in the Sweden without beer. Shortly after we nailed the rules of the game, we took a break for some fine German beer. It wasn't really fine beer since it was the cheapest beer (student-friendly prices) and German because it was common for the Swedish to go across the border to Hamburg, Germany to get their supply of alcohol. The Swedish government imposed a lot of restrictions and taxes on alcohol to suppress the alcohol problem in the state. A rather sore topic for most Swedes. The end effect was completely government controlled liquor, special retail stores that had bad business hours (such as Sat 11 – 4pm) and student-unfriendly prices.

Brännboll (Burnball) could most easily be explained using baseball. One team does the batting, and the other does the catching. Point system is completely different, and a ball is "burnt" when someone catches the ball before it hits the ground. That's worth one point. I had a hard time adjusting to the strange flat wooden bats. But otherwise, we had a really friendly game with a lot of harmless team bashing.



After a nice day on the grassland, we returned to Sparta, the residence of our mentors for a fire BBQ. The Swedes loved great BBQs just like us. Their BBQs would normally be filled with all forms of meat, ribs, sausages, beef patties and more. Accompanied by, of course, lots of cheap German beer and some pear cider. Cider was an exceptional alcoholic beverage in Sweden. It was sweet, refined and very well flavored. Try pear and apple, they were my favorites.

#### *Did you know...*

Another Swedish sport was a cricket like match, mostly played when drunk. Opposing teams would attempt to knock down chess like pieces by throwing cricket bats toward them.

## Swedish Food Exposé!

### ➤ Ketchup

Ketchup to the Swedish is like soy sauce to the Chinese. It is absolutely their favorite sauce and it is used in almost everything. It's used to make pizzas (made from scratch – from the dough), it's used to make pasta sauces (tomatoes, ketchup), and it's used to make their version of “thousand island dressing” (ketchup, sour milk, relish) for salads. I lived in a Swedish corridor, and a few weeks later the ketchup addiction got to me as I learned more and more ways to use it. I still cook this way and I have been away from Sweden for 2 years. Surely it will get to you too.



### ➤ Sour Milk

What on earth is that! When you buy milk in the grocery store you will make this mistake at LEAST once – you end up buying sour milk. They are cheaper, and the packaging is exactly the same as milk. Swedish drink this the way we drink milk – in the morning with cereals. Very much of an acquired taste, to say the least.

### ➤ Swedish Meatballs

Meatballs in Sweden are heavenly. It is so strange that for something that is so common, that one country can produce it so much better than others. In Swedish they are called köttbullar, and come in large packs of 30 or more. They are usually made with a mix of ground pork and beef, lots of mild seasoning and flour to give you the perfect tender taste of meatball goodness.

### ➤ Knäckebröd

These crackers on first sight look like horse food. I'm serious. They come in giant sheets and the texture is really rough, and priced below the cost of pet food. I only mention it because we're all students, and when your bank account runs low, you will want some of this too. And you do grow pretty attached to them after a while.

### ➤ Falukorv

A nice alternative to meatballs (nice because of the price) are these sausages called falukorv. They come in giant sausage rolls (length of arms and legs), and you cut them up to slices and bake/pan fry them till they sizzle.

### ➤ Things in tubes

The Swedes like to pack everything in tubes, like toothpaste. Cream cheese, ketchup and a lot of other things all come in tubes. The tube not to be missed is the creamy kaviar. It's a subclass of kaviar but still taste great. Try it in sandwiches and in mashed potatoes for that extra kick.

## Nations

I admit – there were not that many varieties when it came to partying in Sweden. That did not stop most students from making it their daily activity, and sometimes the only activity. Swedes usually party at the nations, or have house parties.



The Nations were probably one of the first things you read about if you thought about going to Lund. Usually they were being compared to the sorority/fraternity in North America. This was true because at the beginning of each term everyone did nation shopping, much like the rush week in North America where college students sought out sororities and fraternities. To join the nation you would also pledge although there were no strange rituals attached to that.

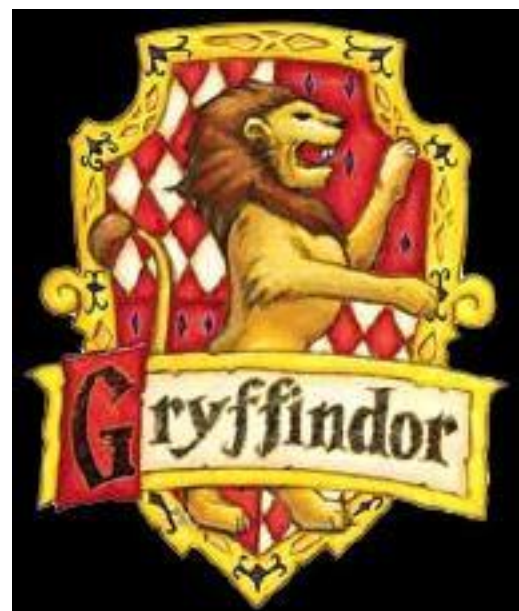
What I think is a much stronger comparison to the Nations in Lund is to the houses introduced in the world of Harry Potter. Like J.K. Rowling's creation of Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw, each nation has a strong sense of identity. We can usually make a few assumptions based on the nation you belong to. For example, I belong to Västgöta, which is an easy one since this nation is very international, so being an international student is an important part of my identity.

My friend Ram belongs to Wermland Nation, which puts him in the heart of indie music. Wermland's club Indigo is the host to concerts every week, where touring indie artists come in and perform.

Not so different from the house of Slytherin, that brought Voldemort and Drake Malfoy into the world of witchcraft and wizardry, not all nations are in harmony with others. The Malmö nation is a house of higher class Swedes that carries a strong sense of snobbery.

They are described as tall blondes, girls who wear their hair as a sleek high ponytail, and boys who dress extra preppy. Some of them are kids of Ikea executives, the rest are in business majors. One of my closest Swedish friend, Johan, and I schemed to crash their party one evening. We planned out a scandalous plot of twisted fate and corrupt morals, and had a great time putting it together... but the plan was never carried out. Oh well.

One last resemblance that I will point out to Harry Potter's world is the nation's extremely long and colorful history. My nation, Västgöta, was created in 1639 (wow that was a LONG time ago) and it represented the students who came all the way from Västergötland to the university. They were studying to become good priests, which were the goal of most students



at that time. 1639 was characterized as 7 years after the fall of Gustav II Adolf at Lützen, and the young Queen Christina ruled Sweden, supported by Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna. Some days when I crammed for exams that I would sit in a random library in Lund (there were 30 to choose from). I would take a stroll down the halls and would stumble upon volumes of books written on the nations, its multidimensional history and its significance to the development of this town today. It was no wonder that the nations today still occupied some of the oldest and most impressive buildings in Lund.

We are still encouraged to visit all the nations despite belonging to only one. Different nations are good on different nights, so there will never be an excuse not to party. I probably have been to my nation once every week, and it's always been a great time. Cost of everything is subsidized by the state, which means drinks at nations are cheap. Nations also serve lunches and dinners, and themed events such as Bavarian dinners and strawberry crepe nights. For 40kr you can get a three course luncheon with coffee/tea, and I strongly recommended it. Personally I like to catch up with friends over nation lunches after our weekend adventures.

Now let me talk about the party scene. To keep this report PG, let me just say, the Swedes are no different from the rest of the Europeans, and the Europeans are liberal. This can be shown by looking at the media rating system. Think about how taboo nudity/sexual content are in media in the US... and compare it to how taboo violent content are. In Europe, switch it around. In Europe sexuality is ok, but violence is tabooed. This does make a lot of sense when you think about it, at the end of the day, sex is natural and violence should really be the thing society censors. Anyway, in Sweden a lot of the party style is, do it first and then talk about it the next day. Intimacy does not equal commitment.



From my history class I have noticed that women in the Swedish society were never repressed, much in contrast to the rest of the world. Population had always been sparse and women always played roles as critical as men. This traced back to the age of the Vikings. In North America the phenomenal we see today is a slight overcompensation as we come out of the age where women were oppressed. Men pay for women on dates because they have traditionally been the money makers of the pair. Domestic abuse laws are extremely harsh on men compared to other forms of violent crime. Childcare and rights heavily favor women. In Sweden we are seeing the future, when the genders are truly equal. In Sweden girls pick up guys as often as the other way around. The bills are usually split because girls always made equal income as boys. I've met Swedish boys who are nurses. My friends in law told me about domestic abuses that were inflicted upon men. Well this is a long societal view on a very simple point – there's a whole lot less pressure on the boys when you're in Sweden! Just something to consider.



## Culture Shock

### ➤ **Concept of marriage**

Common law is more popular in Sweden than marriages. Marriage is currently out of style, and is vastly devalued as the Swedes feel less passionate about religion and traditions. It's interesting how this society structure impact the way Swedes are today – they are some of the most independent-valued individuals that I have ever met.

### ➤ **“Lagom” - just right**

Not too much, not too little, but just right. Lagom is a very Swedish word and it is used excessively. You will hear it all the time and they are damn proud of using it. It's like “eh” for the Canadians and it really shows the modesty and mildness in their characters.

### ➤ **Socialist**

Ok so this is not so different from the rest of Europe. They are a lot more socialist than United States and even more than Canada. The population believes in the state's social programs even though as highly educated individuals, they are making as much as Swedes with lesser qualifications. They have very strong beliefs in social welfare and usually are strongly against most of the capitalistic ways of America.

### ➤ **Internationalism**

I have met many blonde typical-looking Swedes who can speak fluent Mandarin. This occurs for many other nationalities. The Swedes are very globally-focused and understand the importance of expanding their domain outwards. A lot of them are making their bet on China (in anticipation of the rise of the next super power after US falls, yikes).

### ➤ **Language**

Most people ask me this so I thought I should cover it here. Every Swede speaks fluent English. They have a very mild accent that is an off-accent of British English, but this will not affect your understanding. They can communicate very complex ideas without any languages barriers. At most you would have to worry about is an older bus driver, they may not speak English.

### ➤ **Discrimination**

This is a tough topic because Sweden has a very homogeneous population and despite being very open minded, it is not easy to avoid discrimination. The Polish are the source for cheap labour after the European Union and they are being considered as the lower class in Sweden. The Muslims are cornered into a community in Malmö where no Swedes would go. I think these are social issues that the state is very interesting in solving, but it is not solved right now.

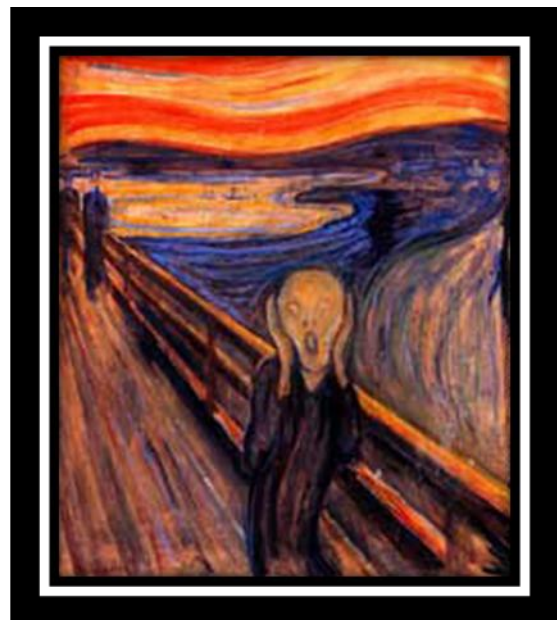
## Residence

Each residence has its own flavor and style. Most places are furnished with fresh Ikea goodness (as you may suspect). St. Lars is the place where most of the exchange students stay. It was a mental institute before reforming into a student residence. There are heavy metal bars on the windows; the doors have air tight seals and are as thick as a human body. There are alerting alarms and sirens everywhere. Everything is painted extremely white and bare. A little strange, but nothing you can't fix with some student décor.

I lived in Delphi, which is more of a Swedish residence. I'll leave the rest of residence exploration to you, but I will share one resident story:

“ Delphi publishes periodic papers for its residents. Once it reported a long term tradition here in Delphi during cold winter nights of the exam week. It described a screaming fest where an entire floor of people would open every single window and scream on top of their lungs at the same time for as long as they can. A dying tradition I suspected, until tonight when I heard the long loud ear-piercing screams from way too many people all at once. I would have loved to join them if it didn't happen a day after I have written all of my exams. The paper reported the tradition as a healthy way to unleash stress and have reduced the suicide rate in the region by 30%. ”

--- my blog entry 11/19/2005





## On getting to places

### ➤ Bikes

You will read many reports on why you need a bike to get around in Lund. You may still decide against getting a bike. Well, you are not going to get through a term in Lund without a bike. You will not be able to get anywhere. So plan to get a bike. There will be bike sales everywhere at the beginning of the term. The prices are inflated so try to get a good deal. And bike theft is a very dominant (and probably only) form of crime in Lund, so lock your bike everytime. Everything on my bike that can be stolen has been stolen.

### ➤ Airport

Your entry point to the rest of the world is Malmo Sturup airport, or the international airport in Copenhagen, Denmark. During the term, you will probably wonder which airport is easier to get to, or cheaper to get to. My friends and I went through the transportation cost calculations already, and it cost the same. They involve taking your bike somewhere, taking the bus, taking the train. If you are traveling at an awkward time (which will happen) the bus schedules and train schedules will block your way. Both airports run numerous flights to the rest of Europe.

### ➤ Deals

Ryanair is super cheap (a few pounds per flight), and flies to the Sturup airport. Try to use it whenever you can. The tourist season in Europe finds wondrous ways to overcharge you, so you might want to save your favorite spots for the off season. Instead of staying at hostels all the time if you are a frequent traveler try couch surfing ([couchsurfing.com](http://couchsurfing.com)) where the accommodation is provided for you by travelers who are currently resting in their hometown and love to meet other traveler enthusiasts.

### ➤ Excursions in and around Sweden

If you want some academia mixed in with field trips (wow I have not done field trips since elementary school) I have an excellent course to recommend: SAS 241, introduction to Scandinavian Study. It's a beautiful course that gives you an introduction to the Swedish culture from all aspects: its musical heritage (German combined with French), to the age of the Vikings (from the barbaric image portrayed by England, to the image of them as Sweden's ancestors). Our instructor was a jolly Swedish traditionalist, and he described Sweden with abundant amount of eloquence and passion. We went on a few trips to Hamlet's Castle (as described by Shakespeare) and Danish writer's houses. The international office organizes many excursions – to the Baltic Sea, old Medieval Castles, and to the Stone Hedge of Scandinavia.



## Santa Lucia

It was December, and I woke up late (missed the sun rise.. and sun set). I grumpily biked over to my favorite Swede's apartment in Sparta. Johan was going to make Santa Lucia bread with a few of us this evening. Santa Lucia is a holiday around Christmas, and it is arguably more celebrated than Christmas day. Santa Lucia is a young woman who gave her life for her love and her beliefs. It is celebrated at the darkest time of the year. Each church would select a young blonde Swedish girl to play her, and she would wear a wreath with lit candles and the choir would sing around her.

As with most Swedish cooking, we made everything from scratch. While we were working hard at the flour mixture, Johan whipped out a package of saffron. Saffron is a spice that added a deadly shade of yellow to our bread. The bread was supposed to imitate Santa Lucia's beautiful blonde hair, so I guess it did the job. The spice packet was from Willy's, which I must mention because it was our favorite grocery store in Sweden. With Sweden's high standard of living, almost all goods and services came at a



fairly high price. After living in this environment for a while, you would surely come to appreciate the low price and great quality of Willy's. Ask for the closest one around you before you do your grocery run.

We braided the bread and decorated them with raisins. We watched it grew in the oven and was very pleased with the final results. After we enjoyed our baked goodness, we headed to the local church to watch the ceremony.

Christmas is so gorgeous in Sweden. Santa Lucia candles are lit at every office and resident window; the decorations are in every hallway and every street corner. The town square is lit up every night and you can really feel the spirit of the season. And Santa Lucia was probably the best part of it.

## More holidays that you won't want to miss

### ➤ **Hans Christian Andersen Festival (July – August)**

I grew up in the world of Hans Christian Andersen's creations: the little mermaid, Goldilocks, and the tin soldier. Every summer in Denmark the town gets together for a week-long celebration at the time of his birthday. Along with gorgeous floats, corner to corner streets full of food, carnival games, you get to see all of your favorite fairytale characters come to life, and a town that adored this beloved author.



### ➤ **Summer Fest (April)**

This is a holiday exclusively for the students. The closest thing I can compare to is St. Patrick's day or the IRS event (the day we get our iron ring). The Swedes would wake up early in the morning and start drinking right away. This does not stop until 48 hours later, that is two full days. They will pour out onto the streets, into the town centers and cause utter chaos. All this to welcome the arrival of summer.

### ➤ **Crayfish Party (August)**

Crayfish are like mini-lobsters. And when they are in season, they are abundant in Sweden. Crayfish parties happen around August and involve a whole lot of crayfish, and beer. Nations and residences host a lot of these parties so don't miss out.

### ➤ **All Saints (October)**

This holiday is really similar to North American's Halloween, but it is an original Swedish Holiday. In fact the Swedes despise Halloween (which is now celebrated in Sweden) like how Parisians despise their Eiffel towers. All Saints traditions involve witchcraft and wizardry but essentially, this is a holiday for the first day of winter, and it is a day for the dead.



## Concluding Remarks

The first Sunday upon our arrival was a day that exemplified a beautiful Swedish summer. My classmate from Waterloo and I walked through the town square, on pink cobbled stone steps, and noticed the square's benches full with people. Some of them were enjoying an ice cream, and others merely just sitting there. It was strange to us that in the middle of a working day the Swedish would just sit in the middle of a square, with no forms of entertaining around them, that they would enjoy just sitting there. With my North American mentality I shook my head and wrote them off as "laid back beyond belief" and "slackers".

The last Sunday before we left, it was winter. The first snow had fallen and then melted away. The town square was still full of people sitting on the benches, although not nearly as many as there were when the weather was warmer. This time I didn't shake my head. We walked to the benches and sat with them, enjoying the sight that was nothing, and the pace of life that I was going to miss so very much. We sat and we understood.

Maybe that will be one of the transitions you will go through, but more likely it will be something entirely different. In any case Sweden is one of Europe's truly hidden treasures, and I hope you will take the time to explore it.



## Links

- Lund's Engineering School (LTH)  
<http://www.lth.se/>
- Swedish-English Dictionary, most widely used  
<http://lexin2.nada.kth.se/swe-eng.html>
- My travel blog  
<http://paloadrive.blogspot.com/>
- Västgöta Nation  
<http://www.vastgotanation.se/>
- Cheap Air Fare – Ryan Air  
<http://www.ryanair.com>
- Sweden's News in English  
<http://www.thelocal.se/>
- An Architectural Phenomenon in Malmö  
<http://www.turningtorso.com/>
- Visit Oresund (Sweden/Denmark, the immediate area around Lund)  
<http://www.visitoresund.info/>
- Industrial Design in Sweden (sample studio)  
<http://www.nopicnic.com/>
- Malmö Sturup Airport  
[http://www.lfv.se/templates/LFV\\_AirportStartPage\\_4125.aspx](http://www.lfv.se/templates/LFV_AirportStartPage_4125.aspx)