

ROAD TRIP, SWEDISH STYLE

Touring Sweden in the most Nordic of vehicles. BY LISA LUBIN

We're cruising down European Route E6, which runs along the west coast of Sweden from its southern tip, all the way into Norway, and ending near the Russian border. The clouds are big and fluffy, the sky, deep blue, and the Swedish air, fresh and clean.

"Beep. Beep. Beep."

As we change lanes and let the drivers in a big hurry pass us, a digital warning sound snaps us out of our pleasure coma and into that "safe driver" state. Our Volvo has just let us know we were nearing the painted highway lines since we changed lanes.

We are moseying around the Swedish countryside thanks to the Volvo Overseas Delivery Program. If you are in the market for a new car, and that car happens to be a Volvo, you can get a free trip to Sweden. Yep, buy a new car, get a free vacation. Just like that.

VOLVO VACATION

The Volvo Overseas Delivery Program gives U.S. car buyers two complimentary

tickets on Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) to Gothenburg, Sweden—a former industrial maritime city and home of Volvo since the 1920s—where you can pick up your new wheels right off the factory floor. Then take your Volvo (Latin for *I roll*) for a spin 'round Sweden (or anywhere in Europe, if you like).

The second largest city in Sweden, Gothenburg, which was founded in 1621 by King Gustavus Adolphus, has recently become known for its growing arts scene, from indie bands to independent fashion labels, award-winning restaurants (five have now been awarded a Michelin star), craft beer bars, and music and film festivals. This "second city" on the west coast of Sweden across from Stockholm has a more local feel with charming neighborhood cafés catering to its manageable half a million people. With the family in tow, there's much to see and do: Get your thrills at Liseberg, Scandinavia's largest amusement park, wander the harbor and the floating marine museum, Maritiman, and don't miss a chance to

stroll in the pedestrian-friendly Haga, lined with shops and cafés.

The first night hotel stay (we stayed at the Clarion Hotel Post, a charming mix of urban modern and old charm set in an old post office and home to Norda Bar & Grill overseen by world-renowned chef Marcus Samuelsson) and 15 days of car insurance is covered. You are free to roam around wherever you can drive. When you return it to the factory or an authorized Volvo drop-off location, your vehicle will be shipped back to the States for free. This program can even save about 8 percent off the normal dealer price.

When I first heard about this program several years ago, I thought it was too good to be true. But it benefits Volvo, too. “We take extremely good care of our customers who travel to Sweden to get their cars,” says Anders Robertson, manager of Overseas Delivery. “They gain a very good understanding of the Volvo brand, to some extent by just being in Sweden, but especially by visiting the factory where their car is built. This understanding and the great experience the customer typically has turns them into great Volvo ambassadors.”

And North Shore Volvo owners agree. “The trip was fantastic; better than we expected. The factory was very interesting, Sweden was beautiful, but most importantly, [it was] how we were treated by Volvo,” says Howard Klieger of Wilmette, a self-declared Volvo fan for life. “We have driven only Volvo for 25 years. Twenty-two years ago my pregnant wife and I totaled our Volvo on an icy winter night. We believe Volvo saved our lives.”



SCANDINAVIAN COASTAL SCENE

Once safely strapped in our vehicle and after a *fika* (Swedish for a coffee and pastry break) in the Haga, Gothenburg’s most charming and oldest neighborhood (dating back to the 1600s) full of outdoor cafés, bistros, and the largest cinnamon bun you will ever have, we hit the open road.

We head up West Sweden’s coast to its many islands and fishing villages. Our first stop is on the island of Klädesholmen, a place that has been involved with herring production for centuries. We overnight at the delightful wood-clad Salt & Sill, (*sill* means herring in Swedish), home of an award-winning restaurant and Sweden’s first floating hotel. I can’t resist the namesake herring board at the Salt & Sill restaurant to get a taste of six different and delectable herring preparations. Salty, fishy herring might be an acquired taste, but gladly it’s one that I have.

After a peaceful night gently rocking to sleep in our floating hotel, we jump back in the car and head up the rocky coast

further north toward Oslo, feeling a bit like we are in New England. We spend an afternoon in the charming seaside town of Fjällbacka, Ingrid Bergman’s former holiday home. You can stay at the wonderfully refurbished Bryggan Fjällbacka right on the pier and simply enjoy a beer or ice cream in the sun on their huge outdoor patio. We decide to leave our car here for the night and take the boat out to the Weather Islands (Väderöarnas), a couple hundred of Sweden’s westernmost islands. These windswept, granite rocks were the former home to sea pilots who helped navigate ships in and out of the harbor. Today, it’s the home of the rustic and charming Väderöarnas Guesthouse and Restaurant. Lovingly updated each year by its owners Mikael and Pia, the latest addition is an outdoor sauna just steps from the sea. The charming, yet rustic wooden house has about 10 rooms with shared baths, plus deliciously prepared meals made with local Swedish meats and, of course, fish.





SOUTH TO SKÅNE

The next morning, we put it into sixth gear and cruise down the highway to Skåne (Scania in English; also simply South Sweden). A stop in seaside Båstad doesn't disappoint with its outdoor cafés and boardwalk along the harbor. We head up to Nivå 125 Båstad Gallery and Café for a simple lunch, which is dwarfed by the amazing views of the bay. If you time your trip correctly and come in July, you can see a match at the invitingly accessible Swedish Open Tennis Tournament.

At the bottom tip of Sweden, we end our trip in

internationally buzzing Malmö, the country's third largest city, just across the five-mile Öresund Bridge from Copenhagen. We spend a few days here walking its pedestrian lanes, meeting a local family for dinner, and having a beer at Lilla Torg, a picture-perfect medieval square filled with outdoor cafés and bars. For modern and local eats, we try Bastard and Belle Epoque, both a bit on the trendy side with really delicious dishes from charcuterie platters to locally raised fish and meats. And nary a Swedish meatball in sight.



SPENDING THE HOLIDAYS IN SWEDEN



Holiday time in Sweden couldn't be more picture-perfect. Just don your scarf and hat and stroll around, enjoying the fresh air, and head to some of the festive Christmas markets, where you can warm yourself with a glass of spicy mulled wine (glögg) and browse over gorgeous handicrafts and Christmas decorations.

Gothenburg, the Christmas City

Combining contemporary Swedish design and a warm sense of tradition, Central Gothenburg is transformed into the Christmas City in mid-November. From the central harbor, a three-kilometer "Lane of Light" guides you through the city to outdoor lighting displays, along the main boulevard to Liseberg Amusement Park and its famous Christmas market.

Liseberg Christmas Market

Close to 5 million glimmering lights adorn the 700 Christmas trees and buildings of Scandinavia's largest Christmas market in Liseberg Amusement Park. There are 80 rustic market stalls and shops selling arts, crafts, and festive foods. Look for smoked sausage, reindeer meat served by Sami (indigenous people from Lapland), and traditional Swedish Christmas sweets, such as marzipan pigs—it's a veritable smörgåsbord of good stuff. There's an ice-skating rink, a chance to meet Santa Claus, sleigh rides, and a range of children's rides.

Christmas in Haga, the Old Quarter

For something slightly lower key, head to the Haga. The early 19th century cobblestone streets lend a distinctive charm to its Christmas market. Outdoor stalls sell locally produced goods, while some of the trendy boutiques have some more modern finds. The many cafés provide the perfect pit stop for coffee and typical Christmas *pepparkakor* (gingersnaps) and *lussebullar* (buns spiced with saffron). ■



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