

STOCKHOLM

We are on our way to Tallinn, for the marathon, and decided a stopover in Stockholm was necessary as we'd not been there before. It was an absolute find – the most beautiful city, laid out across many islands with a modern vibe to it. Then there is the Old Town.... pure magic with its gorgeous buildings and yet a buzzy touch with bars, cafes and restaurants sprinkled around. We stayed in the Old Town, which was a great choice. The city is easy to navigate and has a lot to offer. Our stay was far too brief but now we know what we've been missing out on, we'll return another time.

FRIDAY – DAY 1

We spend a long night in a packed plane before we land in Moscow for a short stopover before continuing to Stockholm. This leg of the plane is empty.

We arrive around 8:30 and take the express train into the city. A taxi from the station and we arrive at our accommodation at the **Victory Hotel** in **Gamla Stan**, the **Old Town**.

The hotel offers for us to have a snack before breakfast finishes. It 10 to 10 and it will be a long day. It's too early to get access to our room so we leave our bags and go out walking through the Old Town.

The Old Town is a combination of tourist shops, lovely colourful architecture and restaurants, along with mandatory buildings such as churches and the Swedish Royal Palace.





Come 12:30 we are a bit beat and retreat to the hotel where we sit in the Lobby and wait for our room, which we get access to shortly after 1pm. We unpack, settle in and have a restful afternoon.

We decide on an early dinner and book online for a 5:30 dinner at **Slingerbulten**, which is just around the corner. There are a few tables but it's quiet. The service is slow. We both order Swedish Meatballs, which come with creamy mash and some pickled cucumber. Unfortunately, the meal is just warm and cold by the time we finish, which I pass onto the waitress. The restaurant is filling as we leave.

We call into the bar of our hotel which is a hive of activity. We pull up a seat at the bar and enjoy a glass of Californian Zin.

We don't linger too long as sleep is the priority. We have complimentary port in our room - nice touch!

SATURDAY – DAY 2

The hotel breakfast is hearty fare with hot food, meats, breads, cheeses and fruit.

We are getting on the first **hop on hop off bus** at 10am. The weather is overcast but there is no rain forecast.



The city tour is interesting and we cover a lot of ground. We disembark in **Östermalm** and go to the markets. The original Hall is under renovation and the markets are across the road in a temporary building. The produce and cafes are delightful. We walk through the streets and back to the bus stop, where we continue our journey around Stockholm.



We see thousands of women heading to collect their bib numbers for a women's race later in the day. We also take an unexpected detour out to the port. The port is full of large cruise ships, primarily the Viking line.

Once back in the city we decide to go to the **Ice Bar** in the **C Hotel**. Just as we enter a tour group comes off a bus ... bad timing. Good news is they are herded in and out like cattle and soon it's just us and the barmaid. The temp is -5 degrees and we are kitted out with ice-time ponchos and gloves.

The interior of the bar has ice furniture and it's a lot of fun. The entrance fee includes a drink and our cocktail is served in an ice glass, which is a bit difficult to drink out of as it's quite thick. We have an enjoyable time chatting with the barmaid who hails from California.

We linger for another drink - Dave has peppermint snaps and I have a Fireball, which is cinnamon and spiced flavoured whiskey - excellent!



We exit and defrost. It's been a fun time in the freezer and Dave did well to last in his shorts. We jump back on the bus again with a view to getting off and walking along the seaside back to the hotel.

Change of plans and the bus doesn't stop at the point we were expecting. In fact, it doesn't stop at all until we get out to the port. Mission aborted! We eventually de-bus back in the city and walk down the pedestrian mall, which is 8km in total. It is hectically busy - seems like everyone comes out on a Saturday evening. We enjoy the walk home.



We venture up to **Matgatan** for dinner, which is just on the corner up from our hotel. We book in for 7:30 and go off to find a bar for a quiet drink. The Old Town is remarkably busy and there are either no seats or there are smokers. So we end up back at Matgatan where we sit out front, order a bottle of red and watch the world go by. We have some kale chips – the only thing that saves them is the salt! The owner is just delightful.

We decide to eat inside and we are upstairs in a small area with around five tables. We both order the Baked Salmon with Root Vegetables – it is brilliant! Such a great meal. We linger on and finish our wine – such a lovely evening.



SUNDAY – DAY 3

We go for an early morning walk around town – there is no one about and the light is subtle.





After brekkie we head to the boat departure point as our bus ticket also includes a boat trip down the **Grand Canal**. We take a seat out the back of the boat.



The cruise is fabulous. The Grand Canal runs between the areas of **Skansen/Djurgarden** and **Ladugardsgardet** and the scenery is gorgeous. A bike path runs around Djurgarden and there are people out walking, running and bike riding. We stay on the boat for an additional stop then walk along the waterfront in the aim of hiring bikes to ride around Djurgarden. The first bike rental we come to is all out so we cross the bridge to a spot where there are lots of bikes. Just as we cross, we see the **Strandbryggan Sea Club** - looks a bit ritzy and there are some fast and fancy looking boats tied up.



We hire a couple of bikes and off we go. The ride is delightful - the track is busy! We stop at a small jetty, at the mouth of the canal, and just sit. We venture on and come to a small cafe/restaurant on the waters' edge. Dismount! We grab a table right on the water and have a beer. It is 24 degrees, with a light wind, and perfect conditions. We linger for an hour or so before continuing.



We come across an area of manicured gardens, sculptures and peaceful spots for sitting. The island is simply stunning with such a peaceful air about it.



We finally finish our ride and turn in our bikes.

Crossing the bridge, we wonder if the Sea Club is open to the plebs. Seems it is. We find a lovely lounge and settle ourselves in. Dave heads to the bar and returns with two glasses of French Rose and a plate of small prawns with rye - clearly a local delicacy which we've seen around the place.



We watch the water world go by. Apparently one in every six people own a boat and many of them are on the channel today. What a lovely way to spend a few hours. Regretfully we move on and walk along the waterfront in the general direction of the Old Town.

As we cross the bridge to **Gamla Stan** there is another hop on hop off boat ready for departure. We have an hour to kill so decide we'll see if we can get on. Our boat ticket is for one ride only but that doesn't seem to matter and we are on our way again. This boat stops at a few places and isn't anywhere near as picturesque as this morning's trip. But enjoyable none the less.

Once back on land we decide to venture up to the square again for an evening aperitif. Luck has it and we settle into the **Pharmacia** cocktail bar. There is a single chap next to us and a couple to his right. We are in a corner, outside, and soon start up some banter. Apparently, this joint is one of the most famous cocktail bars in Stockholm. Single guy, aka Gabrielle (what an enchanting name) knows a fair bit about the place and we realise we have probably erred in ordering a glass of Rose!

We venture into cocktail land - I have a cocktail with liquorice and Dave has a 'smoked' invention. Dave's comes out with a lid and the waiter tells him to not leave it on any longer than 2mins, otherwise the smokiness will be overbearing. My cocktail comes with a spoonful of violet balls - take some balls, followed by a sip of the cocktail. Wowser! This place is the bomb for cocktails.



We chat with our new friends and it's a lot of fun. Gabrielle is a local guy and a graphic designer. He has digs close by. The other couple venture off, as does Gabrielle. New friends come along - a delightful Indian couple who export garments and a single lady from the US. A further two US guys turn up and we are a group again! We order another cocktail! The US people lament their appalling leader - we sympathise. They are great company and we have a fun evening.

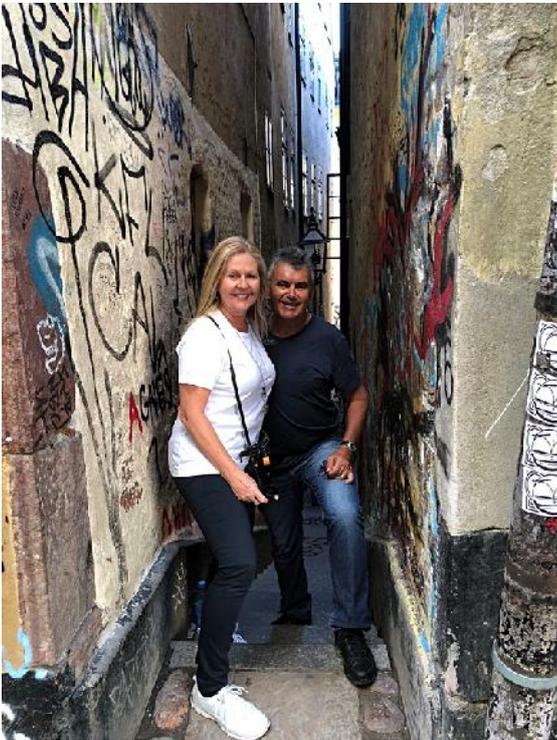
At 9:15 we decide we should find dinner and farewell our new friends. We go to Matgaten - there is a young girl running the place and she says they are closed. I ask if they can do two bouillabaisse, she checks and says yes. Bingo!

The bouillabaisse is lovely. What a fantastic day we've had. One thing rolled onto another, ending up being one of the best days ever.

MONDAY – DAY 4

After brekkie we pack and deliver our bags downstairs before going out for a walkabout.

We see a tour group and decide we'll just follow them around. Very soon after Dave spots that they are a free walking tour so we join in! It's an informative tour and takes us places we wouldn't have otherwise found. That whiles away a good hour or so.



We return to a cafe to partake in Fika - the art of taking coffee and a pastry, usually a cinnamon roll, which we have. I can see why they are popular.



We walk back to the hotel, get our bags and are shortly on our way to the airport for our 4:10 flight. We've booked a taxi as it's cheaper than the train. Taxi is a fixed price of 545 SEK.

Our flight is delayed and we end up taxi'ing out at 5:13, more than an hour late. Tallinn is an hour ahead so we should arrive around 7:30'ish by the time we take off.

Stockholm has been a surprise in its beauty and stunning layout across so many islands. It is a place we could easily visit again, as is the rest of Sweden.