

14½ THINGS TO DO IN STOCKHOLM IN THE DEAD OF WINTER
A TRAVEL GUIDE
By Patrick Tobin
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1.

Use the old-fashioned Swedish word for handsome — *fager*¹. Have a native explain to you that *du är fager* is a little like saying “Thou hast a most fair countenance, mine Prince Charming.” Say the phrase indiscriminately to men, women, boys, girls.

2.

Ride the super-clean subways as often as you can. Listen before every stop, when the same recorded voice announces *nästa*!² then the name of the station. Try to determine the emotional tenor of the woman saying *nästa!* Try to decide if she is happy or simply a whore stuck in Limbo³, saying “next!” to an endless train of tricks.

3.

Drink excessively. Practice saying *stor stark* — big and strong — so that bartenders in Stockholm will know you don’t mean a small glass of lite beer.⁴ Decide you want to try *aquavit*.

2 Pronounced **nesta**, but make it really clipped. Vowels with umlauts are disturbingly terse and hissy, like a wasp sting. These vowels ask you for your papers then ship you off on freight trains without windows.

3 The use of the word Limbo might suggest that I’m a Catholic, but I’m not. I *would* say I’m a cultural Irish Catholic. Here’s why. At the turn of the last century, the Tobins were recent émigrés from County Cork, raising sheep in the valley outside of Helena, Montana. One of the clan’s babies died before she could be baptized and the local priest refused to bury the infant in the church graveyard – the child, he told the grieving Tobins, would spend eternity in Limbo. The Tobins, displaying that “fuck you” attitude which would both empower and socially debilitate all future generations, told the priest where to shove his cassock. Unmoored, the clan became Baptists and Episcopalians and Agnostics, although it was impossible to completely eradicate Catholicism from subsequent generations. It wasn’t until my older cousin Patty returned with a vengeance to the Church that we were finally able to articulate that Guilt and the resilient need for Dogma had followed each of us, all of our lives, like phantom watchdogs. No one else joined the Church, but we all admired *and* derided Patty for her decision.

4 Of course, you could simply say in English, “I’d like a pint of the strongest tap you’ve got” and almost everyone in Stockholm – make that Sweden – would understand you. Prepare yourself for the most discomfiting revelation, that a whole

Discover it's not a specific drink but a category, like wine or brandy. Discover that *aquavit* is potent. Discover that *aquavit* flavored with caraway seed tastes like day-old rye bread soaked in rubbing alcohol. Discover it's a nasty high.

3a.

Decide that you like your highs nasty.

4.

Become overconfident that you know your way around Stockholm. Shove your tourist map⁵ deep in your coat pocket and take to the streets. Think how worldly you must appear to the natives. Buy a cup of coffee from a street vendor — when you pay for it say *tack* with, what you think is, a very authentic accent. Delude yourself that you're mastering the language. Ignore the fact that *tack* is not a very difficult word, just the scrappy, Germanic step-mother of “thanks.”

5.

Find yourself lost in an oppressive shopping district⁶ filled with hundreds of clothing stores. Marvel again at the beauty of the Swedish people — 7 or 8 times a day you will stop dead in your tracks because you have seen a eugenically perfect man or woman. Feel like a fat and lazy American who would look ridiculous in these stylish clothing stores. Become unnerved when you suddenly notice the hordes of teenage girls. Remind yourself of the scene in *The Birds* where Suzanne Pleshette is pecked to death.⁷ Decide that these teenage girls represent a

country can speak your mother tongue as well as, or better than, you.

5 The little free map from Central Station will do nicely. SL (the Stockholm transportation authority) uses a version of Horatio in all its printed material. Horatio was designed in 1970 by British font genius Bob Newman for the foundry Esselte Letraset. It's no surprise that I found myself captivated by all of SL's printed materials. I was five years old in 1970, at that crucial point between the miasmic fantasia of toddlerhood and the first stirrings of pre-adult consciousness, greedily taking in visual information that would inform all of my future tastes. Newman's font was a perfect representation of a space-age/Aquarian hope that filled the graphic arts at the end of the 1960s. (Horatio's filmic fraternal twin is Kubrick's “2001: A Space Odyssey.”) The Swedes, who, along with the Japanese, are the world's leading graphic artists, understand that Horatio represents limitless travel and the promise of adventure for a society in the throes of change, cataclysmic or otherwise. For me, to see Horatio or any of its offspring is to feel a kind of exquisite pain that I find impossible to resist.

6 “The oppressive shopping district is, in fact, Hötorget. The ‘hö’ is pronounced someone with a speech impediment saying whore. Hötorget is within walking distance of NK, the fashionable department store where Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh was recently murdered. Ms. Lindh was very beautiful and critical of George W. Bush. She once quoted Bob Dylan in a speech to the United Nations.

7 Suzanne Pleshette's Annie is the only sympathetic character in the film and it is a great tragedy when she dies trying to save the children. Of course, all sympathetic brunettes in Hitchcock's movies are doomed because he was obsessed with icy, Swedish-looking blondes: Carole Lombard; Grace Kelly; Eva Marie Saint; Kim Novak; Tippi Hedren. It is interesting to note that Lombard and Kelly both died in accidents, Kelly's being a car crash in the very spot where she filmed the picnic scene from “To Catch A Thief.” Saint has campaigned vigorously against the use of cell phones by motorists. For a scene in “Picnic” in which she had to cry, Novak asked director Joshua Logan to pinch her black and blue off screen, telling him, “I can only cry when I'm hurt.” Hedren was actually cut in the face by a bird during one of the shots in “The Birds.” None of

real threat, each jabbering incessantly on her personal cell phone — they are dark clouds of bad attitude. Pull out your tourist map and find your way to the nearest subway station.

6.

Stop at a bar for a *stor stark* to calm your nerves. Meet a British fellow named Chris. Decide Chris is all right. Let Chris buy you several *stor starks*.⁸ Decide that Chris is more than an all-right sort of fellow, with his Byron mane and deep blue eyes and indecent smile. Become indignant when Chris casually mentions he has a Norwegian boyfriend. Become more indignant when Chris becomes indignant and complains loudly that he's just spent two hundred kronor.⁹ Leave the bar in a huff but take a parting shot at Chris. Leave the Swedish patrons confused by the word "sleazebag."¹⁰

7.

Pack a lot of living¹¹ into the forty-five minutes of precious daylight. Submerge yourself in the watery gray twilight that seems to infuse the other twenty-three hours and fifteen minutes.

Imagine that *Peer Gynt*¹² is the soundtrack to your vacation. Wonder how you would look in

Viking¹³ garb.

Hitchcock's leading ladies was Swedish, except for Ingrid Bergman, who starred in the deeply flawed "Spellbound" and then in the masterpiece "Notorious." When Bergman left husband Dr. Peter Lindstrom and daughter Pia for director Roberto Rossellini, it caused a terrible international scandal. United States Senator Edwin C. Johnson of Colorado criticized the actress, condemning her publicly as "a powerful influence for evil." Her funeral was held in the Swedish church in West London. Her remains were cremated, and there is some dispute over whether they were scattered off the coast of Sweden or are buried in Stockholm beside her parents. To add fuel to the fire, I'd heard from a friend who works in Swedish radio that Bergman's ashes were scattered on an island in the archipelago that she used to own with Dr. Lindstrom – although this seems unlikely, since another friend of mine, a priest in Stockholm, says that scattering ashes is illegal in Sweden (?!).

8 The more grammatically correct words would be *stora starker* but I don't think anyone would actually say that.

9 \$27.07, but it hardly seems reasonable to put a dollar/kronor amount on trying to pick up someone, when, in fact, one is *not* in a position to pick up someone.

10 And no wonder. From Andrew McCrum's exhaustive treatise **A Cultural-linguistic Study Of English Sound-symbolic Pejorative lexemes Beginning In *sl-* and *du-***: "In addition to the large number of *sl-* Inanimate > Class I Insult transfers the following are *sl-* Class I *insults* with an attributive/event etymon: *slacker*, *sleazebag*, *slockster*, *slow-coach*, *slow-belly*, *slapper*, *slangwhanger*, *slink*, *sloth-head*, *slasher*, *sly-boots* and *sluggard*. Of these *slapper*, *sleazebag*, *slow-coach* and *sluggard* are in current use. *Slow* and *sluggish* produced deadjectival nominals, *slug* and *sloth*, animals noted for their slow movements, and in the case of *sloth* its slow metabolism."

11 I fully realize that the phrase "pack a lot of living" is almost completely meaningless, like those little teasers on MSN. For example: "Does What She Not Know Really Not Hurt Her?" In a way, though, almost completely meaningless phrases are freeing, because now you, the traveler, must come up with your own translation of this phrase. For all you know, "pack a lot of living" might mean sitting in your hotel room watching the German dubbed version of "The Empire Strikes Back."

12 Ibsen and Grieg were Norwegian, not Swedish.

13 Perhaps the most concise analysis of the Viking historical phenomenon comes from the Snaith Primary School website (Snaith is in the County of East Yorkshire in England). The website seeks to educate seven and eight year olds about the origins of these Nordic warriors: "Around the year 800 the Vikings began to travel from their homes in Scandanavia [sic], from the countries we now call Norway, Sweden & Denmark. The Vikings were farmers. When the farmer died the farm was passed to the oldest son in the family. The Vikings had a lot of children! This meant that there were a lot of people which [sic] had to choose between being workers on their brother's farm or going over the seas in search of fame and fortune or new land. Stories about

8.

Plan to visit the *Medicinhistoriska Museet* — the Museum of Medical History at the Karolinska Hospital. Decide that you're not going to take public transportation all the way to the hospital. Get off the subway at St. Ericksplan — the tourist map makes it look like it's a short walk to the hospital. Walk purposefully along Röststrandsgatan. Feel confident that you're going in the right direction. Lose your confidence when the street starts to curve like a boomerang, right where it appears to deadend into the canal. Notice the nearby freeway. Ask yourself if you remember a freeway — any freeway — on your tourist map. Notice that it is the cleanest freeway you've ever seen.¹⁴

9.

Begin to have an emotional crisis. Question why you took off for Stockholm at the last minute. Question why you gave up so many vacation days for such an ill-planned scheme. Decide your mother is going to be disappointed with her gift, a Viking T-shirt. Realize your mother is smart enough to do the math — lousy fifteen dollar T-shirt versus decadent trip to Europe. Remind yourself that the U.S. economy is going down the toilet. Decide your boss is probably going to fire you when you return. Imagine your co-workers laughing about the welcome that awaits you. Imagine your co-workers rifling through your desk and stealing your mints from the overpriced Mexican restaurant around the corner from the office, laughing about the welcome that awaits you.¹⁵

how easy it was to get rich on such expeditions spread like wild fire over Scandinavia. 'There's not enough room on the farm for all of us. Let's sail westwards and discover some new land for ourselves... sharpen the swords.' So said the Vikings from Norway. 'We're not working for our brother,' said the Vikings from Sweden. 'There's new land and riches to the east ... let's go and trade there ... it's a better way than fighting.' So the Scandanavian [sic] people began to explore, trade, attack both to the east and the west. Some of them went a very long way."

14 In the September 25, 2003 edition of University of Calgary student newspaper *The Gauntlet*, there is an interview with environmental lawyer David Boyd. Editor Andrew Ross writes that "in addition to Vikings, meatballs, trendy furniture and state-produced vodka, Sweden has a national objective of achieving environmental sustainability by the year 2025."

15 According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV), the official criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) are: "A pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following: 1) frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment 2) a pattern of unstable & intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation 3) identity disturbance: markedly and persistent unstable self-image or sense of self 4) impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g. spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating) 5) recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures or threats, or self-mutilating behavior 6) affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days) 7) chronic feelings of emptiness 8) inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights) 9) transient, stress related paranoia or severe dissociative symptoms."

10.

Spot the tall gray institutional buildings across the freeway, about a quarter mile away. Decide they must be the Karolinska Hospital. Shake off your bad feelings and begin walking purposefully again. Arrive at the Medical History Museum and startle the woman at the front desk. Realize, from her awkward English, that this is not a museum frequented by many English-speaking tourists.¹⁶ Say *tack* when she tells you the museum is free-of-charge because they are remodeling, which she tells you entirely in pantomime. Tell her you're a visiting brain surgeon from the U.S. Watch as she smiles without recognition. Consider telling her *du är fager*.

11.

Stop at the syphilis display on the ground floor, just left of the small gift area. Marvel at the life-like plastic models of various body parts demonstrating various stages of the disease. Wonder why the Catholic Church doesn't use these models in its sex education classes.¹⁷ Stop by the art exhibit in the foyer on the second floor. Admire the work of mental patient Gustav Ehrnst, whose renderings of doctors and children are exquisite and tragic and bring to mind Joan Miro.¹⁸ Consider that perhaps what Miro was doing in the 1950s wasn't that different from this

¹⁶ I visited the Museum's web site and, using InterTran, a free online translation service, was able to get the following information (from Swedish into English):

Upplevelsemuseum

For all åldrar. Here mingle gravity and play, people medicine and erudite medicine. Possibility find to suit visning. Childrens able fool doctor, sister and inmate.

Kvinnornas museum

With prudent gum, midwife and system. Wonder all terms had female worked within custodies. Any very exciting personalities am meeting yous here.

Mind museum

Focus on view, hearings, smell, flaw and feelings. Dövas stories had here a egen show.

Veterinärhistoria

Here tell nots only if veterinärer devoid also if choir with 20 kilos plastic in abdomen and five leg.

People medicine

Lär out how husband am boiling rävolja anti bröstsmärta and pain but also how husband cures baby as leak down themselves per that serve them fry rat ors caps.

Psychiatry stories

Mirror with help of superb amount object and also artistic rendition of patientöden.

Därstugan

With four cells for unsettled patient flown from a fattiggård to mice. On in the summer of manifest here installation of various artists.

Örtagård

With over 100 various medicinalväxter fraught with textskyltar. Help for hjärtbesvär, wound and närgångna ogre – all find in Örtagården

¹⁷ See note 3.

¹⁸ It is grievously embarrassing to admit that for years I thought Joan Miro was a woman. I pictured a trendy bohemian housewife in Connecticut. In my mind she threw cocktail parties like you wouldn't believe, a lit cigarette never leaving her cherry-red lips. Somehow she managed to produce great works of art, in between raising three children. I think of the moment when I figured out Miro was a *chico* and not a *chica*, and I think of his quote "I want to hit the spectator with a straight right

contemporary schizophrenic¹⁹ trying to make sense out of his surroundings. Chastise yourself for your shoddy liberal arts education and the fakey way you throw around names of artists.

12.

Move on to the exhibit in the first room on the second floor. Spend a long time staring at the disturbing girl with the gold mesh face and the legs made out of braces. Upset yourself imagining actual patients using the *östermalms mekanisk* — an instrument of torture or an orthopedic aid. Ask yourself what Barthes would say about the top hat and bow tie laying on a chair near the *östermalms mekanisk*. Become transfixed in the next room, where a glamorous department store mannequin, dressed in a nurse's uniform, "observes" a plastic baby sitting in a crib — the baby has its head wrapped in bandages. Try to decipher the narrative intention of the nurse, with her palms raised towards the heavens. Ask yourself what Barthes²⁰ would say about the fact that the baby is playing with a tiny doll that sits in a tiny toy bed. Spend about an hour staring at this scene. Decide that the person responsible for these exhibits should have a show at

MoMA.²¹

between the eyes before he has time for a second thought.”

19 According to the Joseph F. Smith Medical Library: “Patients with a possible diagnosis of schizophrenia are evaluated on the basis of a set or constellation of symptoms; there is no single symptom that is unique to schizophrenia. In 1959, the German psychiatrist Kurt Schneider proposed a list of so-called first-rank symptoms, which he regarded as diagnostic of the disorder. These symptoms include: Delusions; Somatic; Hallucinations; Hearing voices commenting on the patient’s behavior; Thought insertion or thought withdrawal. Somatic hallucinations refer to sensations or perceptions concerning body organs that have no known medical cause or reason, such as the notion that one’s brain is radioactive. Thought insertion and/or withdrawal refer to delusions that an outside force (for example, the FBI, the CIA, Martians, etc.) has the power to put thoughts into one’s mind or remove them.

Positive symptoms

The positive symptoms of schizophrenia are those that represent an excessive or distorted version of normal functions. Positive symptoms include Schneider’s first-rank symptoms as well as disorganized thought processes (reflected mainly in speech) and disorganized or catatonic behavior. Disorganized thought processes are marked by such characteristics as looseness of associations, in which the patient rambles from topic to topic in a disconnected way; tangentiality, which means that the patient gives unrelated answers to questions; and “word salad,” in which the patient’s speech is so incoherent that it makes no grammatical or linguistic sense. Disorganized behavior means that the patient has difficulty with any type of purposeful or goal-oriented behavior, including personal self-care or preparing meals. Other forms of disorganized behavior may include dressing in odd or inappropriate ways, sexual self-stimulation in public, or agitated shouting or cursing.

Negative symptoms

The *DSM-IV* definition of schizophrenia includes three so-called negative symptoms. They are called negative because they represent the lack or absence of behaviors. The negative symptoms that are considered diagnostic of schizophrenia are a lack of emotional response (affective flattening), poverty of speech, and absence of volition or will. In general, the negative symptoms are more difficult for doctors to evaluate than the positive symptoms.”

20 When you go to Ask Jeeves and type in the phrase “What would Barthes say about the *östermalms mekanisk*” you end up at an archival posting for the Leica Camera Users Group, from 1998, in which a person named Raimo writes “What Roland Barthes does not know about photography could fill several books - and it actually has. Mortality rates caused by photography, n=0.”

21 Although it’s highly unlikely that MoMA would invite the curator at Medicinhistoriska Museet, it is possible that the curator might apply to the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The guidelines are as such: “The artist’s presence on the Programme

Believe that the good friends you are visiting, the couple who returned to their native Sweden after twelve years in the U.S., are still good friends of yours. Know that they still love you in the way you all joke about the good old times. Be surprised that it bothers you when the wife stops talking at dinner and says “I can’t remember how you say it in English.” Be even more surprised that it bothers you when the husband says he has stopped dreaming in English. Grow sad that the close friendship you shared feels like it’s drifting away. Decide that what really bothers you is the tenuous nature of friendship and communication, and the shadowy role language plays between the two. Wonder if your friends ever really understood you, or you them. Wonder if we can ever even understand ourselves, if the divide between consciousness and unconsciousness is tenuously negotiated by the symbols we construct through our mothers and fathers and the TV shows we grow up with. Propose that *everyone* in your generation knows the Brady Bunch episode where Marcia gets hit in the nose with a football, that if you pretend to miss catching a football and say *ow!* in a whiny voice everyone will laugh and nod, but ask yourself if everyone in your generation knows that when you think of that particular episode you think of little Sofia, the Greek girl up the street, and how you used to watch the Brady Bunch together, and how her mom would make strange cookies with anise and citron, and how one time you kissed Sofia while you were watching the Brady Bunch episode and her mother saw you and laughed, but not in a way that made you feel ashamed, more in a European *that’s amore* way. Ask yourself if trying to communicate on any deep level is impossible. Grow morose with existential feelings.²²

is funded in terms of studio/accommodation, relevant administrative back-up and a basic living allowance. Specific proposals may necessitate extra fund-raising with which the Museum may assist. There are two submission dates every year - the 31st of March and the 30th of September. The submission should be accompanied by an official application form and should include CV, visuals & documentation of work and a full proposal for a programme of work. The proposal forms the basis of one to one negotiation with artists. The Artists’ Work Programme is also open to practitioners in other disciplines and occasionally curators and writers where a relevant programme of work is proposed. The Work Programme studios are programmed approximately a year in advance. There are eight studio spaces, three upstairs studios and five slightly larger downstairs spaces. Each studio has the possibility of accompanying accommodation space, either in self-contained apartments over the studios or in the accommodation block, the Flanker Building, which can house five artists at a time.”

²² In fact, I tried a little experiment. I went back to InerTran and typed in the phrase “I can’t remember how you say it in English” – the phrase that so completely agitated me when my friend said it. I translated the phrase into Swedish, then I translated the results back into English. And so on. After the fifth round, I ended up with “SELF can’t remember how you say the in British.” Exactly.

14.

Stop by a bar and order a *stor stark*. Say *tack* when the bartender brings you a pint of very strong beer. Tell the bartender you think he's *fager*.