

Created by: Debra C. Argen

## West Sweden

[Sweden](#) is a gorgeous country to visit; we have experienced it by airplane and rail, so for this visit we decided to take to the open roads and explore West **Sweden** behind the wheel of a Volvo.



After Edward F. Nesta and I spent three perfect days in Gothenburg in late August 2005, we went to the [Volvo Center](#) and picked up our shiny black Volvo XC90 V8 AWD, to drive around experiencing West Sweden. Volvo is synonymous with Sweden, having built their first car in 1927. Always with an eye on safety and innovation, they were the first automaker to introduce the seat belt. One of my favorite features of the Volvo XC90 V8 AWD though, was their navigation system. No more driving around aimlessly trying to interpret directions; no more, “Are we there yet?” questions.

Read about our Volvo experience in the [Events](#) and [Destinations - Gothenburg, Sweden](#) sections.

### Volvo

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With excellent directions programmed into the Volvo navigation system, we set out to visit the [Nordiska Akvarellmusset](#) (The Nordic Watercolor Museum). The museum, located about 50 km north of Gothenburg opened in 2000, and features Nordic and contemporary watercolors where their focus is to explore the “borders” of watercolor. Their exhibitions feature both Nordic and international artists. They have 400 pieces of art in their permanent collection, with special exhibitions throughout the year, and they have an award-winning restaurant where guests can dine overlooking the water.

During our visit, there was an interesting exhibit of 130 works by the talented and prolific Swedish artist, Ivar Arosenius (1878-1909), who died at the age of 30 of hemophilia. Many of the works were on loan from private collections and were being featured in public for the first time.

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The museum attracts around 200,000 visitors each year, who come not only for the art exhibitions, but for the art classes and “Open Atelier” (Workshop) as well, where visitors pay a small fee to paint in their workshop. There are five Guest Studios on the water, which artists as well as the public, can rent as accommodations. The day we were there, the sky was an incredible shade of blue, and I longed to have the time to sit outside and try to capture the beauty of the day in a watercolor painting.

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Our next stop was to have lunch at [Handelsman Flink Restaurang & Handelsbod](#), located on Flatön Island in the Bohuslän archipelago, which we reached by driving the Volvo onto a car ferry for a short trip to the island. Handelsmans Flink Restaurang is part of [Vastsvensk Mersmak](#) or Taste of Sweden program that was launched in 2000, to promote West Sweden as a culinary destination. Being foodies, we thought that experiencing some of the restaurants in this program would be quite appealing.

Flatön Island is a charming little island, where the bright colors of Sweden &ndash; reds, yellows, greens and blues are evident everywhere you look. Handelsmans Flink Restaurang & Handelsbod is a family owned restaurant, boutique hotel and “country” store, where the Hjelmér family warmly greets their visitors.



We had a wonderful lunch in their restaurant, loved browsing through their circa 1912 gift shop and purchasing gifts and old-time candy presented in cone wrappings; and since it was a beautiful day, Björn and Stefan Hjelmér convinced us to stay a little longer and take a ride on their power zodiac boat to experience the rugged beauty of the Flatön Island and the Bohuslän archipelago, and the charming little fishing village of Grundsund.

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Read other articles on Handelsmans Flink in the [Restaurants](#) and [Chefs' Recipes](#) sections where Chef Niclas Krafft shares one of his recipes.

### Handelsman Flink Restaurang & Handelsbod

Handelsman Flink

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We continued our West Sweden adventure by taking another car ferry and driving north from Handelsman Flink to Strömstad, where we parked our car and with five minutes to spare caught the last passenger ferryboat (Kosterbåtarna) of the day to Sydkoster to explore the natural beauty of the Koster Islands. The Koster Islands are the most westerly inhabited islands, and consist of the 4 square kilometer North Koster and the 8 square kilometer South Koster.



We purchased our tickets onboard, caught our breath after running to catch the ferryboat, relaxed for the 35-minute trip, and disembarked at Ekenäs, where Anete Werliin from the [Sydkoster Hotell Ekenäs](#) met us with her "Koster taxi", a moped with a wooden platform on the front to transport our luggage the short distance from the dock to the hotel.

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Bent Petersen Hjorth has run the restaurant since 2003 and the small hotel since 2004. This enterprising chef has been working in kitchens since 1969, where he said that he continues to learn, and most importantly have fun. He believes that you need to love this work, or else it will destroy people, but he likes it! In addition to the hotel and restaurant, he is also the creator of a natural beverage called Ren, which utilizes all natural ingredients and delicious flavors including sloeberries. The restaurant is in a charming building that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2005. We enjoyed a lovely dinner in their cozy, intimate dining room with beautiful handmade contemporary design wood tables and chairs made by Anete and Svenåke Werliin.



The next day we explored South Koster sitting on the luggage rack of Svenåke Werliin's moped, which must have made for a very interesting sight, as we experienced this unusual form of transportation. Since the Koster Islands are almost car-free, the only other methods of transportation are either by foot or by bicycle.



We stopped periodically to hike and explore the trails, take photographs, followed by a delightful picnic lunch on the beach, and sitting on a large rock soaking up the late August sun. Afterwards, we decided to experience North Koster, and took the automated cable ferry, which connects South Koster to North Koster, and stopped at a small restaurant on the water to enjoy drinks on their deck. The Koster Islands are a tranquil place to rest, enjoy nature, or hike, and in late August, we virtually had the island to ourselves.

**Sydoster Hotell Ekenäs**  
**Sydoster**

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In the morning, we took the ferryboat back to Strömstad, picked up our car, and drove to Västerlanda to Thorskogs Slott. On our way there, we passed the most adorable horses at play, that I asked Edward to stop the car so I could get out and photograph them, which quickly evolved from me photographing the horses to feeding them, and Edward doing the photography.



We arrived at [Thorskogs Slott](#), an impressive ivy-covered brick manor home that was built in 1892, in the English New Renaissance style. Tommy and Lena Jonsson purchased the castle-like Thorskogs Slott in 1986. Their gourmet restaurant is a part of [Vastsvensk Mersmak](#), and their boutique hotel hosts many conferences and weddings.

We stayed at Thorskogs Slott and felt like we were staying in a fairytale. Our guestroom, the Christina, was romantically and sumptuously decorated, their restaurant was a culinary dream, where Chef Anna Sara Johansson turns out creative and beautifully presented dishes, and the service was one of gracious professionalism.



Outdoors, guests can stroll along their park-like grounds, enjoy archery or a game of boules, play golf on their pitch and putt course, or even go clay pigeon shooting. Always looking to fit in a game of golf in our travels, we enjoyed playing their 9-hole course. Indoors, guests can try their hand at darts or play a game of snooker. For relaxation, there are two outdoor hot tubs and an indoor sauna. Since Thorskogs Slott participates in Vastsvensk Mersmak or Taste of Sweden, they even offer cooking classes.

Read our articles on Thorskogs Slott in our [Hotels & Resorts](#), [Restaurants](#) and [Chefs' Recipes](#) sections where Chef Anna Sara Johansson shares a few of her enticing recipes.

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The next morning we enjoyed a farewell breakfast in their Floral Room before driving back to Gothenburg, where we reluctantly relinquished our Volvo at the [Volvo Center](#), in order to take the train to our next destination &ndash; Stockholm!

Please read other articles on Sweden in our [Destinations](#), [Hotels & Resorts](#), [Chefs' Recipes](#), [Restaurants](#), [Music Scene](#), [Gastronomy](#), [The Liquor Cabinet](#) and [Events](#) sections.

For more information on Sweden, please visit: [www.visit-sweden.com](http://www.visit-sweden.com), [www.west-sweden.com](http://www.west-sweden.com), [www.stromstadtourist.se](http://www.stromstadtourist.se), [www.kosteroarna.com](http://www.kosteroarna.com) and [www.vastsvenskmermak.com](http://www.vastsvenskmermak.com).

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