

Come travel with us along Höga Kusten

This July we took a most interesting 4-day bus-trip to Höga Kusten, Sweden. The area so called due to the extraordinary land-rise, from Härnösand in the south to Örsköldsvik in the north. We stayed in a hotel in Härnösand and made daily excursions along the coastal area. Our guide spoke about local history, area development and shared many other “useful/interesting” stories of the area. This is our travel story to THE HIGH COAST OF SWEDEN with its uplifting landscape.

HÖGA KUSTEN is a World Heritage Site; appointed as Sweden’s most beautiful natural region. For 10,000 years, the High Coast has been rising steadily out of the sea, from where the weight of the 3 km thick inland ice had pressed it deep down 800 meters (1/2 mile) under the waves. In the beginning, the land lift was fast, close to 300 meters (984’) since the last ice age, but it has slowed down over the millennia. Today, the rate of rebound is only 8mm (0.026”) per year – but it’s still the fastest in the world! This means the land rises almost 100 meters per 100 years. The nature here is untouched, unique, majestic and “uplifting”. The dramatic islands are accessible by bridges and ferries. The land lift also formed lagoons, former inlets now cut off from the sea; they are called “flads” and “gloe” lakes. The land uplift process is not done yet and will rise approximately another 100 meters before it stops. In another 2,000 years a land bridge may have formed across the Kvarken Strait.

In terms of topography, the **High Coast** and the **Kvarken Archipelago** are complete contrasts. Across the Baltic Sea near the city of Vaasa, Finland is a low-lying and Kvarken rocky archipelago, and comprises low moraine ridges, massive boulders and a mosaic of shallow inlets with thousands of islands. The highest point is only 20 meters (66’) above the sea. The area shows clearly how the ice sheet, isotactic land uplift and waves have shaped the scenery and continue to do so. The High Coast/Kvarken Archipelago form one of the few transnational World Heritage Sites in the world. Archaeological findings show how man has adapted his activities in response to the uplift. Harbors have been abandoned as they become too shallow. Place names associated with islands and the sea are found far inland. The post-glacial isotactic uplift continues and the shoreline is under going significant changes in the low-lying- Kvarken Archipelago, where large areas of

land emerge from the sea every year. The High Coast, on the other hand, does not manifest as many visible signs of change because the sea is deep – as much as 293 meters (879’) along the coastline.

Höga Kusten-bron, the bridge with a total length of 1,867 meters (6,000’), was opened in 1997. The suspension bridge is one of Sweden’s highest construction projects – it is suspended all of 182 meters (600’) above the river below. The stations are bolted to the Nordingrå granite 35 meters (105’) underground. Öresundsbron may be longer, but far less beautiful. The new bridge was built much because the older bridge, Sandöbron, could no longer support the heavy trucking industry. E4 was rerouted over the Höga Kusten-bron. This shortened the drive by 30 km and saved many hours of driving.

The High Coast Region is comprised of Härnösand, Sollefteå, Kramfors and Örnsköldsvik. Many offer coastal hiking, a national park, unique tunnel caves, the world’s highest cobble field, delightful lighthouse and magical kayaking in the archipelago. The only way is up! **Skuleberget** is the mountain that has risen out of the sea. Its silhouette has become the World Heritage Site’s signature. It’s the highest coastline at 286 meters (888’) above sea level in the world. Ever since the 14th century there has been a road along the Swedish coast. Today E4 runs along the coast. It has always gone by Skuleberget and through a great forest of Skuleskogen. Back then it was a narrow and a secluded road. According to folkloric tales robbers resided in Skuleskogen and attacked travelers who passed by. It is unsure whether these tales are true, but it would certainly have been a very strategic location for a band of robbers.

The mountain is named **Kalottberg** with its tree-topped peak and barren sides covered in cobble fields. The tops of several mountains have always been above sea level – when the inland ice melted, their peaks were islands sticking up out of the sea. Waves battered the mountains’ slopes as they slowly rose higher, washing away all their fertile soils, which is why they are barren today everywhere except for their tops. **Cobble fields** are large areas of stones that have been rounded by erosion due to being battered by waves or fast-flowing water. They can be found long distances from the coast. As land uplift changed the coastline, the stones remained, providing us with evidence of where the coastline once was. **Tunnel**

caves are formed when stones and gravel are set in motion by waves, leading to cracks and other weak points in the rocky coastline being eroded away leaving tunnel-like caves. Due to the uplift, these caves are now found far above sea level and away from the coast, and only to be found in Scandinavia and along the High Coast.

We visited many interesting sites, enjoyed ferry trips, and FIKA stops. At **Mjälloms Tunnbröd Bakery** (this is crisp bread baked very thinly). They offered tunnbröd made with rye, wheat, oat and sweet potato flour. The tour guides come so often that they have a key to the front door.

The “honor system” applies – shopper selects what they want to buy and pay by banking card. Simple for us and guides and provides an excellent income to the Bakery owners. At **Växbo Lin** (flax)– linen-weaving-design studio we bought “must have” items. FIKA stops wherever - whenever. While traveling on the bus our guide spoke about historic and unique events in Norrland Region.

We passed **Sundsvall** on our way to Härnösand. During 1800's Sundsvall was well known for its forest products – the country squires became very rich while the workers slaved away for pittance, resulting in a major strike in 1879. The wooded city buildings were consumed in a big fire 1888 when the city center buildings all burnt up. That is when Swedes decided to build stone buildings, some really as palaces with beautiful ornamentation.

Deep under Storråberget on the island of Hemsön is one of the country's best-kept secrets – **Hemsö Fortress** – once a top-secret underground fortress and one of Sweden's largest defense secret facilities during the Cold War. Many young men and women trained here, in summer, during their military service. Carl Gustaf (now known as King XVI Gustav) visited the fortress October 11, 1967. It is now an interesting tourist attraction, and the view is exceptional.

The High Coast's absolutely foremost and world-renowned delicacy is not something you secretly eat. The Swedish delicacy has a special aroma, which

should be enjoyed with pride out-doors. The infamous, yet loved-by-many, **Fermented Baltic Herring**, came about by accident during time of salt shortages in the 1500's when people couldn't preserve their herring using traditional methods. **Surströmming** is served at Ulvöhamn on the third Thursday in August. Every year! This is where the locals take their signature dish very seriously, best served with almond potatoes, beer and Aquavit. The exclusive aroma of fermented herring wafts around, enveloping the entire village of Ulvöhamn in a soft aromatic cloud much to the joy and delight of visitors and residents alike. Today 956,409 cans of surströmming are produced annually.

Ulvön islands are the High Coast archipelago's biggest tourist attraction with a fantastic cultural heritage thanks to the picturesque little red houses with attached boat sheds and wooden frames for drying fishing nets. You must take a ferry from Köpmanholmen to reach Ulvön. **Ulvö Chapel** is the oldest wooden building in northern Sweden. This historical chapel is a very popular place for weddings during summer months and is home to many dramatic tales dating all the way to 1622 when it was built. The paintings on the walls and ceiling are extraordinary beautiful. The Ulvö museum gives the visitors a sense of how life was over 100 years ago.

Ulvön was once Northern Sweden's largest fishing community and is often referred to as the gem of the Bothnian Sea. Fishermen sailed from Gävle to Ulvön since the 1350's. Gävle has long been a gateway to Norrland. There was better fishing further north – they were called Gävle-fiskarna – they sailed the waters from April to September fishing day and night. Women cleaned and salted the fish filling up large barrels that were shipped south. The fishermen and their families enjoyed living on Ulvön during summer months. Lars-Erik is the last remaining fisherman on the island, at the age of 89 he leaves early every morning to fish. He may be the last fisherman to sail from Ulvön.

Rotsidan in Nordingrå offers a spectacular view of the Baltic and it must be experienced! This fantastic 4 km long stretch of a slip-rock beach, previously at the bottom of the sea, cleansed of sand so that only large flat stones remain. It takes your breath away! The sea has been polishing the coastline for thousands of years.

With over 2,600 rock carvings **Nämforsen** is one of the world's largest rock carving sites - a unique environment. The past and the present come together in a magnificent natural setting via the rapids and the river. Nämforsen Museum of Rock Carvings is situated with a stunning view of **Ångermanälven**. Here you can learn more about the legacy of people who lived 4,500-1,800 B.C. and carved their life pictures in the rock at the rapids. On the opposite side of the river you can see thousands of items found during an excavation showing signs of hunters life during the Iron Age. Free admission to the museum and guides offer tours during summer months. **Ångermanälven** is wide and deep. Anger means bay and Ångerman translated to "the men from the bay". During the 1700's people asked, "Where does the water go"? The Clergy responded that the water disappeared because of your sins. During the 1890's the church and people agreed that the water disappeared because of the land rising, not by God's hand.

In **1719** a Russian seafaring force burnt most every building in many villages along the coast from Gävle and along the Norrland coastal region. After that many cities were constructed in stone rather than in wood. Sweden has as much granite rocks as forests. Maybe the Russians attacked in response to the war-faring king Karl XII. People set kaser (fires) on top of the hills to warn farmers of the oncoming Russians. Church ringers rang church bells to warn the citizens. Over 5,500 Russians ravaged the coastline and burnt the fields. The Russians did not take the total yield from the fields. They warned the villagers "we'll be back". They did come back and attacked the villages again burned down the villages again in **1721!** Eventually there was a peace agreement was signed in 1721 between Sweden and Russia. Along the Pacific Coast and California the Russians traded and burned villages as far down south at Bodega Bay, California. Russians continue the same destructive actions today in Ukraine.

The town of **Lunde** i Ådalen has an ugly past. In 1931 on April 21 the company leadership called in 60 strikebreakers to replace striking workers. The workers were asked to accept a 4 öre (<1cent) less an hour. A spontaneous protest march began. A military horse-riding group arrived and opened fire against the unarmed strikers and shot a demonstrator. Never before was a demonstrator killed by a Swedish military. The workers lacked food, women rebelled, there was nothing to

eat, people starved. After this event there were agreements made between owners and workers. "Folkhemsverige" began to form (peoples rights became acknowledged). Similar history is told of 1920's-30's USA.

Häxmuseet (Witch museum) near Kramfors tells the story of witch-hunts that took place in Sweden in the 1600's. The museum tells of the horrific stories about women accused of witchery and burned to death in Torsåker in 1675. Salem, MA had similar witch trials.

A room with a view! Wake up to the high coast's most spectacular views at the **Historic Högbonden Lighthouse** built 1909 to warn ship's captains of the rocky coastline. It offers unique accommodation in the old keeper's house, with an atmosphere full of serenity and calm. Set high above the Baltic Sea's thundering waves. You can reach Högbonden by ferry from **Bönhamn**. It is the most authentic fishing village on the mainland. Fishermen came here during the 1600's to stay for the summer months.

Ways to see and experience the coastal area is traveling the 130 km (81 miles) long **Höga Kustleden** (High Coast hiking path), by foot, bike or car. While in Härnösand take the opportunity to visit open-air **Murberget** located just northeast of the city center, with over 80 buildings. During summer-months you can take guided tours and learn more about the people who lived here a long time ago.

Wildlife in Sweden is diverse as is the flora and fauna. Elk, brown bear, reindeer, wild boar, red deer, fox, lynx, Eurasian wolf, wolverine, migratory birds are some of the animals, who live north of **Dalälven**. They live among conifer forest, lodge pole pines, birch, aspen, Norway spruce, Scots pine, willow thickets and dwarf shrubs. The intensity of green color is splendid and beautiful. Pines & firs represent the darker green color with birches bringing in the lighter green color. Certainly to us, who resided in Julian for so many years, green is loved over brown. Dalälven flows from Lake Siljan, a county of Dalarna, into Östersjön (Baltic Sea) south of Gävle. Dalälven is 520km (320 US miles) long. The river demarks what grows and lives south/north of the river. Rye is cultivated here,

however, wheat only grows south of Dalälven. This is also where the Norrland region begins.

In the old days Swedish society was divided between: Bönder (farmers), Borgare (commerce), Präster (church) preached and Adel (nobility), they ruled the country. Nobility did not settle in the north. There are no royal castles north of Dalälven.

Gävle is known for: Gevalia coffee, Gävlebocken (Goat), and an enormous harbor where much of the iron products were shipped further south. In the big immigration to the USA many immigrants left from Gävle. In 1846 it took 5 months to sail across the Atlantic, at the cost of 33 kr/p.p. Travellers received a bed and water! They brought their own food! Steamships replaced the sailing vessels in the 1930's.

Along E4 there are “orientering's skyltar” (special orienting signs attached to the wilderness fencing). When you find yourself in trouble, you tell the emergency crew where the nearest marker is to you location, so they know where to look for you and also help if the authorities need to shut down road.

The Swedish nature is magnificent, untouched and accessible for everyone. Sweden has a special philosophy that is totally unique. The Swedish countryside is open to everyone, and as a tourist you can roam and visit almost anywhere. It's called **ALLEMANSRÄTTEN** – the right to public access, is an ancient custom that is written in the Swedish Constitution. Swedes love outdoor life and nature, and when you meet them on a trail, expect them to be friendly but reserved. There is nothing wrong with small talk it's just that many Swedes are not good at it. Most everyone speaks English and a little shy but helpful. Learn of the importance of taking a FIKA break! Swedes are proud of their country; they care for their environment and believe in sustainability and recycling.

With our travel bags filled with memories we returned home. We often visualize the extraordinary landscape the intensity of the green colors almost hurt our eyes and that of the blue clear water. Yes, it did rain a little, but we seem only to remember sunny gorgeous days.

Have fun traveling and we encourage you to visit SWEDEN!

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