

If you are thinking of travelling to Sweden, **GÖTA KANAL** is one of our most well known attractions. This is a trip through Swedish history and the most beautiful nature, where one marvelous site replaces one another. Welcome onboard for a trip “Sveriges blå band” on Sweden’s Blue Ribbon as the beautiful water channel is often called.

*Göta kanal, mitt ideal.*

*Där simmar sällan någon haj eller val.*

(My idea of travelling as seldom sharks and whales swim here)

The channel is one of the largest civil engineering projects ever undertaken in Sweden. The channel stretches from Sjötorp on lake Värnen to Mem on the Baltic Coast. Together with Trollhätte Kanal (opened 1808) Göta Älv and Göta Kanal it forms a 390km (242 miles) long waterway across Sweden from Kattegat (Atlantic) to Östersjön (Baltic). The length of Göta Kanal is 190km (118 miles) with a total of 58 locks; of this distance 87km (54 miles) were dug by hand. There is a 91.8 m difference in the water level along the channel.

Gustav Vasa spoke about a channel crossing the country, as the Danes already collected tolls in 1429 from any foreign ship passing Öresund. It would save time & money. In 1525 Bishop Hans Brask suggested building a canal connecting Lake Vättern and Lake Värnen. It took almost 300 years of discussions and planning before funding the work.

In April 12, 1808 a permit to build the channel was issued with costs estimated to be 800,000 kr.

In 1808 Captain Batzar von Platen presented his idea for the channel construction to king Gustav IV Adolf, who approved the idea. Contractor Batzar von Platen was commissioned to complete the work that started year 1810 and finished in 1832 by a crew of 58,000-conscripted soldiers from 16 regiments. The men worked 12 hours/day digging, using metal reinforced wooden spades. It was a hard and difficult job. Von Platen planned every lock & size location along the entire stretch together with the well-known British channel builder Thomas Telford. The channel is 14m (42’) wide, and 3m (9’) deep. Beyond the digging men also chiseled stone blocks to fit the locks design. Every soldier, who participated in the work, received a silver medal with Karl XIV Johan’s image and this inscription: “För verksamt biträde till Hafvens förening” (Thank you for your work for connecting the two lakes). Once the rail network was

built up, ships carried less cargo i.e. timber, coal and iron. The channel became less important to Swedish commerce.

The amount of dirt dug up to make the channel represents a wall 5m(15') tall and 1m(3') wide stretching from Treiksröset northern border to Smygehuk the most southern town.

The western part of the channel between Sjötorp and Karlsborg opened for traffic in 1822. The Öresundstullen closed in 1857. During WWI and WWII part of Kattegatt and Östersjön were mined. Consequently shipping increased and was more profitable using Göta Kanal. In 1970 Postal ships carried the mail with the captain stamped each piece.

The fortress of Karlsborg was once considered as the second capital of Sweden. Here the royalty & government could gather if the Russians attacked, with lake Vättern, as a colossal moat.

The commerce was relatively good for shipping materials and passengers up to the 1930's. More pleasure boats started sailing through the channel in the 1970's, as passengers were once again interested in sailing on the elegant, romantic ships along the route. The cabins are small, the sitting-room lovely and the kitchen chefs prepared marvelous meals served in an elegant dining room. Today the ships regularly sail along with an estimated 7500 pleasure boats through the channel. During high season (June, July & August) it takes 6-7 days to sail from coast to coast through a beautiful Swedish landscape.

The most impressive set of locks are at Berg, named for king Karl XIV Johan. Its seven connected locks lift the ship 18.8m (57') between lake Roxen and Berg lock. It's impressive! M/S Juno is magnificent as she slowly moves along the channel, through fields of green summer foliage and while many visitors' along the shores wave flags, talk to the ships passengers and snap pictures. At Berg, the oldest cloister Vreta was founded 1100 and Holy Birgitta was canonized 1391.

The ships that still sail today are:

M/S Juno 1874; M/S Wilhelm Tham 1912; M/S Diana 1931; M/S Bellevue 1961; they offer Swedish culture and traditions along with culinary delights. The ships have a maximum length of 30m (90'), width of 7m (21') and depth 2.82m (8') and sail at a max speed of 5 knots.

Finally in year 2000 Göta Kanal has been recognized as the world's most extraordinary channel construction. The communities of Sjötorp at lake Värnen, Mem at Östersjön and the seven communities in between Mariestad, Töreboda, Karlsborg, Motala, Linköping, Norrköping and Söderköping are now all connected.

On one our many trips to Sweden we stopped in Motala to watch the fascinating work of men operate the locks manually, while we enjoyed a marvelous ice cream cone. You can select starting the trip from either Stockholm or Göteborg or simply choose only part of the cruise. Whatever you choose, it'll sure bring you memories for lifetime. Just look up [Gotakanal.se](http://Gotakanal.se) for more details.