

## 4 days on a discovery tour of Swedish culture in Stockholm

From 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016, fifteen third-semester students of the international degree courses *Baltic Management* and *Leisure & Tourism Management* went on an excursion to Stockholm. As in the years before, the excursion was packed with interesting meetings and events and, as a side-effect, rather exhausting.

Right after landing at the airport Stockholm Arlanda, we directly drove to the city centre and visited the headquarter of **TT (TIDNINGARNAS TELEGRAMBYRÅ)**, a Swedish news agency.



From the presentation held by Mats Johansson, who has been working in the agency since 1980, we learned that TT is the largest news agency in Scandinavia and monitors events in Sweden and the rest of the world with the motto that things need to be done quickly and correctly. Therefore, TT has several parts - for example, the news service; a television program; a sports department, and a graphic department for videos and images. TT also has an increasing number of complete services for the Internet.

At the news agency 240 full-time and about 130 short-time workers produce circa 70,000 photos, 1,100 articles, 1,000 TV pages and 100 pages of sports, games and features per week. An interesting point in this context is the work schedule – 7 days on duty followed by 7 days off duty.

After this interesting visit, we settled into our **youth hostel, Zinkensdamm** located very centrally, in the busy district of “Södermalm”, which has about about 120,000 inhabitants. The Hostel was built in 1975 and has about 200 beds. It belongs to a very big association, the “STF (Svenska Turistföreningen)”, which includes more than 300 hostels all over Sweden. Here are some images, in case you need affordable, calm and clean accommodation in Stockholm.



On the next day, we drove to **LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation**. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation LO is the central organisation for 14 affiliates, for example Byggnads (Swedish Building Workers Union) or the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union, which organise workers within both the private and the public sectors. The 14 affiliates, who have independent status, have about 1,470,000 members of whom about 684,000 are women. The Confederation was founded in 1898 by blue-collar unions on the initiative of the 1897 Scandinavian Labour Congress and the Swedish Social Democratic Party, which almost exclusively was made up by trade union members. After a small presentation from our host, we got some time to start a discussion about different work issues.



Following that, we visited **GRAND TOURS, a tour operator**. We met Cecilia, the head of the agency we visited and two of her employees. What makes GRAND TOURS special is that it is owned by *Pensionärernas Riksorganisation (PRO)*, an organisation with about 400,000 members and focusing on enabling the elderly to take some time off of everyday life by travelling. A special highlight of GRAND TOURS' programme is *Res och Lär*, which includes a two-month course before the actual trip, so that the travellers are well-informed about their destination, get to know fellow travellers before the trip and have another highlight in their daily routine.

The day's program was closed with a trip to **Haninge**, a suburb of Stockholm, where we had the great chance to explore the **"Riksäpplet" high school** and the Swedish education

system. The school centre at Haninge is one of the largest and most modern upper-secondary schools in the Greater Stockholm area and also one of the best-equipped ones nationwide.

The school offers 11 out of 18 national programmes, and thanks to the new building, which was just opened this year, they can one building for the academic content and another one for vocational training. Students do not have to pay any charges, be it tuition fees or costs for equipment and devices needed for study. The most amazing point for us: Each student receives a MacBook or iPad at the beginning of upper secondary school at Haninge!

For the vocational training they need to spend the first year to learn all the basics in their programme and are then able to choose their specialisation in the second year. For example, in the “transport” programme, they have to learn all the basics about manufacturing a car, then in the second year, they can choose from a variety of specialisations, from repairing to painting or even driving busses.

**So, we feel:** The school centre Riksäppet at Haninge is a prime example for the Swedish school system teaching us that there’s still a lot we can learn from Sweden, especially in terms of equal education conditions and future possibilities.

Another highlight planned for the second day of our stay would have been this year’s announcement of the winner of the **Nobel Prize for Literature** 2016 should have taken place on Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> October. However, due to unexpected administrative changes, the event took place one week later. Therefore, we had to miss out on this great cultural event.

On day 3, i.e. Thursday, we visited the **Swedish parliament**, in Swedish called **Riksdag**. The Member of Parliament we met was Hans Ekström, MEP since 2010 for the Social Democratic Party. He did a tour with us through the parliament building explaining the important facts about Swedish politics, the parliament and the Swedish population.

History: The Swedish Riksdag was established in 1435. In those days, the parliament was divided into four groups/estates, each owning one fourth of the parliament - the nobility (2% of the population), the priests (2%), the bourgeoisie (2-3%) and free farmers. So, three out of four estates were overrepresented in comparison to their actual share of the population. Therefore, the parliament wasn’t democratic until 1865. Until 1970, the parliament had two chambers, similar to the situation in the UK.

Sweden’s current political system is a constitutional monarchy with its current King Carl XVI Gustaf. Prime minister is Stefan Löfven, who heads the Social Democratic Party, (Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti /SAP). The parliament has 349 members belonging to 8 parties, viz. the Left Party, the Social Democratic Party (32%), the Green Party, the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Moderate Party (24%), the Christian Democrats, the Swedish Democrats. A party needs at least 4% in whole Sweden or 12% of the votes cast in a constituency in order to receive seats in the parliament.

Rooms: In the plenary hall, the members are seated by constituency, not by their membership in political parties. On the left side are the members that come from Stockholm, in the centre members from the “Heartland” of Sweden are seated, and on the right side you can find the “colonies”. In the front, you have besides the seats of ministers and parliament’s president two debate desks that were adopted from the British parliament.

Buildings: The Riksdaghus itself is situated on the island Helgeandsholmen in the Old Town and was built between 1897 and 1905. In fact, in the whole Gamla Stan (old town), there are

several buildings that are used by the government, the parties and the Supreme Court. The Prime Minister also has his residence and study diagonally across the parliament building. Sweden has one of the oldest laws for freedom of speech and print which was introduced in 1766.

Other achievements: 1921 the right to vote was also introduced for women. Nowadays, the so-called *Kvinnorummet* (*Women's room*) appreciates the achievements of women in politics and parliament and is an addition to the appreciation of (male) politicians in the old part of the parliament building. In the room, pictures of the first woman in parliament (1921), the first female minister (Karin Kock-Lindberg, 1947) and the first female speaker (Karin Söder,



1985) are exhibited. Furthermore, the parliament features a room dedicated to Swedish heroes. These are Raoul Wallenberg who during Nazi fascism saved thousands of Jews in Budapest during the Holocaust and Gustav Harald Edelstam, a Swedish ambassador who saved more than 1,000 Chileans.

**Our conclusion:** Modern politics for a modern country

After this, we walked to the “**RIDDARHUSET**”, **the House of Swedish Nobility**. There, Henrik von Vegesack welcomed us, explained the history, the current function, the building and the exhibits to be found in the RIDDARHUSET.

The House of Nobility - built between 1641-1672 by architects from France, Germany and the Netherlands - is a palace for the nobles in Sweden and also an organisation which maintains and protects the historical heritage.

First, we went to the basement where documents from the noble families are preserved in a safe with a special climate. The oldest document is from 1508 and even though the employee in charge avoids taking out the documents, he made an exception and showed us some. He also told us that they currently do digital copies of the documents, so the RIDDARHUSET can exhibit them.

After that, Henrik von Vegesack led us to *the great hall* which is decorated with 2,330 coats of arms of noble families that are painted on copper plates. 700 of them still have living members in Sweden or abroad. When persons were raised to the nobility, they were allowed to choose a new name. We got to know that each coat of arms has its own story and that the aristocrats often expressed an important event in their lives with them.

Today, the RIDDARHUSET has 27,000 members all over the world, who support students with scholarships.



**This was the whole aristocratic history in one building!**

Very exhausted from the past two days that we did a small guided tour of **“Gamla stan”**, the city centre and all had a cup of the wonderful Swedish coffee.

We finally closed the third day with a short visit to **“Almega”**, a Swedish employers’ organisation. ALMEGA is an employers’ organisation, which has more than 10,000 member companies throughout the whole country. These companies work in the service sector and since almost three quarters of the Swedish working population have service-related jobs nowadays, ALMEGA is responsible for around 500,000 people.

ALMEGA’s self-declared main functions are to support these by offering expertise regarding different situations and helping to improve relations between employers and employees.

What made this visit particularly interesting was the strikingly different view ALMEGA has on labour relations compared with trade union umbrella LO. While ALMEGA maintains that negotiations about working conditions and earnings should be settled at company level, LO believes that worker representation at company level is too weak for achieving optimal results.

An appealing aspect of Almega’s practices is their attempt to improve the equality between men and women regarding the labour market. As a result they invented the program *“Womentor”*, which not only tries to change the image of jobs that are usually mostly done by men but it also seeks to transform the typical picture of women and the prejudices of the limitations of which jobs they should work in.

**Our conclusion:** ALMEGA polarizes but offers a tangible approach for an actual change of gender-based prejudices in the labour market.

Our last day in Stockholm was dedicated leisure - we went to **“SKANSEN”**, an **outdoor leisure park**. situated on a small island in the middle of Stockholm’s city and can be seen from afar. To get there, we took a ferry from Gamla Stan and could have a last beautiful view at the city centre. Unfortunately, as the main tourist season was over, many historical buildings there were closed. However, we still had a lot of fun watching the large number of animals there, with our favourites of course being indigenous inhabitants of the north, i.e. elks.



After SKANSEN, in the afternoon, we took the bus back to airport and this is very sad that we had to leave the wonderful city of Stockholm.