

Twenty-three Cousins, Two Weeks, and Happy Memories!

In June of 1991, twenty-three Swedish-American first cousins and spouses from nine states proved that you can tour Sweden together for two weeks, meet everyone's expectations, and return home wishing the trip wasn't over. Here are some pointers that might help others who would like to organize their own *familjeträff*.

Extensive planning by someone in charge is the key. My husband Dennis and his cousin Ralph (who live in the same town) spent 200 hours over two years planning the trip, then actively led it as well.

Obtain an excellent travel agent who will work hard for you. Our Swedish-born travel agent, Robin Jending, was well versed on current opportunities and proved invaluable. The return trip alone necessitated eleven different flights!

Start regular mailings right away. Special envelopes and stationery printed with the phrase: "Cousins' Tours; 'Don't travel without a cousin'" added hype. Information was dispensed frequently. Major facts were emphasized repeatedly (none of us retain it all the first time). Information about places we were going to visit, light written humor and cartoons were included to add to the flavor and build excitement.

Ease travel tension. Driving together for 1,000 miles could have tested everyone's patience. By acquiring a 3 van fleet and 1 lead car we mandated twice-daily rotation amongst the 11 driver/navigators and 12 passengers. Camaraderie was enhanced as cousins renewed childhood bonds and "out-laws" (spouses) became well acquainted.

Tell them how they can help. Everyone was to be as punctual as pos-

sible. Luggage was restricted to one large and one carry-on piece per person (that's 46 pieces!) and each person was responsible for his or her luggage getting into and out of the vehicles. No freeloaders allowed!

Discuss their trip expectations. We reminded all participants that everyone would enjoy most things, but no one could do everything they would like. Small complaints were acceptable; major moaning was out!

Assemble a trip package that is as inclusive as possible. Hotels and B&Bs (Bed & Breakfast establishments) rates include large breakfasts. We made dinner and some lunch reservations. Seating a large group required it. Restaurant and hotel personnel often treated us special, flying the American flag, adding extra decorations, and cooking requested Swedish foods because they knew we were coming.

We opened a "Cousins' Tours" account at our local bank, and everyone prepaid. We asked for early deposits and the balance when the airline tickets were cut. The leaders used charge cards as we traveled, eliminating individual bills and saving a lot of time.

It's a good idea to obtain a small amount of local currency for everyone before leaving. Upon arrival, everyone had money to use for immediate needs.

Contact the city or town's tourist

bureau where you are going. One of the employees at the Mönsterås tourist bureau, Göta Fransson, worked so hard to make our stay great she became an "Honorary Cousin".

Correspond with friends or relatives in Sweden. Invite them to join you, perhaps for a dinner on a specific date, rather than putting them on the spot. A large group of Americans can be a little overwhelming!

Ship gift purchases whenever possible. Purchases not mailed which were eligible for VAT refund had to be hand carried until airport departure.

Allow for some free time. Occasional—but not too much!—free time allowed museum lovers and shoppers to have some independence. The tour guides appreciated the break from their responsibilities too.

You too can have "the experience of a lifetime". Our trip was a total success, according to all the cousins, a very appreciative group. Early and proper planning paid off, even in the cost. For about \$2250—including airfare!—per person, we bought a lifetime of memories.

—Doris Nelson

Doris Nelson is a free-lance writer who waits in Arlington Heights, Illinois, to return to Sweden!



The twenty-three cousins enjoying two weeks in Sweden. [Photo: Doris Nelson]