

## **More *Life in Sweden*:** **(A brief list of things we wish we knew sooner)**

***Philomène Offen and Sonia Vivian***

Despite the incredible wealth of information available on the AWC website, sometimes it's the smallest details that stymie you in your first weeks in Stockholm. Below are some details we wish we'd known sooner. (We're guessing the AWC newcomers staff wish we had too. They got a LOT of emails!)

### **Alert your American bank that you are going to Sweden:**

Unless you want to find your credit card suddenly refused (or confiscated by an ATM machine), be sure to alert your bank as to how long you will be in Sweden.

### **Door codes**

Apartment dwellers may find themselves hunting for the buzzer in their apartment that allows guests entrance into the building. Some buildings do indeed have them, but more often you simply give your 4-digit building security code to your friends, repair persons, delivery persons, etc. At first you think, "Huh? The neighbors will kill me!" It's just the way it's done here.

### **How to type Swedish letters on an American keyboard:**

You can't access information from many Swedish websites without being able to type Swedish vowels. Fortunately, it's easy: Just hold down the Alt key on your keyboard, and at the same time type a 3-number sequence on the numerical keypad on the right side of the keyboard. (Make sure the Num Lock button is on.) So:

Alt 134 = å	Alt 143 = Å	Alt 130 = é
Alt 132 = ä	Alt 142 = Ä	Alt 138 = è
Alt 148 = ö	Alt 153 = Ö	

### **Personnummer:**

Most American companies use a relocater service, and these folks will initially take you down to the tax office to apply for your *Personnummer*, the Social Security Number equivalent without which you cannot access medical care or a host of other services. Once you fill out the appropriate form and submit it with a passport size photograph (ear must be visible), you have to get a Swedish person to vouch for your signature. After you send in form, the picture ID will be mailed to you.

### **Medical care:**

Getting medical care within the Swedish system: Once you have a Personnummer, you will be assigned to a local medical care provider and hospital. Women will automatically get a notice in the mail from a clinic in your area of an appointment date and time for OBGYN checkup. If you cannot make the appointment, call to cancel or reschedule.

However, if you have an emergency or have out of town guests:

Medical emergencies:

Karolinska Hospital Main Emergency: 08 517 700 00

24-hour Medical Referral Hotline: 08 320 100 (local medical centers which operate “out of hours” service.

Dental Emergencies: (a dentist is a tändläkare – literally, “tooth doctor”)

Emergency dental treatment is offered at **St. Eriks Hospital**, Fleminggatan 22 (tel. **08/545-51-20**), open daily from 8am to 5pm. OR

S:t Göran’s Hospital Dental Emergency: 08 587 026 15

24 hour Drugstores

A pharmacy that remains open 24 hours a day is **C. W. Scheele**, Klarabergsgatan 64 (tel. **08/454-81-30**).

Getting non-emergency medical care if you are not in the Swedish system (a tourist, or have no Personnummer): Fortunately, there are a number of private clinics in Stockholm, including Sofia Hemmet (on Valahallavägen), Läkarhuset (Hötorgcity), and Läkarhuset Odenplan (in Vasastan), all of which have a good reputation. Be prepared to pay in hard cold kronor, then be reimbursed by any American insurance you may have.

Cigna International has an Ex-Patriate Plan for Americans who work in foreign countries.

Prescriptions: Be sure to bring enough of your own prescription drugs to last you for a while until you’re in the Swedish medical system. Don’t count on getting exactly the same drug you took in the U.S. Medications (even aspirin) can only be purchased at the state run Apoteket and the selection is hugely less than you will find in the U.S. If, for example, you prefer Advil Liqui-gels to regular Advil, bring it, because you won’t find it here. Note: you cannot purchase over the counter cold medicines (Contact, Nyquil, etc.) in Sweden without a prescription. You’re allowed to bring it with you for your own use.

**Phone service:**

***To dial Sweden from the U.S.:***

Calls to land lines: 011 + 46 (country code) + 8 (Stockholm city code) + local number. (for example: 011-46-8-12 34 56)

Calls to Swedish cell phones: If you are calling a Swedish cell phone, you drop the 8 (Stockholm city code) and the 0 (which local cell phone numbers start with). So, for example to call the Swedish cell phone 076 999 9999 from the U.S., dial: 011 – 46 – 76 – 999 9999.

***To call within Sweden:***

Once in Sweden, you'd dial that cell phone locally as: **076 999 9999**. Again, the cell phones have an "0" in front of them for local calling, but it is dropped when you call it from outside the country.

To dial back to the U.S., dial 001 + area code + local number.

Just to make life really exciting, Swedish local telephone numbers can have varying numbers of digits – either 6 or 7 for land lines, or 10 for cell phones.

***Discount phone service:***

Inquire of the company that is providing your Swedish phone service if they have a discount plan to the U.S.

***Euro City Cards:***

For 100 SEK (about \$14) you can get a 2 month card that gives you 1200 minutes. Calls must originate from Scandinavia and can go to other Scandinavian countries or the U.S. You cannot use it in the U.S., however, to call back to Sweden. (These are purchasable at Tobak shops.)

***Phone books:***

You'll have four: The two volumes of white pages are the Privat (residential) listings. The Gulasidorna (yellow pages) list businesses by categories (hair dressers, lawyers etc.) The pink pages are businesses listed alphabetically.

***Internet service:***

Most buildings are wired for internet access.

***Cable TV service:***

Pick a company that services your area. Once you set up service, they will mail you a cable box which will be programmed for the channels you selected. There are various packages according to what channels you want.

***Banking:***

As *Life in Sweden* already covered, once you have established a bank account, you have two ways of paying your bills. Neither of them is with a check. There are essentially no checks in Sweden.

Option 1: - Take the bill with you to your local *kassaservice* (they're all over - often in the local grocery store, post office, or gas station), stand in line, and pay them money (generally 45 SEK per bill) to pay it for you.

Option 2: Pay on-line. This is cheaper and way more convenient but as of this writing, there is no on-line English language banking at any bank in Stockholm. Ask someone from the American Women's Club to come over and show you how to do it. It's not hard once you get the hang of it (including the fact that the Swedes use of commas and periods in money is the exact opposite of ours). Where we would write 1,014.00, they would write 1.014,00

### **Tipping:**

They really do mean it about the tipping. It's already included in the bill. Still, tipping is such an ingrained experience for Americans that it really takes a while to get used to this.

### **Restaurants:**

Unlike American restaurants which have several seatings per night and can't wait to get you out of there, Swedish restaurants assume that you want to sit there for the rest of the evening after dinner chatting with your friends. As such, they would never insult you by bringing your bill (which would suggest they want you to leave) until you specifically ask for it.

On your check, you will also see a line for "Garderob" – the coat check person. Many restaurants – even ones that aren't very fancy - will have a mandatory coat room (and person who hangs up your coat for you) once the weather gets cold. You can either give them 15-20 SEK per coat when you leave or put the charge on your bill. Some have a fixed charge.

### **Mail delivery to apartment buildings**

Unlike American apartments which are identified by numbers, there are rarely numbers on a Swedish apartment – just the occupants' names. That's how the postman knows where to deliver your mail. If you are subletting, you need to find out if the mail has to be addressed to you c/o the owner – or whether your name will suffice. Be sure to get your name posted on your door as soon as possible.

Mail being sent to you also needs to include your floor. What we consider the first floor is called the BV (*botten våning*, or ground floor). What Americans consider the second floor is the Swedish first floor – "en trappa", abbreviated 1 TR. Subsequent floors are 2 TR, 3 TR etc. The 5 digit postal code comes before the city, so your address will read as follows:

Jane Smith  
Sveavägen 22, 3 TR  
111 34 Stockholm, Sweden

### **Shipping to Sweden:**

#### ***Items you're shipping over:***

Your shipper/mover should know this but it is important that if you are sending over new merchandise that it not still be in its original unopened carton. The Swedish government will charge you 25% tax on it. Used items moved for personal use are not taxed.

#### ***Stuff that is sent to you:***

Once again, the Swedish government wants its 25% tax on any new items that are sent to you – and possibly even added duties on top of that. Sometimes you get lucky and your package (clothes, books etc.) gets to you without additional charges, but don't be surprised to either get a tax bill after the fact from the shipping company or to be charged additional duties when you go to pick it up.

If friends or family are sending you anything – even books - they will need to include a Commercial Invoice indicating the value of the package. *Do not feed the lions:* make the value as low as can be justified and have the sender remove any price tags They should indicate it is either a gift, or is USED and for PERSONAL USE ONLY. Even your forwarded mail requires a minimum stated value of \$1.00, although your bills aren't likely to fetch that on the open market. ☺

### ***Where to pick up packages sent to you:***

If the package is small enough to go through the mail slot in your front door, the post man will do this. If not, you will receive a notice to go pick it up. As *Life in Sweden* already mentioned, the notice will have the name of a local ICA market, gas station, or other local business who has been contracted to hold on to packages for the Post Office until people come pick them up. Seems very strange initially to go through a mini-mart food checkout line to get your mail!

### ***Getting packages by Fed Ex or UPS:***

Although it seems horrifying to Americans to do this, if you live in an apartment building, you need to have the sender put your building security code on the package. *Ja*, really. If you are regularly receiving packages from a specific shipper, you can register your signature on file with them so you don't have to be home to have the package either stuffed through your mail slot or left by your front door.

### ***Sending Mail from Sweden:***

As *Life in Sweden* mentioned, the Swedish post office has contracted out to many small businesses - like 7-11s - to act as post offices. So the same kid who is serving Slushies and ersatz hotdogs is also weighing your package and selling you stamps (10 kronor for overseas and 5 kronor for domestic for a regular letter or card. If it weighs more, obviously, you'll pay more.)

### **Avoiding junk mail:**

To stop junk mail being delivered, put a small note on your door reading: *Ingen Reklam, Tack* (no advertising, please).

### **Transportation tickets/passes**

The most convenient mode of travel in Stockholm is the month-long transportation pass for 600 SEK (about \$85) that gives you unlimited travel on buses, T-banas (subways) and even commuter trains in Stockholm. It is especially recommended to get one of these the first month (or even two) that you are in Sweden as it allows you unlimited exploring and you don't have to have any idea where you're going – just get on a subway/bus and go. Unlimited transportation passes can be purchased for 1 day (60 SEK), 3 days (180SEK), and, starting May 1, 2006, one week (220 SEK), besides the one month (600 SEK) pass. With the pass, you never have to stand in line at the T-bana – you just swipe your card in the turnstile. (On a bus, you just flash the card at the driver as you get on.) You can also buy 4 month passes at varying discounts depending on the time of year (2330 SEK for January-through April or September through December, and 1730 SEK from May through August.)

Alternatively, you can buy ticket books (10 for 180 SEK, or 18 SEK each) which the T-bana folks or the bus driver will stamp with the date and time. Up until May 1, 2006, travel in Stockholm was divided up into zones - the more zones, the higher the cost. To simplify the system, everything is now considered a three-zone trip and costs one ticket, or alternatively 20 SEK in cash. You can re-use the same ticket for an hour after it was initially stamped if you want to make stops for errands, or you are transferring from one mode of transportation to another (say, bus to T-bana.)

Ticket strips and passes can be purchased at any of the many Pressbyråns (News Stores) that are at every T-bana station, or in the main transportation office at T-Centralen. The guy in the booth at the T-bana also sells them.

### **Bus/Train Schedules**

For local trains, buses and subways, go to: [www.sl.se](http://www.sl.se) You can get transportation schedules in both English and Swedish – but there are more options on the Swedish link. If, for example, you want a copy of the same schedule that is posted at your local bus stop – for example, the 47 bus from Vasaparken, - click on *På svenska* (in Swedish) at the top of the page and then click on *Tidtabeller* along the left side of the next page. In the *linje* box, type 47, and the *Hållplats/station* box type Vasaparken. You will get the full week's schedule for the 47 bus for the times it leaves Vasaparken. Note that from about June 20 to around August 20, buses and trains go to a reduced summer schedule, so you need to print out the schedule again during that time.

For long distance trains, go to: <http://www.sj.se/> Or wander in to T-Centralen (the central train station on Vasagatan) and pick up schedules there.

### **Maps:**

The back section of yellow pages (Gula Sidorna) in the telephone book has excellent maps (the pages with the red sides), or go to [www.gulasidorna.se/kartor](http://www.gulasidorna.se/kartor) Many times when invited to a party or someone's home, they will refer to the phone book page where you can find the appropriate map. Those maps are indispensable and referred to often.

Free maps of the city are available at the Tourist Office in Kungsträrgården, across the street from the NK department store on Hamngatan.

Transportation maps (showing bus and T-bana (subway) routes) are available free for the asking at any T-bana station. These are a must for getting around the city.

If you need to look up the address where you're going, an excellent site is Eniro Kartor (Eniro maps) at <http://kartor.eniro.se/> Type in the address you want, for example, *Sveavägen 37, Stockholm* then click on "Sök" (seek). If you want to see a bigger map, click on "*Stor Karta*" on the bottom. Remember, if there is a Swedish vowel in the address, it won't find it unless you use Swedish letters.

### **Trash and recycling**

If you live in a house, your trash may be a flat fee, or it may be weighed and you will be billed accordingly.

If you live in an apartment, there will be trash bins, generally outside.

Be aware that recycling is the national fetish (okay, it's a good fetish) and that should you be found putting glass, paper, or plastic recyclables in the building trash bins, you will probably hear about it. Every few blocks in the inner city, and ubiquitously in the outlying areas, there are big green bins for recyclables: clear glass, colored glass, newspapers, cartons, metals, assorted plastics, even batteries.

### **Laundry**

There is alleged to be a Laundromat in Vasastan but unless you plan to spend the day there, you need other options. For reasons unclear to Americans, the wash and dry cycles on Swedish washers and dryers are waaaayyy longer than American ones. Count on at least 45 minutes – but up to two hours – for a load of wash to run (depending on what cycle you use) and often several hours of dryer time.

If you live in an apartment building, the building will have a laundry room with washers and dryers in the basement, and also a sign-up schedule for the room's use. It is virtually a hangable offense in Sweden to use the laundry room on someone else's time. It is also the most indisputable excuse you can have for an event you don't want to go to: "I'd love to, but alas, it's my laundry time."

Both private homes and apartment buildings also frequently have a drying room where clothes are hung up and a low grade heater and fan dry the clothes.

Dryers in individual apartment are generally not vented to the outside. Instead, one needs to press on a well-hidden panel on the front of the machine which opens to a "reservoir" – a long plastic tub into which the water from your clothes is deposited as it dries. Once the reservoir is full, the clothes will no longer dry no matter how many hours you run the

machine. You will just have very hot, very wet clothes – and a whopping electric bill. Empty the reservoir regularly. (Dryers in a building laundry room will likely be vented.)

Dry cleaners and laundries are much more expensive than in the U.S.

### **Other Appliances:**

Even if the appliances in your kitchen are fairly new, don't count on the freezer portion of your refrigerator being frost-free, or your oven being self-clean.

You will also need to bleed the radiators in your apartment come winter – i.e. let out any air that has accumulated in them so that they can fully fill up with hot water. This requires a special little key that looks like an old-time roller skate key and is easily available at a hardware store like Clas Ohlsson, a chain in most major malls. Either the building's handyman can do it for you, and a neighbor can show you how.

### **What you won't find here:**

Currently, items that are either non-existent or really hard to find in Sweden include:

Manila file folders

Any OTC cold medicines (need prescription) or medicated lotions, powders etc.

Specialty vitamins or much of a selection of aspirin, ibuprofen, etc.

Twist ties

Paper toilet seat covers (in restrooms)

Seasoned bread crumbs

American-style brown sugar

Chocolate chips

Vanilla extract

Crystal Light drink mix

The last three items can occasionally be found at Gray's American Store (Gamla Stan, or on Odengatan in Vasastan). Gray's also has many other U.S. products like Mexican salsas, barbecue sauces, margarita mix, candy bars, cake mixes, etc.

### **News:**

English language newspapers include the International Herald Tribune, and the Financial Times. For on-line Swedish news in English, *thelocal.se* comes out every Friday.

### **Miscellaneous:**

Movie theatres: Unlike the U.S., you get an actual assigned seat. (Very nice.)

For locations of theatres in English:

[http://www.stockholmtown.com/templates/AddressList\\_2556\\_EN.aspx](http://www.stockholmtown.com/templates/AddressList_2556_EN.aspx)

For listings of theatres and times, and to reserve a ticket (in Swedish):

<http://www.sf.se/clayton/Index>

You can also easily book a ticket, select your seat, pay for the tickets online and pick them up at a little machine in the lobby by popping in the credit card you paid with or providing a reference number (depending on the machine). So civilized!

You can also see the movie schedule daily in the free Swedish newspaper Stockholm City.

*Take a number:* Most stores, banks, etc. operate with a number system. Look for the ticket number dispenser as soon as you walk in. If you miss your number, just take another one and wait again.

*Ice falling danger:* Ice falling from rooftops on to the street is a major hazard in the winter. You will see yellow signs saying “*Varning: Rasrisk*” where the danger exists.

*Elevators:* If the elevator has a sliding inner door (which many of them do), it is important when you get out to slide that door closed behind you. Otherwise the elevator cannot be summoned to any other floor. It is almost a rite of passage for Americans to have an entire building of Swedes ready to stick pins into little effigies of you because you have stranded their elevator on the fifth floor.

*Hairdressers...* are called Frisör. The easiest thing is to ask other women in the club who they use and then try them out.

*Alcohol purchases...* can only be made at the state-run SystemBolaget. There is proposed legislation to lower the alcohol taxes by 40% in the 2006 election...but for the moment, expect to pay a LOT more for alcoholic beverages – particularly spirits – than you would in the U.S. Some SystemBolagets let you walk around with a cart and select your own bottles, but most of the others have the bottles in glass cases with item numbers on them, and you tell the clerk the numbers of the items you want. Definitely not your Liquor Barn concept.

*Costs:* Just about everything is more expensive in Stockholm than the U.S., except perhaps gravlax and caviar. Some of the best advice the AWC gives is: don't convert to dollars; it'll just make you feel bad. (Most of us can't help doing it anyway but it's still good advice.)

*VCRs:* American –recorded video tapes won't work in a European VCR unless that VCR is equipped to handle that.

*Smile a lot:* The Swedes are genuinely nice about forgiving your ignorance – and helping you out – especially if you seem genuinely grateful.

Buying duty free if you have a residence visa:

Taxes on almost all good in Sweden are 25%, but you can get 15% back at the airport when you leave to go back to the U.S. The item must cost over 200 SEK and be purchased at a shop that sells Duty Free. They seal the bag or container and put a special stamp on it, and also give you a form to fill out that indicates how much money you'll get back. However, you can only do this with items purchased within 6 months of the time you are permanently leaving Sweden.

Swedish dictionary 101: If you have brought along a Swedish dictionary, you may initially wonder why it seems to be missing 90% of the words you're looking up. (\*%#\$\$@ cheap dictionary!) This is because Swedish has 3 extra vowels in their alphabet which alphabetically come after z: å, ä, and ö. So if you're looking up a word that starts with these letters, they're in the dictionary after the z's.

Similarly, if you're looking up a word that starts with, say, sä, these words are after the su's, sv's, sw's, sy's, and sz's (if there were any). That's when the så words start, then the sä's then the sö's. By the way, V and W are interchangeable in Swedish.

The other reason you may not be able to find words is that Swedish has a lot of compound words – several words strung together into one new word – so to understand the meaning, you need to break it down to its component parts, translate them, then put it back together again.

*Summary:* We confess that even after we were told some things, we found them so counter-intuitive to what we were used to that we just couldn't believe them. Like giving out the building security code. Or not having to tip. Or apartments being identified by the occupants' names instead of a number. Or picking up mail at a grocery store. And don't even get us going on the reservoir tubs on the dryers. But after a while, it all made sense. Now if we can just remember to start tipping again when we get home...