

CONFLUENCE IV

Orchid School-Guteskolan Södra, Gotland,
Cyber Gymnasiet, Stockholm

India - Sweden exchange program
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Student exchange programmes across cultures and continents are not just about getting a stamp in the passport or visiting an exotic location.

It is about seeing beyond what is visible to the eyes, getting a perspective about a culture that is deeper than what a tourist would get.

Cultural exchange is about -

- Developing respect for other culture's beliefs, values and norms
- Developing ability to cope with and enjoy ambiguity
- Developing ability to build trusting relationships with host families
- Questioning one's biases, prejudices about other cultures
- Examining one's own cultural values and beliefs
- Developing ability to adapt to new environment and adopt what is relevant and suitable for one's own context
- Communicating both verbally, non-verbally and decoding the communication Most of all, becoming inter-culturally competent and sensitive.

Lakshmi Kumar
Director,
The Orchid School & PNES

Foreword

“Certainly, travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living”. -Mary Ritter Beard

This quote does resonate the objective of our exchange program to Sweden wherein we have seen the transformation in our students in terms of responsibility, confidence, growth, global awareness, ability to process the various cultural experiences understand the similarities and differences and respecting the uniqueness of both the countries.

Our student/faculty exchange program to Sweden is an endeavor towards shaping our students to be globally competent and locally rooted citizens of tomorrow.

It has been our endeavor to encourage the students to pen down their perceptions, experiences thoughts, and reflections in the form of an article with illustrations which depict the essence of their writing and publish a journal which is a culmination of this entire process.

It is aptly named 'Confluence' i.e. union of two countries, their varied cultures, traditions, methodologies, teaching/learning practices and value system. It is a document reflecting the core purpose of this exchange program and a rich repertoire of articles and images which will take us down memory lane for years to come and be a source of inspiration for the future generations.

We are happy to bring to our readers the fourth edition of this journal, capturing the impressions of the student/teacher group who were part of the exchange program to Sweden this year.

Guteskolan Sodra, on the island of Gotland, in the vicinity of the Baltic Sea and Cyber Gymnasiet in Stockholm are our partner schools in Sweden and has been extremely cooperative, enthusiastic and energetic in taking this initiative further.

Guteskolan Sodra hosts the students from tenth grade.

This year, the students from Grade XII were also enrolled in the exchange program. A group of ten students accompanied by two teachers visited Cybergymnasiet, an upper secondary school in Stockholm, Sweden and were hosted by their students.

Students of both the groups attended well planned lectures, had plenty of hands on experiences through well chalked out activities and had meaningful interactions with the students and faculty at the respective host schools. Staying with host families enabled them to learn a lot about the Swedish culture in its true sense.

The collaboration will definitely scale newer heights with the support and cooperation from the leaders and team members of both schools, Guteskolan and Cyber Gymnasiet.

Coordinator's Desk - Baishaki Bapat

Freedom

Why was the Sweden Exchange Program the best trip I have been on so far? Was it the weather? Was it the people there? Was it what I learnt in the school or outside or both? I thought that I have a lot of freedom in India because I have open-minded parents, but I actually realised that being free is much more than what I've known.

In Sweden, the best thing was how we could just walk. Walk and walk for kilometres. The roads were so amazingly safe. The first day we arrived in Gotland, we walked all the way from Gustavsvik to Visby. I thought I would just drop dead when our teacher told us that it was a 40 minute walk in the crazy cold weather there. We started walking and five minutes through I was absolutely in love with it. Everything was just so mesmerizing. After that walk that day, all twelve of us did not give up walking the entire trip.

Most of the days after school, we would just ask our hosts if we could go to the inner city (because it was literally just a ten minute walk away) and if they would say yes, off we went into the city. Even if we didn't have to buy anything from the mall there, my friends and I would go into the city, walk and talk like the Indians we are at full volume and have the time of our lives. If we got tired, we would eat! Oh my god! The food... it was just wow. And also all the energy we used to use up in walking, we would have to eat equally as much. So we would walk and then take a break and eat at these mind-blowing restaurants.

Being there, I have learnt endless number of things; may it be curricular or completely extra-curricular. I learnt how to say some things in Swedish (which I did not use at all because I was too shy to) and I also learnt how to curl hair and bake. I had to live with another friend of mine in Gotland. She taught me so much throughout the trip. With her, I learned how to manage time really well and I also learned how to share a bed.

Sweden has taught me so much. Most of all it has taught me how to be responsible; how to manage time, how to make sure I still have my passport and to make sure that I am still me. The amount of freedom we had in Sweden cannot be matched anywhere else, I feel. But this freedom has taught me when to stop as well. Day in and day out, we would just walk into the city and look around. Every time, we had a different experience and were completely

satisfied with it. By the end of the trip, the five of us that were always together, knew most of the roads in the city really well! And our hosts were so kind to us to let us have this absolutely amazing experience in Sweden.

When I look back, I can think about all the fun we had. May it be just walking around or climbing rocks or attending English classes or even just talking really loudly in the cafeteria. The most important thing I have come to realise is that what I thought was freedom, is not anything compared to what I felt in Sweden. I have come to acknowledge that we are still conservative in India. Here, we cannot just walk straight from school aimlessly and endlessly to where ever we want. Also, here we have still not gotten to the point where it is safe enough to. I felt like a grown up there because we could do what we wanted and all we needed to do was ask for some time.

I will remember the freedom and I will never forget any second that I spent there with my friends and any minute detail about what I have learnt through these walks that I had. May it be around the school or around Gotland, with my friends or without, each time, I have taken in something, it could be a song, a sight or a smell, and that will always remind me of Sweden no matter which part of the world I am in and will always bring back awesome memories.

Aarya Desai
TOS Student



My Journey to Sweden

When I was asked to fly to Sweden by Baisakhi di, it took me quite a few days to make a decision whether I should go or not. It was really hard to figure it out, being a father who is really attached to his 2 year old son & can't even imagine staying away; I think some time life gives you an opportunity with a hidden treasure. I took a step forward in the face of my reality as I did not want to miss this opportunity and boarded the flight with a curious mind.



When I reached Sweden, I was amazed by the Beauty of the “Nature” I could not move my eyes away off from the beautiful sceneries, long and big roads, disciplined traffic; almost took my heart away. Temperature was less than 10 degree, it was freezing cold.

Next two days I enjoyed the time spending near the sea shore gazing at the sky, relaxing & capturing the beauty of nature in my camera, a white swan grabbed my attention and I was so happy seeing such a beautiful sight.

Later that day when we went for shopping in the morning, I was desperately searching for a washroom, suddenly I heard a voice “ Bhai jan kya dhund rahe ho...” I turned back and saw a man standing behind, to my surprise I felt so happy to hear Hindi in Sweden I told him that I wanted to use the washroom, but all the washrooms were closed in that area as we had arrived very early in the morning.

During the whole conversation I got to know that the person who was helping me was a Pakistani and suddenly I felt unsecured so I insisted Ishan to come along with me as the Pakistani offered me to use the wash room at his home. The hospitality and warm welcome at his home took away the hard feelings from my mind and we were really happy to bond with each other, this was an awesome experience in my life to feel so secured with the bonding.

My hosts were Anders and Michael. It was time to unite with Anders. I had a warm welcome by Anders Anders and his wife Beatrice, who made me feel like I was at home. They had a huge house with two cats and a beautiful barn with 5 horses. I use to take riding lessons from Anders and enjoyed the most; each and every moment was a great learning for me. Amazing sessions on leadership by Anders made my experience all the more interesting.

When I went to Michael's house in Visby, Michael and his daughter Noora were really nice to me and made me so comfortable.

Every day was a new day for me and I used to get up to have a new experience each day which made me rich with precious memories added to my treasure. We used to go on chatting on various topics and most interesting was differences and similarities in people around the world but at the end I felt we all share the same warmth and goodness.

Visits to places like, "Museums in both Gotland and Stockholm, excursion to Fårö Island will always be with me as my best memories. I have so much more to say about each and every thing what I have experienced but I feel words will not be enough to describe.

I would like to thank "Orchid" for giving me this wonderful golden opportunity to explore the world. I felt worth trusting myself on this journey and brought back some precious memories for me and my son.

This will definitely make my family bond well and I wish to go back to Sweden again to have life time learning.

Anil D. Kokate
TOS Staff



Beyond the Horizon

Visby, Gotland, Where is this you wonder!

Visby on the island of Gotland in Sweden is THE city. It is the city from my dreams. It is what lies beyond the horizon. It is the place that lies behind that mysterious sunset. It is that alluring and absolutely stunning place. It is my Atlantis and has been for a wonderful 3 weeks. Atlantis? Isn't that something exotic?

The world we live in now is a concrete jungle. High rise buildings, fast cars, fancy people. So is Visby much more exotic than this? No.

What makes it exotic and what makes it stand out is that it is elegantly simple. Flush green meadows. No building rises higher than 5 storeys. Small winding lanes. Narrow streets. Sparkling blue sea. Clear blue sky. Greenery everywhere you go. Light green grass with a gazillion of miniscule bright yellow flowers embedded in it like well-done embroidery on textile. It's the fairytale town. It has that calming and peaceful quiet that India sorely lacks. Visby is something beautiful at night. Look up to the skies and you shall witness more stars than you ever have at night anywhere else in the world. Right out of the likes of Cinderella, a cluster of old cottage like buildings with streets paved with cobblestone running in between them. All of this encased by the great Visby wall running all around it.

Hey, this isn't even the best part. The best part is the people who make up this place. Probably, the happiest, most cheerful and warm hearted people on the planet. I'd say Visby has been the highlight of my trip but then I realized that it was my host, Manfred, who made this all come alive. It is quite unreal how many times he used to hug people. Every hello and bye was with a hug for all his special people and I just happened to be on that list. He even managed a group hug when there were 7 of us with him! He was with me every step of the way, cracking foolish jokes which would be repulsive often but would still make everyone smile including me. He was 18 but had the heart of a 5 year old. His naughty wide grin would make it crystal clear that this was a guy who hadn't lost his spark growing up. His amazing family and friends managed to make our lives much happier and exciting than they already were. I loved the long walks in the forests and meadows, running around, going crazy and laughing at absolute nonsense. All our endless hours of gaming and laughing at each other fail and how we used to impersonate star wars characters and

have imaginary air battles. He is a marvelous cook, that's one thing he taught me how to do extremely well. Oh, if there is one being that I have fallen in love with on this trip, it's Manfred's cat Skywalker. The pets here in Sweden are nicer than most pets and quieter than most.

You know, Visby is not like any other place. It is something special. It's full of surprises. We were at this cafe in the middle of nowhere and the elderly man who was the owner had complete albums of Jagjit Singh on his phone. What are the odds? Then there was a person whom I met in the street who started a conversation with me and asks me about a movie called 'Sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness', till it hit me.... he was talking about Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum! These things are quite amazing to experience.

You visit Visby and everything catches your eye at the snap of a finger but it takes you a while to realize that this town from heaven is what it is because of how the people keep it. The people are simply amazing; yes they take a while to open up but you'll never meet a more helpful people in the world than in Visby.

What have I learned? I've learned that everything around you is what it is because of what you are and no one other than you can change your surroundings for better or for worse. All we require is the will to do it. People in Visby show one unique quality, it is the way they can be happy and smiling through the hardest of times and through all the financial insecurities. If you can learn anything at all from them, it is to be happy and content. It truly is something magical. Visby. The ideal city, the city of dreams, the wonderland beyond the horizon...

Gautam Marathe
TOS Student



A New Home

I think we were in 6th grade when the first exchange between India and Sweden was held, and since then I've wanted to go and I'm glad I did end up going because it was honestly one of the best experiences of my life.

Since the Swede I hosted back in September wasn't hosting me, I was being hosted by basically a stranger. And I was terrified. It definitely didn't help that I had been told by so many people that they wouldn't like it if I hugged them (something I do quite often). In fact almost anybody I talked to made it their mission to terrify me with stories of how Swedes weren't known to be friendly people. So when we walked into the cafeteria to meet our new families the last thing I was expecting was my host and her parents to pull me into a hug and smile at me.

After that things just kept getting better and better. Though the first few days living with the hosts were pretty scary, my hosts did whatever they could to make me feel at home. When I fell sick in the first week, they actually made vegetarian food for me to eat. Since I didn't understand their language they would translate almost all their conversations and even tried teaching me Swedish while I taught them bits and pieces of Hindi too.

One (of the many) things I really miss is the singing. My hosts loved to sing! Whether it was a Swedish song or an English song or a combination of the two there was never a dull moment in the house.

The whole experience was amazing. Gotland was a dream come true with quiet roads, the weather, the food and the people. It's hard to think back and pick out one moment that stands out because truthfully everyday held another adventure.

Some days my host and I would go out and roam around Visby taking pictures and admiring the scenery and on other days we'd laze around at home but still have a lot of fun and then some days we'd lock ourselves out of the house because we'd forget the key inside!

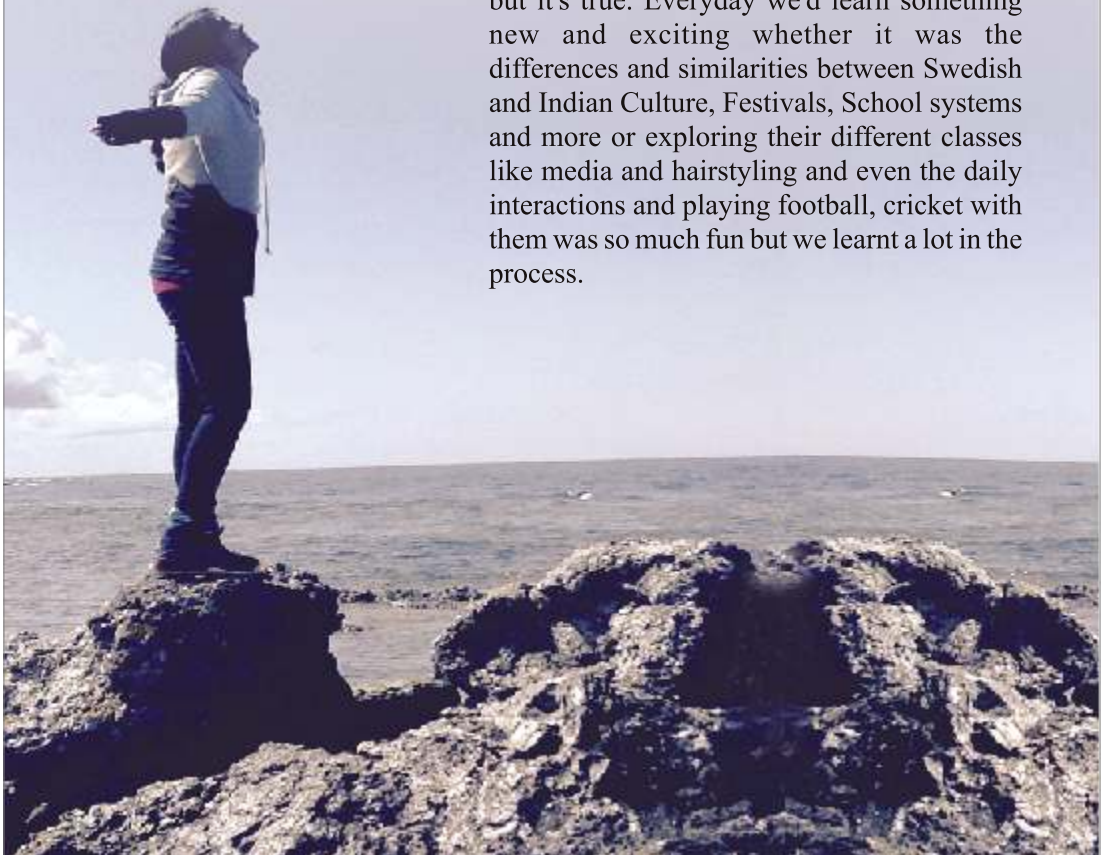
They did their best to introduce me to as much of the Swedish culture as possible and I tried my best to do the same with the Indian culture.

Almy, who was my host, took me to see the bonfire on Walpurgis Night and we ate typical Swedish dishes as often as possible. We would watch Swedish T.V shows (which they would graciously translate for me) and would have lengthy discussions about anything and everything at the dinner table. On the last night with our hosts, Almy and I actually cooked an easy Swedish

dish while alternating between playing typical Indian and Swedish music on the laptop and the day before we went out for a picnic where we bought only Swedish food.

Soon I fell into the routine and I actually enjoyed it, waking up early and the late night walks. I walked everywhere in Sweden, but I was luckier because my hosts lived in a location which was the perfect distance from everything. I sat in a car only thrice while I stayed with my hosts, otherwise I'd walk everywhere, and I loved it. To school and back, to the inner city and the shopping centre or the beach, everything was walking distance and if it wasn't, we'd walk anyway!

Going to school was a lot of fun too. That's a sentence that I thought I'd never say but it's true. Everyday we'd learn something new and exciting whether it was the differences and similarities between Swedish and Indian Culture, Festivals, School systems and more or exploring their different classes like media and hairstyling and even the daily interactions and playing football, cricket with them was so much fun but we learnt a lot in the process.



They were genuinely interested in India. We took a walk with the ninth graders from the school out into the old town and they asked us questions about feminism and religion and a lot of stuff related to India and it was fun because we got to know them a bit better too.

Aside from the wonderful experiences there was one thing that struck me about Sweden and the Swedes and it's something I'll never forget; acceptance. We were strangers in their country, people they had never met before and people they knew nothing about but they welcomed us with open arms.

The first day was a little awkward but it was smooth sailing after that. They accepted our culture and the fact that we'd do things differently or looked different and it wasn't hard to get to know them at all! Which was amazing considering they knew very little about India.

In fact all a few people I talked to knew about India was what they had seen in the movie 'Slumdog Millionaire'. Even though I haven't seen the movie, from what I've heard, it doesn't show much of city life so even though they assumed we came from the villages; a misconception we cleared, they didn't judge us or look at us differently.

What I liked the best was the last day. We were split into pairs and given a sheet of questions, some in Swedish and a survey in English. Our task was simple - go out into the town and get answers. And that's exactly what we did. It was probably the craziest thing we did. We ran all over town asking people to answer questions for us that we couldn't understand or asking them random survey questions like 'when was the last time you read a book?' or 'do you know what the capital of India is?' and asking them the Swedish questions was so much fun because they'd tell us the myths behind how Gotland was formed or about the king or how old a church was. They didn't laugh at us or refuse to answer us; in fact they did their best to answer everything as accurately as possible.

Gotland was magical, it was like a fairy-tale and I'll treasure it all. Every experience, joke, all the walks and all the fun, I wouldn't trade any of it for anything.

And at the end of it all I'm happy to have found another place to call home.

Tanisha Anand
TOS Student

Anchored to Serenity

Like a flower in a plant, like a tree in a forest, Sweden is a natural part of the world and adds to the beauty of it. If anyone asks me what I loved the most in Sweden, my answer would be its scenic beauty. The open fields swaying with a cool breeze, the tall and uniform belts of trees that surrounded and made a part of the island, and the amazing experience of seeing a beautiful oceanic view everyday... the experience was truly priceless. The experience with my host was another thing worth visiting Sweden for.

My host was not a student, but a really kind lady who had a connection with the school and was willing to host me (I was the second student from Orchid whom she hosted). During my stay there, she was literally my second mother. She took tremendous care of me, looking after my meals, paying for all the meals we had outside, buying me a lot of knick – knacks that I absolutely adore and also taking me to the ice – cream shop regularly! In short, my experience was no less than that of anyone else's, rather I also got to see much more. I learnt a lot about a regular person's life in Sweden, how they spent their time and also how they celebrated occasions and festivities.

This trip literally taught me how to be INDEPENDENT. I know this is something everybody must expect out of a trip of this sort, but for the first time, I was a part of the change. I learnt how to handle myself at moments when I was alone, of course, washing my clothes, spending the money I had in a wise manner, finding the way to a place on my own, and a lot more. To be frank, this was my first trip out of India. Usually the trend is to go on a vacation with your parents, enjoy most of the trip without worrying much because your parents are there to take care of the technical details. In my case, in addition to this being my first international trip, I felt I was literally bombarded with a tremendous amount of responsibility. Frankly, this is something I have never experienced before. Since 95% of the people talk to each other in Swedish, I was left asking for translations to my host everytime she and another person were having a conversation regarding me in Swedish. This made me feel uncomfortable; the situation in India is completely different. I hear languages that I know all the time. However, the situation there, it was something that made me dependent, and that made me feel quite out of control. The peaceful and quiet surroundings seemed alien at first, but I soon adjusted to it.



I particularly loved the amazing activities that were planned out carefully for the whole trip. School life in Sweden is really something worth being a part of. I loved the trip as a whole, and also enjoyed the company of the 9 kids who were travelling with me to Sweden. I am very happy I was a part of this learning experience and I will cherish the memories Sweden has given me forever.

Titiksha Bhaskar
TOS Student

A Rollercoaster called Sweden

Sweden- a beautiful Scandinavian country in Europe, full of small towns and villages with a population that is only about one-tenth of that of Maharashtra, not only brings back some beautiful memories of the picturesque islands there but also those of the equally beautiful friendships I made.

I have traveled a lot before, however Sweden, initially, caused anxiety. To travel without my parents and to actually live in the homes of the local Swedes was definitely a scary thought. Since I would not be with my parents, being a vegetarian and living in a family where the daily breakfast is ham and cheese was also something that worried me. I was one of the lucky ones to get an amazing host family- the Hermann's, who took care of me very well and made sure that I felt at home.

The very first two days were great since we were all living together- the 'Indians'. However the day we were going to move in with our hosts was nerve-wracking. After the get-to-know lunch, I was at ease and was really looking forward to the rest of the trip.

Another lovely aspect of this exchange program was the schools and the education system. It was entirely different ranging from their schedules and syllabus to their families and social lives. Although I was aware of the cultural systems of European countries, nothing can compare to actually experiencing it. The first surprise was that the students were allowed to have food and drinks in their class. In India if we were to munch on snacks while the teacher was teaching, it would probably result in a detention or a good scolding from the teacher. Also, they would address their teachers by their first name, which is considered disrespectful in our society.

One more thing I noticed in Sweden would be the security the



citizens feel. Here a 13 year old is as safe as a 30 year old would be walking on a town square. When in India, our parents are extremely protective of us and expect us to be with them at all times if we are going out but in Sweden we were all roaming on the streets, shopping with friends without the worry of being mugged.

The scenic beauty of Sweden is definitely another story. The most beautiful places for me would be the Fårö islands. It was a lovely white rocky beach with huge boulders. We would climb them and take pictures and then we set up a small picnic and we ate lunch.

To sum it all up, Sweden was the most exciting and fun trip I have ever had. That small country holds more memories for me than all the other foreign travel expeditions I have done combined. The major takeaway would be that no matter how different our cultures are, we are quite similar at the same time. No matter how differently we live, we behave in a very similar manner. After all, we are all humans and a mere change in the geographical location does not change it. I learned that in the end, all cultures come together. Life is a intermixing of cultures and this I learned in the amusement park of life on this fun rollercoaster called Sweden.

Aashna Jain
TOS Student



A Schengen Visa and a curious mind is all it takes...

... is what I would say to anyone who asks me, 'What should I do to prepare for the Orchid Exchange Program to Sweden?'

While growing up, travel was considered a rare luxury in my circles; not something families did every summer. And even if travel was considered, more often than not it meant nothing more than visiting the town/village where we came from, to meet relatives. There was a familiarity to the travel. A level of comfort, a home away from home. It was only recently, that travel to unseen places for the sake of travel became an option. And only then did I realize the thrill of stepping beyond the known. And what I had been missing out for so many years.

Going for the exchange program with the Guteskolan in Gotland, Sweden with 10 students and a colleague will forever be a travel like none other. Simplistically put, we knew we were there to learn about Sweden, to share a little about India, to absorb whatever we can and bring it back with us. We did indeed. We all brought back a little of Sweden with us. And what I brought back with me was my entire journey, in pictures. Every night I would write in my diary what I did in the day, and no amount of words would seem to do justice to what I experienced or saw. So I started keeping a picture diary. Thankfully phones these days allow you to do that.

And so I began clicking. The first couple of days it was pretty much 'random point and shoot'. The natural beauty of the town of Visby in Gotland was something that seemed right out of a fairytale (which we can safely generalize since all 'fairytales' are so European). Our group stayed together to get acclimatized and accustomed to the place. The next step was when our 'travel' really began in its true sense - we moved into our host homes. For the next 2 weeks, we lived in Swedish homes, attended the Swedish school and lived the Swedish life.

I would be able to speak about my experience in Sweden keeping two broad themes in mind, considering I was there on an official trip, the first being the school system. As expected, a lot of it seemed 'different'. Being a welfare state, the approach to education was a whole lot different than ours. Being a first world country the infrastructure looked a lot different than ours. Suffice to say, that since realities are different, the most effective activity to do is absorb all that can be transported back, without comparison.



Direct comparison seemed very superficial, and this is something we hoped our students too wouldn't get into, as complexities are then ignored.

Most interesting about the time spent in school were the discussions between the two groups. Misconceptions about life in the other country, culture, religion, the people, the geography were addressed as far as possible. That's when I realized how big a responsibility it is, to travel to another country on an exchange program. Suddenly you are not you, you are this warehouse of 'information' (at least you think you are) and you seem to be speaking for every Indian! And that's when I became the 'disclaimer lady'. I would begin every sentence with 'this is not true of all, but many Indians...'. And that's when the diversity of our own country hits us. Not when we're in the midst of it, every single day, but when we're sitting 1000 miles away.

I speak now about the second broad theme, my experience with my host families. I agree with James Michener when he said:

“If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay home.”

I think what helped me the most during my stay there is that I learned to love the food, was completely in awe of the customs, was very interested in the way the religion (or the interpretation of it) played out, and pretty much stuck to my hosts and others locals around me, bombarding them with questions. I was like an incessantly curious child that had a question about everything. The hospitality and warmth of the hosts and the way they welcomed the questions and us into their homes ensured that homesickness was felt only if you wanted to feel it.

The Swedish way of life is definitely worlds apart from the average Indian way of life. However, travelling and staying in their homes makes one realize how much of a common denominator exists between people all over the world. Like the picture I chose to attach with this piece, it really is wonderful to travel down a road, perhaps not knowing where it ends, but enjoying it while it lasts. I think one has travelled meaningfully if you have come back home finding those commonalities, accepting and respecting the differences, and have allowed the travel to change something in you, forever.

Anusree Menon
TOS Staff

An Experience I Will never Forget

My trip to Sweden is one that I would never forget. The trip began at the Pune airport, I was very happy to know that we don't need to go Mumbai to catch a flight. We were pretty bored and at the same time very excited for our trip.

Once we stepped out of the Stockholm Airport our first reaction was “It is cold”. We had to hurry as we had a ferry to catch. I was really excited about it. When we reached Gotland I was really sleepy and wanted to rest.

In the next few days we walked a lot, we went around the inner city and hung around in Visby and we got to know each other.

Then the big day came, when we were going to our host's house. I was very nervous. I had some trouble when I reached my host's home. But they were very kind and helped me and also the teacher and other students helped me overcome my discomfort.

My host Olof's dad had to go to the mainland for a few days. And there was no other adult at his house. So Christina, another teacher at the school, hosted me for a few days.



I had a lot of fun at their house too. She had two sons, and as it turned out we had common interests. They also had a dog, who I was excited to meet. Unfortunately one morning the dog bit me; she did not mean to do so. Christina and her husband woke up and treated the wound. They were really worried about me. Later the dog came to me and I could swear that she seemed to be apologizing to me with her expressions!

The next day we went to the Fårö Island. We had a blast over there. We had a small picnic.

The days passed by and I experienced their culture and their education system. Later, in the final few days we got to hang out with the 7th, 8th and 9th graders. Since they were of our age we bonded easily. We played a bunch of their traditional games, which were fun to play. We also taught them how to play cricket!

Then the day came when had to leave our host family's house and leave for Stockholm. That day we went to an ice cream shop where they had over 180 flavours of ice creams. Then we took the ferry to mainland.

We reached our lodge late and we went to sleep. Next day Annelie, the Vice Principal at the Cyber Gymnasiest, took us around Stockholm. We shopped, went to the technical museum and saw around Stockholm. The technical museum was the best museum I have visited in my life.

Then came the day when we had to leave Stockholm and come back to India. It was a sad day for us as none of us wanted to leave Sweden. If I ever get a chance to go back, I would love to do so.

Daksh Kanoria
TOS Student



21 Days Away From Home

This photograph was taken on the last day with our host families. For a little over two weeks I lived with them and had become a member of their family. At the end of these two weeks I was so attached to them that I did not feel like leaving them. So when this photograph was taken I was very emotional.

I was pretty nervous at the start of the trip because I had no idea about how I will be able to stay away from my parents for three weeks and how will I be able to live with a 'different' family from a 'different' country which had a 'different' culture. But my host family took good care of me, not giving me a single reason to complain. My host's name was Edward Lundberg. I had hosted him when he had come to India. We both had a lot of fun and visited many places together during his trip. So I was also excited to see him again.

Edward's family was a happy family and they referred to their family as a 'crazy' family. His family had five members who were his father- Hans, mother- Kerstin, his twin brother –Johannes and his younger brother –Malte. Edward's father owned a cafe in the old town of Visby and his mother worked as a journalist in the local newspaper. They took good care of me. They also took me to different places. Once they took me to the south of Gotland where Edward's family along with his relatives came. I was surprised to find out that



most of Edward's relatives had already been to India. Then once they took me to a Mexican restaurant that was recently opened. The restaurant was really good. We went to the Swedish festival of Walpurgis which was an important festival as it marked the arrival of spring. In this festival they lit a bonfire to keep the witches away from Gotland. I thought it was in a way similar to Holi.

Before coming on this trip I thought it would be difficult to live in a country without any spices. But I got adjusted to the food quickly since I am a non-vegetarian. Even Edward's family prepared many good dishes for me which I seriously loved. I ate almost all sorts of meat there and some of them you can't find them in India like beef, pork, duck, turkey etc. There were 3 things that I really wanted to take back to India. The first was the Swedish milk which was really fresh and didn't taste like the Indian Milk. The second was the yogurt and it is very hard to find something similar to it in India and the third was the Swedish candy. That was the only thing out of the three which I could take back so I ended up taking about 25 packets of candies!

I had no problem adjusting at my host's house. Similarly I had no problem adjusting at the school. The pattern of schooling in Sweden is way different from that of India. In Sweden the government supports every child's education by bearing all expenses of education and other education-related costs. So for instance, the school also provides laptops in which they have to do all their assessments. In school we mostly had English classes where we compared India and Sweden in terms of society, culture, religion and education. We also had some classes like hairstyling and the media programme which I feel no Indian school has. We were mostly in the Gutegymnasium (high school) and only for a few days we were in Guteskolan (middle school). The school took us to different places for excursion. Among the many things we did; we went to Fårö Islands, we went horse riding, we went with the media class to the east point of Gotland for clicking pictures and we went to Brucebo which was an art museum. Everyone enjoyed more in the Guteskolan because everyone was our age and they liked spending time with us which was different from the students at Gutegymnasium. One day we also tried to teach the students to play cricket and they taught us to play the local games in Gotland. On our last day we had a survey where we interviewed some locals and asked them various questions like on their hobbies, reading habits, and we also asked them a few questions on India. The whole point of the survey was to learn more about the people and to be more social to talk with

anyone in the future. This was also a lot of fun because we also got to know that the people in Gotland liked Indians and knew a lot about India.

Sweden is a very beautiful country. The first few nights at my host's house I had a problem falling asleep because it was a little too quiet! Gotland being a large island had a population of only 58,000 people which is even less than the population of Pune. Visby is a very beautiful city, which was more like a medieval town. It was also pretty clean and there was no piece of garbage lying around. We lived our last few days of the trip in the Swedish capital Stockholm. Stockholm is a beautiful but more populated city. In Stockholm we visited the Technik museum which was just marvellous. We also did a lot of shopping in Stockholm. No one wanted to go back home because going back meant doing all the projects and the studies of Class 10! But also because we felt like we just hadn't had enough of Sweden.

The trip to Sweden made me more independent and more social. Before this trip I was pretty shy and I was afraid of public speaking. But now I am not scared to do so. This trip also taught me how to spend my own money and be more responsible for my belongings. So this Swedish trip was so far the best experience of my life.

Ishan Puntambekar
TOS Student



Hej Hej Sweden! 3 incredible weeks of Swedish Culture

The trip to Sweden was one of the most exciting and fun trips I have ever been to. This was a great experience for me personally because this was the first time I was going outside India and the first time I was going somewhere alone without my parents.

We started our trip on 23rd April early morning flying Lufthansa. After travelling by various modes of transport like a flight, by bus and then by ferry we finally reached Visby almost 24 hours later. We reached the lodge a little after midnight local time and were dead tired, so we directly hit the bed.

We were going to stay at the lodge for the first three days and then we were to move to the host families, the beginning of our real 'Swedish' experience. We wanted to know about their culture, how the families were – the relationships the children share with their parents, friends and other relatives, to see and experience how they live, their school, the city and how the children there are similar or different from us. So during our stay at the lodge for the first three days, all the students who went from here were getting to know each other better. We enjoyed the natural surroundings of the lodge and moved around Visby town. The town was very beautiful with lot of colorful plants and

also it had a rich cultural heritage. The old city was amazing and we also visited the biggest and the oldest church of Visby. On third day before lunch at Gute Skolan we were introduced to the host families with whom we were going to stay for the next 2 weeks. I was nervous and excited at the same time because I had met Niklas earlier (I hosted him when he came to India), but this was the first time I would meet his family. Some of my friends were scared too because they were going to meet their hosts and families for the



first time and some were going to stay with two or more hosts.

Living with the hosts was a different experience all together. Niklas's parents are separated, so we stayed at his dad's house for the first week and then at his mom's house the next week. His dad lives outside Visby, in Darlem. Darlem was a really quiet place. It had a population of 500 people and you could hardly see cars there. I had a lot of fun living with Niklas. He is a football fan like me and we played a lot of football. His dad was very nice and warm person and took great care of me. He set up goal posts in the backyard of his house so that we could play whenever we wanted to. School started at the Gute Gymnasiet from the next day.

While in school, we attended classes with the other Swedish students. These classes helped us in interacting with the Swedish students and we got to know a lot about them. We felt that they were more independent and mature than Indian students of the same age; more oriented towards a career that they want to adopt. Most of them were thinking about how to earn money in their summer vacations. We also got to know about the subjects which they had. Mostly all the subjects were same but there were some special vocational subjects which we don't have in India, like hair styling, media, dog training, carpentry, cooking and languages.

We attended the hair styling class on Wednesday. We had a choice between hair styling and physics but most of us took hair styling because we don't have that subject in India. Hair styling was great fun. The girls got their hair styled by the students who attend the hair styling class. Meanwhile, the guys got tasks to do like curling and braiding of models.

I did the curling and it was great fun.

On the 30th of April, we attended a Swedish festival called Valborg. The Swedish celebrate this festival by lighting bonfires. This festival is celebrated to welcome summer with all its colors and warmth. There were choir groups singing a Swedish song, we had learnt the same song in our music class. We celebrated the festival with our hosts and their friends. 1st May was a national holiday in Sweden, so Niklas's dad took us to the south eastern part of Gotland. We had great fun there. On our way, we visited a railway station which was used earlier to transport oil and food. We also went to a Rock garden. The Rock garden was awesome and I got to know there that the whole of Gotland is made up of limestone and the rocks there were formed due to the waves from the sea. We also visited a town called Ljugarn which is the second largest tourist centre of Gotland after Visby.

On Sunday, we visited Fårö islands from school. Fårö islands are in the north of Gotland. I visited Fårö twice, once with my host and once from school. We had to go there by ferry. We went to a place where there were many huge rocks. We roamed around there, climbed the rocks, took some pictures and had lunch. Even though we didn't do much there, we had a lot of fun and I realised how sometimes not doing much and just relaxing and roaming around could be so much fun. After staying there for a while, we went to a church and saw the grave of a great director of Gotland – Ingmar Bergman. We were scheduled to go to a beach too but since we spent a lot of time near the rocks, the beach plan got cancelled.

Since this was also my last day at Niklas's dad's house, after returning, I spent time with Niklas and his dad chatting and nibbling on the yummy smoked fish he had cooked.

The next day I moved to Niklas's moms' house. His mom lived in Visby city very close to the Gute Skolan; she works as a teacher in Gute Skolan. She was really nice and took great care of me over the next week. We used to walk to school from her place.

The next two days were really exciting and engaging. We attended the media class. In the first session, we went around the Visby city, took photos of the city and the natural landscapes. After lunch, we had a studio session in the media room. The media teachers took many photographs of us with different poses. The next day, we went to an old limestone mine near Ljugarn, which is a now a museum, to take pictures of nature. We also rode in a small local train there. We climbed a hill and took photos of the plants, trees and rocky formations.

We spent the next two days in Gute Skolan. The schedule was almost the same as we had in the Gute Gymnasiet. We attended some classes and interacted with the Swedish students and got to know more about them.

On Saturday, I visited Niklas's Aunt's caravan house and had lunch with her. We also went to a place near Klintehamn and watched a football match over there. We just relaxed the next day; in the evening we visited the biggest ice cream parlor of Europe. It had more than 100 flavors of ice cream.

The last day of school was great fun. We were given a task in which we were divided into groups of two and we had to go out into the city and ask the people on the road some questions given to us by the school. Whoever came back first with the answers would win.

We also baked Swedish buns and had some snacks with the teachers.

It was then time for us to leave. Our host families dropped us to the dock. We all were very sad and said bye to our host families with tears in our eyes, hoping we will meet again. We then moved to Stockholm city, lived there for two days. We did a lot of things in those two days, looked around Stockholm, visited the Teknik museum, celebrated Tanisha's birthday and shopped around a bit. And then it was time for us to leave Sweden and come back to India.

I think I have learnt a lot during this trip to Sweden. This was the first time I was travelling alone and I think I have become independent and responsible. I took care of not only myself but also my money, my phone, my luggage and most importantly my PASSPORT. I also learnt how to adjust and live with people whom I did not know very well and while living with them I learnt a lot about Swedish families.

I was amazed to see how Niklas was easily able to adjust and spend time beautifully with both his parents.

The Valborg festival was very much like Holi that we celebrate over here.





The traffic on the roads and the respect and value for human life that we are able to sense there was a different experience (each car stops for the pedestrians and allows them to cross first). Cars would stop at signals even at late night!

I think the type of subjects that they have at school, prepares them for future and hardships of life at an early age. Most of our Swedish friends were planning to do some summer jobs and earn money.

We came to know that the government actually pays them a stipend, that is an amount to cover all costs of school and related costs.

In Sweden the sun keeps shining till late. Even at 9:30pm there was enough light and one could have read the newspaper.

We walked a lot in Sweden and actually enjoyed our walks in the evening in the lap of nature.

Many people over there are interested a lot in board and card games and spend their time playing the same with their family.

I really enjoyed my trip to Sweden a lot and would like to thank my School and my parents for giving me this opportunity and allowing me to undertake this journey of learning. I would also like to thank Niklas and his parents for supporting me and taking very good care of me. And finally I would like to thank Anusree di, Anil Da, Baishaki di, Lakshmi di and all my fellow students for the support and the wonderful time they gave me.

Karmanya Mendiratta
TOS Student

How Horse-riding taught Me Life Skills

An exchange program between India and Sweden is definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Fortunately, I was one of the few amidst tons of other students that had been lucky enough to be selected. And I am grateful that happened.

Sometimes, I wonder, what would have happened if I hadn't gone? The trip has been sort of a life changing experience in certain ways. Ever since I came back, I have looked at many things from a different angle, a different perspective. Sweden has taught me how to have freedom but also how to understand my limits. It has taught me how to deal with money and with people. But one of the most important things that I have learnt during my stay there was how to look at something not just from your own perspective but from others as well. I have also come to apprehend that one of the most essential ways to have fun is to always be open to new things. And also, before you do something, you must always be aware of the risks you are about to take. Judging by the way I have become a little more open minded, I knew I had definitely changed for the good.

One experience which I think was really valuable was that of horse riding. Now, some may wonder what horse riding has got to do with my life. Well, I had a slight fear of riding horses because of the possibility of falling off and though I never showed it, I have always cringed at the idea of taking control of the reins.

Anders, our teacher for the day, helped us get acquainted to the idea of horse riding. We were to pretend that our friend was a horse and we walked them all around with a rope. As we moved on to personal space, one by one, all 10 of us found out how much distance we needed from another person. It was quite funny and we tried to stifle our laughs as we watched each other do it. But only then did we realize what this was all about when Anders said:

“Horse-riding teaches you very important life skills.”

Learning to be confident and firm about a decision is necessary to be a leader, he had explained to us, referring to the rope activity. If you're not confident about a choice you want to make, people wouldn't really want to follow. Moreover, he made us recognize that if you want to be a good leader, you need to know what you think is best and at the same time, help the others.

Although some of us still doubted it, we decided we were ready to go. For instance, me. We hopped on our saddle, took the reins, we began! To my amazement, I was actually relatively good at it. I even managed not to ride into a tree's branches, unlike my friend. At the end of the day, I knew it was all worth it.

As an aftermath of this whole journey, I think, apart from making new friends, getting accustomed to a completely different culture and interacting with different people each day, I have become conscious of some very important life skills. I have become aware of how people live in different parts of the world and how to react when you are put in a different family with different customs. In the long run, my goal is to use these life skills as much as I can, and every time I do, I will surely be reminded of Sweden.

Rhea Desai
TOS Student



From Amul to Oboy

In this more than memorable Sweden exchange programme, there are a few things that I will always remember, but none that I would want to forget. A unique culture friendly people and amazing scenery are all things that describe Sweden. This article would focus on the things that I most enjoyed on the trip.

Firstly, I have to say how much I loved the food and services of Sweden; discovering the amazing Swedish products like risifrutti, oboy, yogurt, chocolates and candy (while this is seemingly shallow) was still great to eat and drink the flavours of Sweden. These unique foods tantalised my taste buds and I absolutely loved having them. Next I would like to talk about the school experience. They had rather unique attitudes which ran a stark contrast towards India. I was allowed to eat and drink in the classroom and as such I loved this too, we called the teachers by name (which was very alien at first) and I couldn't get enough of it. Free Wi-Fi and acceptance of phones in the school made me very jealous, it demonstrated a trust that the teachers had in the students. Now in Sweden the schools allowed me many opportunities but there was one that I really enjoyed; sports. I am known for not being 'athletic' or 'good' at sports but Swedish sports were still fun as even the swedes that I played with, didn't seem too proficient. Targeting the same spots and using 'cheesy' tactics helped me win these games. We played two Swedish games. The first of them, brenball, was a fusion of cricket and baseball that I seemed quite good at. The only difference between baseball and brenball was that in brenball the batsman threw the ball in the air himself, instead of the pitcher the “burner” sat there who collected the ball and attempted to catch the batsman between bases and strike him out.

The second game was 'kubb'. This game involved using rods to knock over arranged pawns in order to eventually knock over the king after his pawns are all hit. The knocked out pawns are used to defend your king instead. We played cricket with them as well.



I've saved the best for last; meeting the families, the Andersons and the Achrens were amazing people, each person in their own way. They accepted me as their own and let me use their stuff; they cared a lot for me and surprised me every day. The Achrens had a dog, Malwa, she was just amazing, loving, happy and fluffy. But I guess she takes time to get used to people, considering that she kind of bit Daksh! They took me on a boat trip as well; I've gotta say it was a great experience. I boarded the ship and helped sail it too, I was accompanied by my good friend Daksh which made it even better, afterward I visited flea markets and charity auctions where I nabbed an entire pokemon card collection for a very cheap price, and I tried out cow bingo.

As I was leaving Sweden I was sad but the gift baskets that my hosts gave me were amazing and helped me remember them. I had arranged gift basket for each of my hosts keeping in mind their desires and likes; boy was I surprised when they did the same for me! I guess its true what they say, "give without desire to receive".

In conclusion there is of course one final thing I will bring with me, my memories of those amazing comparisons; living in Sweden led to an unprecedented amount of comparisons to India, which I found quite humorous.

The picture that accompanies my article was taken in the port of Visby, before my departure. From this picture I wish to show how the Swedish government just does not do things for necessity, they efficiently take care of problems, give their citizens excellent facilities, but still leave room for simple but effective gestures to show that they are not of only a serious disposition. There are sheep and goat stone idols all over the plaza of Visby, in some places they replace dividers. Great graffiti covers the town; post boxes are covered with unique illustrations and anarchic expressions, it's something that I feel India will benefit greatly from. Imagine small tigers instead of the dividers? Wouldn't that be a nice world to live in?

Rishabh Bapat
TOS Student

More Confluence





Pradnya Niketan Education Society's

THE ORCHID SCHOOL

S. No. 80/1/2/1, Baner Mhalunge Road,
Baner, Pune : 411 045, Maharashtra, INDIA
Telefax : 020 - 27292701 / 02, 6620 2702
www.theorchidschool.org

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) ON ACADEMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN CYBER GYMNASIET, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN AND THE ORCHID SCHOOL, PUNE, INDIA

Date of signature: 8th December 2014

Effective date: 8th December 2014

In order to promote co-operation and the advancement of academic and

Educational exchanges the Cyber Gymnasiet, Stockholm represented by the Principal Annelie Rohlin and Lakshmi Kumar, Director, Pradnya Niketan Education Society and The Orchid School and Cross Cultural Consultant, Trainer, Sweden-India Project, hereinafter referred to as "Parties", agree to the following Memorandum of Understanding, hereinafter referred to as MOU:

1. Goals and Tasks

The two institutions seek to promote academic co-operation by encouraging direct contact and co-operation between their faculty members and departments, subject to the provisions of this MOU.

2. Ways of co-operation and joint projects

2.1 Within fields that are mutually acceptable, both Institutions agree to the following general forms of co-operation, subject to available resources:

- 1) Academic visits including visits of Board Members;
- 2) Short-term exchange visits of teaching faculty members and administrative staff;
- 3) Short – term exchange visits of students;
- 3) Exchange of scholars to participate in conference, symposia and seminars;
- 4) Joint teaching programs;
- 5) Joint student projects;
- 6) Hosting groups of students on study/exchange programs;
- 7) Hosting teachers on study/exchange programs.



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2.2 Specific conditions for academic co-operation and the financial and social arrangements for specific visits, exchanges, etc., will be developed jointly and stated in detail as addenda that will be an integral part of this MOU.

2.3 The Agreement imposes no financial or other obligations on either party before signing of operation agreement.

2.4 Each institution shall designate a liaison officer to develop and coordinate the specific activities agreed upon. For this purpose, the responsible parties will be the Principal of Cyber Gymnasiet, Stockholm and the Director of Pradnya Niketan Education Society and the Orchid School.

3. Duration of MOU

3.1 This MOU will become effective as the date of signature by the Executive Heads of the Parties.

3.2 The present MOU will be valid for a period of five years from the date of formal signature by both parties. Revisions or modifications may be proposed at any time, effective from the date of written agreement signed by both parties. Either institution may terminate this MOU by giving one year written notice to the other. The Agreement is automatically renewed after the first five years unless either party may notify the other party its intention of termination through written statement.

The Agreement has been made in Stockholm, Sweden, on the 8th of December 2014 in two copies, the both being completely authentic and having equal legal force.

Legal addresses:


Cybergymnasiet Odenplan

Vanadisvägen 98

113 46 Stockholm Sweden


The Orchid School

Baner Mhalunge Road, Baner Road

Pune – 411045

Tel – Office – 0091-6620 2702/65007681

E-mail: lakshmikummar62@gmail.com

My Experience In Sweden

My trip to Sweden was the best trip of my life. I remember every single moment of it. It was a magical experience. We were 10 students from 12th grade, accompanied by two teachers. We reached there on the 20th of April. The vice principal of Cybergymnasiet, Annelie came to pick us up at the Arlanda airport. For the first three nights, we halted at the city lodge. It was super fun when all friends were together.

I honestly enjoyed each and every breath I took in Stockholm. I didn't know who my host was or how he looked like till the welcome pizza party the school gave all of us. He was really entertaining! I got to see so many places in Stockholm itself: first was the city lodge area, which was the main city; then was the school; then came my host's place which was 50 km away from the school!; and I also stayed at Annelie's place for 4 days.

We went to quite a lot of museums. The first one was a Natural Science Museum. Then was the Technical Museum, which was my favourite one. We also visited the Noble Museum, which was situated inside Gamla Stan (Swedish for "Old Town"). The old town was around 300 years old. Apart from all the museums, we had lots of activities in school itself. Due to those activities, we got to make better friends, life-long friends! There was a Bystander project we had out there. We got an idea from the clip we were shown. So, my group and I came up with two situations regarding bystanders and I interviewed people on the street of Stockholm. It was then uploaded on YouTube.

The school was brilliant. The difference in education as compared to India is BIG! The students out there are given more exposure to what field they want to get into. They aren't restricted to specific subjects. They can select math with psychology and media. Basically they can choose any subject and any combination of their choice. We had a hairstyling session one day. The students aided our transformation by giving us completely new looks.



There was one day when we went to a hill in front of the school to see the pre-graduation ceremony. We all enjoyed the experience immensely.

On the very day when we visited the Noble Museum, we also went by bus to a place called Waxholm. It was kind of an island. My friends and I enjoyed there. Although the weather was windy and quite cold, a few of us ate ice-cream! While returning back, we took the boat. It was a sort of a mini luxurious cruise. That was the best part of my trip. How much do I miss those days!

There was one day when we went to see the zoo. It was called Skansen. It was huge! The purpose of visiting the zoo was that on the very day, there is a festival that takes place, where there is a bonfire, similar to Holi. Quite coincidentally, the historical background is also pretty much same. A witch was burnt on the day, just as Holika is burnt in India. It was freezing cold on that day!

Summing up everything, Sweden was the high point in my life and I will never forget it till my last breath. It was a completely different experience for me as it was my first time all alone. I'm looking forward for my Swedish friends to come to Pune in October.

Antariksh Kudal
TOS Student



“You Learn Everyday If You Pay Attention” -Ray LeBlond

Yes, we do learn everyday provided we pay attention. Learning is not just about textual knowledge; it's also about observing what's around us. Here are a few things that I have learned in the field of educational difference between Cyber Gymnasiet ; a college that we visited in Stockholm, Sweden; and The Orchid School Pune where I study.

Infrastructure: Cyber Gymnasiet has 2 buildings and have 9 floors. Each floor had somewhat same type of subjects that were taught to them like design and arts classes were on one floor, instrumental class [drums guitar etc] on the other floor etc. So the students reached their respective classrooms while the teachers waited for them.

Whereas over here students are segregated depending on the subjects they choose and a fixed classroom is allotted to them. Also, here the teacher is the one who come to the class while student remain in their fixed class. So we don't as such have a floor for same type of subjects but we have floors consisting of same grade/standard student.

In the classrooms: Teachers over there spend time on illustrating principles with sound examples. They make presentations, movies or short clips etc. They have more of psychological analysis then theory and concept.

Teachers here also make power point presentations but mostly stick to our textbooks and try to find different ways to explain that concept or chapter by putting it into a debate or discussion or sometimes gives us few notes. So we have more of theory and concept application based education rather than thinking and psychological analysis.



These are some of the differences I observed during my stay in Sweden which I thought was a brilliant student exchange programme which has given us immense amount of exposure to the world.

Anushka Pendharkar
TOS Student



Same Country, Different Experience

An exchange program to Sweden. The journey of a lifetime. Once again.

Except, a different school. A different city. A different host family. Different people.

Having done this before, I knew what the trip would be like. Well, more or less. But the last time was spent in the countryside, this time was the capital city. Things worked differently here. Quickly, very quickly. Everyone, everywhere at any given time, had somewhere to be. And what the rest of the world was doing didn't matter. The train was leaving in two minutes and they needed to catch it. And I daresay with great pride that we caught up to them. In the twenty-one days that we spent there, we discovered our way around town, memorizing the routes



and trains we needed to take to get home, wandered around previously unknown parts of the city but never got lost. And we did it on our own, no guides or adults. It was amazing.

Stockholm, being a very walk-friendly city, also helped me realize how much I love walking. Trudging along allies and gullies, discovering things and places you would never find on a tourist map. And that, I believe, is the true essence of any place. Its hidden secrets. Never found in five-star hotels, but in the more real places: its trains, its streets, its homes, and its people.

Ishani Kulkarni
TOS Student



More than a stamp in my Passport.

Hej, everyone! I'm back in India. 'J' isn't pronounced as 'Y' anymore. Perplexed, are you? Well, that is obvious. So, back at Sweden, 'J' is read as 'Y' in any word.

You just can't imagine how nostalgic I felt when the flight arrived at the Pune Airport. I miss every second I spent there, but after all, there's nothing better than being home. So in these three weeks of my life, I was exposed to so much of learning, either by observation or just my own mistakes/actions. I had to look at things critically to be able to grasp every Swedish aspect as a traveler. I had to act interested to get them interested to help me gain from this opportunity. There's so much beyond observing the basic things like the architecture, public transport and cleanliness. I believe I saw much more. The social behavior and the routine pattern as well as how the 'Swedes' looked at their lives.

Even when you are taking a walk in the streets of another country, you have a sense of responsibility of yourself and the way you interact with others. You not only represent yourself, but your country too. I'm sorry if I didn't make you feel like you were in Sweden, but I'm not much of a writer, and there is always a lot one misses when you write about such a wonderful experience. It's so hard to write about it!

I would encourage anyone and everyone to volunteer to go for such student exchange programs, and have a positive attitude when you are out there to grasp and learn all the life skills you can. Thank you for reading up, and have a great day!

Nakul Nawale
TOS Student



Swedish Delight

“It's a funny thing coming home. Nothing changes. Everything looks the same. Feels the same. Even smells the same. You realize what's changed is you”- F.Scott Fitzgerald.

3 weeks...Exchange program...Sweden...A lifetime worth of memories...How is it possible to envelope all of them in one or two pages? Now that I look back I feel that all of it was unreal. Because during those 3 weeks, reality was better than dreams. Here are my three main takeaways from the exchange program: Rules are rules for a reason:



I remember the first time when I sat on the second row of my host's car. The first thing my host said to me was, “Wear your seatbelt!

Sorry we Swedish people are very particular about this”. Such a simple task isn't it? Yet I'd never bothered to wear a seatbelt when I sat behind in a car in India.

Whenever my host and I would cross the road, I would just hang back and let the cars go first, while my host always walked straight ahead without any hesitation. In Sweden there is a law that the cars have to stop for pedestrians crossing the road. It took several weeks of my host going “Sans! Don't stop! Just keep walking!” to break my habit of waiting for the cars to pass. I felt like someone whose legs had recently been taken out of a lifelong fracture. It just made me realize how all these rules are incredibly easy to follow and they're made keeping everyone's well being in mind. Why don't we take an effort to understand the rules in our country and stop showing off our rebellious side?

Turn that stranger into a friend:

“What is India like?” “How do you like Sweden?” “What are your passions?”

These were just some of the questions that were asked by the students we met and interacted with. We told them about our life in India and what our ambitions were, and they shared the same with us. I'd talked to a

girl who liked the same author as me, and the next day she gifted me a book from her very own collection by the same author we had raved about the previous day. Attached inside was a note: "To my new friend from India. Hope you enjoy your time in Sweden". I had a smile on my face the entire day.

I can safely say that my host, Bani, was my twin sister and we were separated at birth. We listened to the same music, danced to the same songs, had the same sense of humour and we chatted for hours as if we'd known each other for years. The 3 weeks that I spent with my host family, I've grown to love them as they really did make me feel like home. I'm confident that this is a life long bond and its comforting to know that I have a family on the other side of the world who is looking out for me and also wants to see me thrive.

Independence is enlightening:

As I was the resident in someone else's house I felt it was my duty to help them out as much as possible. I would keep my room clean and bed made. I would set the table and wash the dishes. I even cooked food. And I thought, if I can do all of these things happily, for a family I have known for merely a few days, why can't I do the same for my family back in India? There are tiny little things that we depend on people for, when quite frankly we're fully capable of doing them ourselves. And the happiness you end up giving others is priceless.

There were exactly 3 times when I got lost and couldn't find my way in Stockholm. But as cheesy as this sounds, I feel it was necessary for me to get lost, to find myself, literally and figuratively. There is something quite empowering about getting lost on the streets of a new city. You're left alone with your thoughts and it makes you reflect on numerous things going on in your life. It tests your inner strength. It tests you as a person. And the best of people, always find their way.

Roaming around the entire city of Stockholm...Talking to the locals...Discovering the enchanting old streets and shops...Hopping off one subway to get into another...Laughing...Running...Panting...Living...And stopping only to see the beauty around...are just some of the memories from Sweden I hold close to my heart.

"You get a strange feeling when you're about to leave a place. Like you'll not only miss the people you love but you'll miss the person you are now at this time and this place, because you'll never be this way ever again"

-Azar Nafisi

Sanskruiti Wale

TOS Student

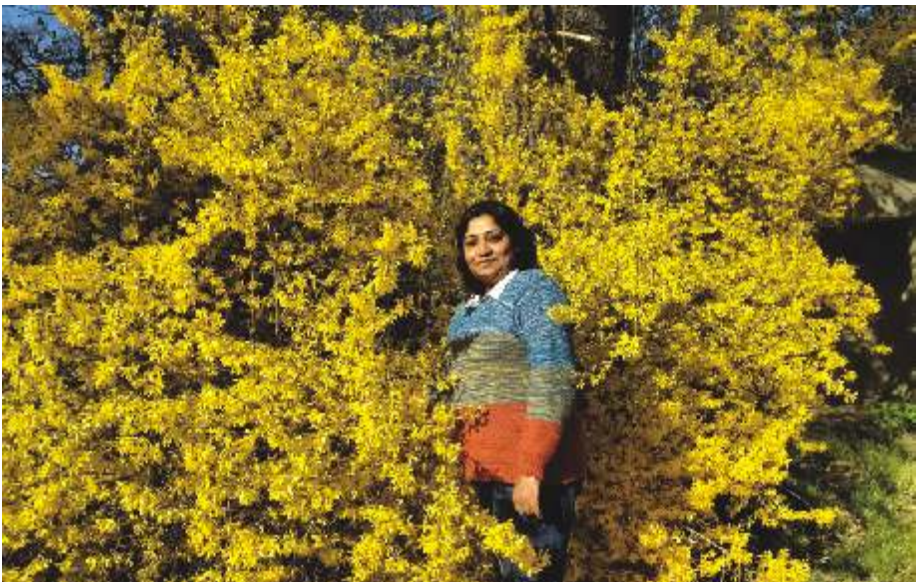
Glimpses of Stockholm

In the words of Pat Conroy “Once you have travelled, the voyage never ends, but is played out over and over again in the quietest chambers. The mind can never break off from the journey.”

Words cannot be more truer than this as during my moments of solitude I keep on replaying particular moments of what transpired when twelve of us from TOS embarked on a journey to distant Stockholm, our stoutest winter wear neatly packed in our equally bulky suitcases. What I intend to chronicle here is not a travelogue, nor would I make this a lengthy diatribe of a comparison between US and THEM, what I would like to share with you readers is a flavour of what we experienced in no particular order or of no specific pedigree.

It was with trepidation in our hearts and a deep sense of curiosity that we started the journey from Pune Airport. The suitcases were packed, weighed and repacked, forays made to the local shops for winter wear for which the mild Pune weather had no use. The last days were probably spent stuffing our luggage with the odd khakra's and similar ready to eat food, none of which we probably used in our entire trip but that is another story.

The moment we set foot on Swedish soil outside Arlanda airport, the thing which stuck me was the all-pervading orderliness and neatness coupled with the lack of sounds we Indians normally associate with a large city.



That cars could cruise by without honking, that so many people could congregate and move around yet not create sound was something to be seen and believed. This feeling stayed with me even after I came back and it is only now that I have reconciled to the fact and my ear drums have got used to the higher decibels.

When we reached our living quarters for the next two days after what I thought was a very warm welcome by vice principal Annelie, our bodies were tired from a long flight but our faculties awake soaking in every bit of the country, its smells and sights. Here I would recount an anecdote of how on the first evening during dinner the students took it upon themselves to have a quick reconnoiter of the place for suitable eateries. With their new found freedom away from the clutches of ever doting parents and supervisory teachers they were quite enjoying the un-chaperoned movements until after a while when I suddenly found them trooping back to where we, the teachers, were seated only probably to reassure their young minds that they had parental company. That done they again went off in different directions reassured and carefree.

Speaking of students some of them did initially have a hard time managing all that was to be managed, for the country laid a lot of emphasis on doing things themselves. That dinner needs to be warmed up and generally not bought to the table, that plates need to be washed, that all domestic endeavors are a group activity and you are an integral part of the group were subjects alien to some of us and that probably needed some time to get used to. Waking up unaided early without an earful from the parents and getting roadworthy ten minutes prior to the ETD was an effort as well. After all most of our kids belong to a society where each of them are treated with the due deference of feudal warlords, doting parents ensuring that the Lord is not inconvenienced, is not an easy habit to come out of. I am sure that something would have changed in them on their return, even if an iota, for I did see subtle change on our flight home.

The country was a marvelous place to be in, with its picturesque scenery, its soft courteous people with quaint dainty traditions. While the Tekniska Museet (Musuem) Natural Science Museum and the Nobel Museet impressed us with their exhibits, the visit to the Royal Palace astounded us with the sheer opulence of what the King still enjoys. Though Sweden is a democracy it was indeed heartwarming to see the deferential treatment to the king proving that development can coexist with a relation with the past and all

things old need not be thrown away. Our visit to Skansen on Walpurgis day with its stupendous bonfires still linger on my senses, the day started with us participating in the pre-graduation ceremony for the Swedish kids. We even had a glimpse of the May day celebration where all in Stockholm gathered for parades and singing along , only time we Indians saw a sudden increase in people per square inch and were quite glad because it reminded us of our country.

We had participated in many a group activity in their classes. What impressed me singularly was the sheer aplomb with which some of our normally introvert students handled themselves in these interactions. The poise and the clarity of thought from each one of them left me spell bound- I wonder if it was the singular act of letting them be themselves in a foreign land which brought about this change as they knew they had no one to fall back to . I still get goose bumps as I recount the experience , I wish I find the new found confidence intact when they come back for that is what would make them ready for what they want to be in the future. Our work of art in the clay modeling section wasn't Van Gogh either , but collectively we gave vent to the artists in us and some of the chairs , I dare say, were quite chic if I may say so.

The final barbeque and the final exhibition of all projects on the penultimate day were unique experiences by themselves. The fine feeling of camaraderie which our students had struck with their Swedish counterparts as we had with their teachers was evident from the interactions. Off course we Indians had this extra glow in us as we were longing to go back to our own cul- de -sac, our daily poha fixes and our doting family whose absence was now actually hurting.

Overall mission accomplished I would say . Stockholm left an indelible impression on our minds for more reasons that I would dare count , needless to say it made me , at least , a more confident person than what I had been for I have lived a contented 17 days in a foreign land and come back richer in experience and knowledge. To end by quoting the great Benjamin Disraeli - **“Like all great travelers, I have seen more than I remember, and remember more than I have seen”**.

Sarbani Moitra
TOS Staff



Don't Forget The Word 'Tack'!

This journey of mine to Sweden was an amazing one. The most interesting part of this trip for me was the social cultural and behaviour of the Swedes.

In Sweden ... silence is a trait to be valued. 'Mind your space' could be a Swedish motto. Swedes keep their body language and hand gestures to a minimum rather than relying on nonverbal forms of communication. Swedes are 'universalists' -meaning they respect rules and they think that rules apply universally. They are Universalists also in terms of gender. Gender equality is self-evident here.

There is a particular level of formality followed in Sweden. Even in public, formal is always better than informal that is: no gum chewing, slouching or leaning against things. Thanking is another trend followed here. In Sweden, one hears 'tack' or 'thank you' much more often than the other countries. Swedes thank each other when they take or when they give. If you are invited for dinner with a Swedish family, there is a little etiquette to breach. Just don't forget to say 'TACK!!'. I guess this is the only Swedish word I will remember throughout my life.

This was a small brief experience of mine about the social culture and behaviour of Swedes.

Shristi Rawat
TOS Student



SWEDEN – The Land of Experiences

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN. APRIL 2015.

This is one trip of my life I'm never going to forget. Be it, for enjoyment or experience or for the memories. This place was no less than paradise.

I got this opportunity from The Orchid School to go to Sweden for an exchange program. At first I was apprehensive about going because I was going to miss 3 weeks of my IIT classes. But my parents were supportive and they were like “this is a once in a life time opportunity”. They were absolutely right and today I don't regret my decision and their sagacity.

Stockholm was so welcoming. The people, the atmosphere was full of energy. Our trip lasted for only 18 days but it seems like I spent half of my life there. I felt I had adjusted to everything.

The school, Cyber Gymnasiet was AMAZING. The teachers, the students, everyone was so friendly. Their education system is entirely different but it was worth knowing their way of learning.

I stayed with a girl called Sofia. She studies in that same school. She stayed alone and was very independent. Staying alone without a family was entirely a new experience all together. It made me realize how important and difficult it is to take up responsibilities of running a house at such a young age. The fact that she was earning while learning made me feel so inspired that on coming back to India I'm exploring the same kind of avenues which would give me the same feeling.

The feeling all of us got by travelling alone in the subways was refreshing. It gave me a sense of responsibility. The mode of transport was really convenient and this gave us all the confidence to travel alone and freely without any hesitation.

The weather was perfect. Walking endlessly under the clear blue sky with a cool wind without traffic and pollution was peaceful. The different museums, zoo, were a treat to the eye.

This trip has been one of the best trips in **my life so far in terms of** memories, experience, learning, bonding with friends, and a reality check. If given an opportunity to go for an exchange program like this one should definitely not even give a second thought.

Divya Manjunath
TOS Student



A Journey of Learning

SWEDEN

S- SELF RELIANT

W-WISE

E- ENERGETIC

D- DARING

E-EXUBERANT

N-NOSTALGIC

Is what Sweden exchange Program was all about. The breakup of the word Sweden is itself self explanatory- and that's what my daughter Divya Manjunath came back as after the trip. The exchange program of 3 weeks was an inspiring, enabling, empowering and transforming experience in totality for a girl like Divya and a girls' education is the single best investment that any society can make.

Lakshmi di rightly said, “The exchange program to Sweden is an initiative towards sensitizing the students to different cultures to enable them to undertake the challenges of travelling, living with the host families, stepping out of the comfort zone. It makes them self confident and develops their personality which is a step towards making them locally rooted and globally competent citizens of tomorrow in the true sense.”



The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows. Walt Disney rightly said:” if you can dream it you can do it”- and my daughter's dream of going to Sweden for an exchange program through the Orchid school came true. Divya having said yes instantaneously for this trip made us think about it later- can she actually do it? And well there was no looking back after that.

Pre travel jitters, the preparations, and the rapport formation with the host family online, buying gifts was indeed a new experience. During her stay the nervousness of going into a strange family, adjusting with them, getting to know their routine and life style was a challenge- post Sweden trip Divya did not want to come back and took some time to adjust to the “new Environment” (her own home) after three weeks of stay in a foreign land. We could see a positive influence, due to the right encouragement, direction and mentoring the students had during the stay.

To quote Maya Angelon and to summarize Divya's stay in Sweden – “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Jyoti Manjunath
TOS Parent



The Path to Paradise

Where is paradise?

Here's a fact: basic human tendency dictates that we refrain from breaking out of our comfort zones. We do not wish to explore too much, as long as we have what we want. But what really happens when you break through those imaginary barriers? When you explore the world beyond? That was what we, a group of 10 Indian students, had to find out on our trip to Sweden in the summer of 2015. There we had no maids to clean up after us. No cooks to make us food. No mother to wake us up on time for school. At the same time, we also were granted liberty: liberty, to roam around the beautiful city of Stockholm on our own. The liberty to explore and understand the cultural disparity between the 2 nations. The liberty to sit listening to street musicians with their mellifluous melodies, to have an ice cream at Kungstragarden in the chill.

And in the whole process, we gained an abundance of values, lessons, knowledge, and wisdom. We were taught the invaluable virtues of independence, money management. We got a sneak peek into the very parliament house of Sweden. Our eyes were treated to the amiable views from the hills top of Skansen, the top of Globen. Was THIS paradise? Look in front of you. Not so close, far away. Walk in the way of the beautiful valley you are already standing on. Cross the daunting (but in fact not too laborious) mountain peak. That's where you shall find paradise...

Shaunak Kulkarni
TOS Student



Enriching Learning Experience

I'm one of the 10 lucky students who got to visit Stockholm this year.

It was not just a trip to just another country. It was a beautiful learning experience. A trade of cultures, a panorama of the breathtaking sites of Stockholm and a great step towards learning to live independently.

From the cobblestone streets and ochre colored buildings of medieval 'Gamla-Stan' Old Town to the picturesque King's Garden lined with pink cherry blossom trees, every road told us a different story.

But the most different experience was living with a Swedish student and being a part of their family for half a month. My host sister and I took a subway every morning to her school, Cybergymnasiet. A school for students from all over the city, from every culture and race, a school that provided education and training in all fields. The one very important thing I learnt was that in Stockholm, it was not the people's need to get educated; it was the government's need to get people educated, because their education meant progress of their country.



After school, my host sister and I usually took a 'Fika' a Swedish term for chilling out, getting coffee and a snack. So we sat near a lake, hanging on to our coats to protect us from the cold, while sipping on our warm coffee and biting into our fresh cinnamon buns; we talked about cultures, traditions and other norms so common to our respective countries and so uncommon to one another's. In that moment we realized how different our lives were and how fortunate we were to be a part of this exchange program, to live a fortnight of a life so different.

I look forward to the day she comes to our city, and I get to show her around town.

I'd like to thank the Orchid school for letting me be a part of The Sweden exchange program that gave me a memory for a lifetime, a story to tell everyone and an enriching experience.

Tanvi Gudipudi
TOS Student



Stepping in to a New World

Living away from home, on the other side of the world, has impacted me in ways that will stick with me for life. Since being in Stockholm for 21 days I've become more independent, confident in the choices I make, I've also learned to take in everything as it comes and not to judge people by their first impression in any situation. Being here and experiencing a different culture, a different lifestyle, and a different language has changed my perception of life. I am so much more aware of the world now, and when I get back, I can't wait to pass on all of my new knowledge. Being put outside of your comfort zone is scary at first and is not at all easy, but now I realize that it is just an exciting new opportunity life gives you to try new things and learn from them.

I am a person who loves making new friends and socializing so I was really looking forward to go to Sweden and make new friends. I got to live with an amazing host family who made me feel like I was living in my own house. They were 5 siblings in that family, living with them actually taught me how to create a stronger and healthier bond with my sister and parents. I became more independent and responsible since I had to look after myself. The best experience was travelling alone in an unknown city and finding your way back and getting to see a new environment.

The school we went to was amazing! All the lectures we attended were worth listening to, I learned a lot in those 21 days. If I ever get a chance again to go to a student exchange program without thinking I will be ready to go there and come back again with a whole new experience and new friends and new learning.

In closing I would just like to quote – “What you get by reaching your destination isn't as important as what you become by reaching that destination “.

Tejaswini Waghulde
TOS Student

















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Baner Mhalunge Road, Baner, Pune - 411 045.

Telefax: +91 20 6620 2702 / +91 20 6500 7681

Email: contactus@theorchidschool.org

www.theorchidschool.org