

Anna Zoch

Travelling to Absurdistan



Curious Stories on the Road

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1. Preface

„If someone goes on a trip, he has something to talk about!“

This is all the more true for me, as I have been traveling as a study tour guide for many years, mainly in north-western Europe.

Anyone who works with people knows that it is never boring. Our fellow human beings always cause unforeseen and sometimes very curious situations. In my long-term work, I have now seen numerous events, some of them quite absurd.

At some point, I started to write my stories down in order to be able to remember these special trips and, above all else, my many guests. Each anecdote stands for itself. Sometimes, however, experiences from several journeys have merged into one story.

The "common thread" of all stories is my great love and passion for my job as tour guide.

I wish to share these personal moments and experiences with you now and invite you on an exclusive trip to my private "Absurdistan"!

Would you like to join me?



**In front of the Admiralty Church in Karlskrona
with “Mats Rosenboom”, known from the novel
“Nils Holgersson” by Selma Lagerlöf**

2. “My Swedish Suitcase Thriller”

A summer in Sweden! Who doesn't immediately think of a bright blue sky with puffy clouds, of the countless lakes or the sound of the surf, of red wooden houses on bare archipelago cliffs polished smooth by the ice, of a true summer idyll in the country or at the coast, strawberries with cream, in white clad, and blond and partying Swedes! And everything in a calm and relaxation mood, the hectic rush and stress seem far away ... Oh yes, that is the Swedish summer, definitely, I've seen it again and again, so very exciting.

But, this idyllic impression can also be deceptive. Do not trust the "Lindström" certificate so lightly: We are on our way in Sweden, a country where the grotesque, absurd and even criminal can happen. You don't want to believe it? Then I will tell you about my personal suitcase thriller, which also happened in the very tranquil southern Sweden.

When I started my first one-week tour of Sweden in the 2012 summer season, I had no inkling of what was going to happen. Full of joyful anticipation, I arrive from Hamburg Airport with my guests from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. We fly to Jönköping, which is picturesquely located on the south bank of Lake Vättern. After landing at the small airport, all passengers walk across the tarmac to the terminal. This walk alone, coupled with the sight of the small, automatic lawnmowers, which do their rounds in front of the terminal building, trigger astonishment and budding enthusiasm among the passengers.

Then the wait at the luggage belt, where the first pieces of luggage will soon appear. Those who receive their suitcases can consider themselves lucky, because I quickly realize that this is not a given situation.

Connection flights, in particular, seem to carry with them the innate risk that reloading and forwarding of the suitcase is not always guaranteed. So, one of my first official acts at the airport is to submit the "missing person report" of two suitcases, the owners are a slightly angry mother-daughter team. "This is a great way to start your vacation!" is their sarcastic comment, which I should hear more often ... to my deepest regret.

Soon afterwards, rain sets in - greetings from "Murphy"! The rain jackets of my suitcaseless guests are of course well and safely stowed in their suitcases. We spend our first night in Jönköping, but unfortunately, it is not possible to shop for cosmetics that day. Because it is midsummer and all the shops are closed, but luckily, our hotel is prepared for such emergencies.

The next day, a Sunday, takes us south-west to Lund in Skåne, where we will spend the second night. In the course of the evening, one of the missing suitcases actually arrives, but one is still missing, although the two "injured parties" did traveled together. In the meantime, the nerves of the guest, whose suitcase is still on the move, and who has spent the whole day at around 18°C without a jacket while encountering several rain showers, are pretty fried. The next morning there is the redemption: shortly before our departure from Lund in the direction of Malmö, a taxi from Copenhagen Airport arrives at the hotel with the last missing suitcase! The rest of the trip runs without further losses worth mentioning, and in the end, it is a wonderful

travel experience in the Midsummer Night's Dream for all guests, despite the initial obstacles.

The next summer I am flying back to Sweden, full of anticipation and cheerfulness, not knowing that this time the suitcase drama will increase. After the first two weeks of successful and problem-free tours, the arrival of the third group of guests leads to a "meltdown"! The suitcases of 10 passengers are missing, this is almost a third of my group, and all from different departure airports: Vienna, Zurich, Munich, Frankfurt and Düsseldorf. This cannot be true! A colleague, with a completely different travel program, also has lost luggage. Initially, the procedure is the same as the past year's. Again, the losses have to be reported. But, in the meantime, I copy the list with the respective hotels and my Swedish mobile phone number as a precaution and I leave it at the airport in Jönköping.

This time it, the arrival is on a normal weekend so that the most urgent items can be bought in Jönköping. Of course, none of those affected are enthusiastic, especially a gentleman from Austria reacts very indignantly about his loss of a suitcase and, in addition, believes that he got a particularly bad hotel room. This is when it is really necessary to have a light touch ... Again a journey begins under poor starting conditions, again I hear the sarcastic sentence "This is a great way to start a vacation!" But at least this time the weather holds.

Hoping that at least some of the missing luggage might be in Lund the following evening, we set off the next morning. Halfway to our first stop of the program my cell phone rings. Somebody from Copenhagen Airport wants to know the reference numbers of the injured parties, which are listed on their receipts. I ask for a call back at a later time, because their phone number is not visible on my display and after

all, I still have to complete my program, so I cannot always make calls. After the visit at our next stop, all those affected look for the required paper in their existing luggage.

Then we drive on and I hope to be called back at the next stop in order to provide the requested information. The callback comes, as I somehow suspected, shortly after our next departure, again at an inconvenient time. So I ask them to call me back during our next stop, not considering that there is hardly any cell phone reception in the headland on Kullaberg! And of course, the requested callback only arrives at our departure.

The next destination is Lund, the location of our hotel for this night and not too far from the Copenhagen and Malmö airports. Our hopes of finding the missing suitcase on arrival at the hotel is quickly dashed, but the evening is still ahead of us and the missing luggage could still arrive before we leave for Malmö the next morning. Then we go to bed and dream of suitcases... Yes, me too, because I received another call that evening. This time it is the airport in Malmö with the good news that the missing luggage would arrive there the next morning around 11 a.m. Unfortunately, that is about the same time as our departure time for the next stop on the trip, which is about two hours from Malmö. The disappointment of a third of the guests that their suitcases did not arrive for breakfast is not particularly conducive to a group trip. So, what shall I do? I decide to detour our trip past Malmö Airport, even if this delays the rest of the day's program. After all, a large part of the tour group is affected.

We drive to Malmö Airport, which is in the exact opposite direction of our program, and arrive full of hope. And thankfully, various abandoned suitcases are found in the terminal. But, three of the missing bags are still lost. I console my grumbling and now unfortunately slightly smelly

guests, after all, there is also an airport in Kalmar, where we find our next hotel. Additionally, there is shopping in Karlskrona that afternoon, but the weather is just too nice! Sincerely, these are not really particularly good moments in the life of a tour guide...

On the way, I get a call from Kalmar airport: our missing suitcases are on their way and will be taken to the hotel in a taxi. Hallelujah what a joy! When we reach the hotel in Kalmar in the evening, a taxi actually pulls up and delivers TWO of the three missing suitcases. The person concerned, a lovely professor from Zurich, now loses his composure and explains to me that he has been walking around in the same clothes for three days and that this situation is no longer bearable for him and his fellow travelers in view of the summer temperatures. ... His suitcase will arrive in the course of the next evening in Stockholm, by which we have already completed half of our trip.

That evening, the following happened at the hotel in Stockholm. I received a call from Stockholm International Airport in Arlanda saying that the last remaining suitcase will be delivered to the hotel. Shortly before 11 p.m., the last suitcase has already arrived, my mobile phone rings again: this time it is the hotel reception. A suitcase has arrived and names from my travel group are written on the banderole. I go downstairs and I am stumped at the names on the banderole: there is a total of three names and two match guests from my group. BUT we already have all of our luggage and I don't know what to do with this excess suitcase! So I tell the receptionist to send this suitcase back since we have already been taken care of! That week, I get the impression that my Swedish mobile number is on file at all the airports and that I am the first contact person for all "abandoned" suitcases during that time. In the end, the