

If you are interested in exploring the history, geography and culture of Sweden while sharing unforgettable experiences, gaining new perspectives and friendships - all with an English-speaking tour – look no further. My wife and I, along with a number of relatives and friends, have had the pleasure of joining Crister and Maria Brunnegård, owners of Saxentours AB, on tours of Västergötland in 2018 and again in 2021. We have also met participants from earlier tours and Swedes who have travelled with Saxentours in North America. All have been enthusiastic about their experiences, and I know many share the thoughts expressed here.

This tour company, under Crister and Maria's direct guidance, offers a *unique personal touch*. They are your hosts and Sweden is their home. Interesting and articulate friends and family members often participate and add texture to tour experiences. One might be an artist, another an author, an historian or a college student. As an example, a neighbor of Crister's father, an accomplished painter of farm scenes, was also the owner of land where one of the sets for the recent remake of "The Emigrants" was filmed. After showing us the set and telling us about the filming, he led us through a small forest to his farm, set near an idyllic pond with geese and grazing sheep. His family came out to welcome us and offered to show us their beautiful farmhouse. It created an indelible memory.

The Brunnegårds expertise, contacts, and advance preparations are all top-notch. They have personally checked out every mode of transportation, restaurant, tour site and guide in advance. We were especially impressed by the quality of the on-site guides. The Saxentours association with SwedGen (discussed in Marilyn Braun's letter) provides not only genealogy expertise, but the SwedGen folks often accompany tour groups, offering expert and interesting historical content, all delivered with a great sense of humor!

Flexibility is also important in the Saxentours approach. For small groups they will even consult with participants before finalizing the itinerary, to be sure that expectations align with what they propose. Once the tour begins, everything runs like clockwork, with guides on cue, restaurant tables reserved, and bathroom or photo stops as needed. Yet enough time is built into the structured portions so that one never feels rushed. On our most recent tour it was even possible to fit in two unplanned stops that became of interest to several of us during the trip. This flexibility also extends to the balance between structured and free time. An occasional later breakfast, a free afternoon or a lunch or dinner 'on your own' provided much appreciated opportunities to shop, walk, just relax or have an impromptu dinner.

The value of a Saxentours experience in Sweden is hard to beat. Per day, the cost was similar to what we have paid for private day tours in other countries that did not include hotels or meals. Our hotels were well-chosen, often of historic interest, and had huge breakfast buffets. Included meals were wonderful but even for those that were not included, Crister and Maria would often arrange locations with great views and menu options that gave participants more choices and value than if everything had been pre-selected and paid.

For those interested in genealogy, access to SwedGen's research capabilities and materials, all included in the tour, also adds tremendous value at a fraction of what it would cost to contract such help separately.

At the end, a tour in Sweden with the Brunnegårds will become a lasting and cherished memory. Maria keeps a great collection of photos and videos from each trip and tour members have been known to get together months later to share and relive their experiences. Even if you don't sign up for another trip you will have many opportunities to meet Crister and Maria again as they bring Swedes to locations throughout America and Canada. This cross-cultural perspective, for which they have been honored by the Swedish government, is why they don't just offer tours, they acquire new friends as they create them. I would be happy to discuss my experience with Saxentours in more detail with anyone who would like to contact me.

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