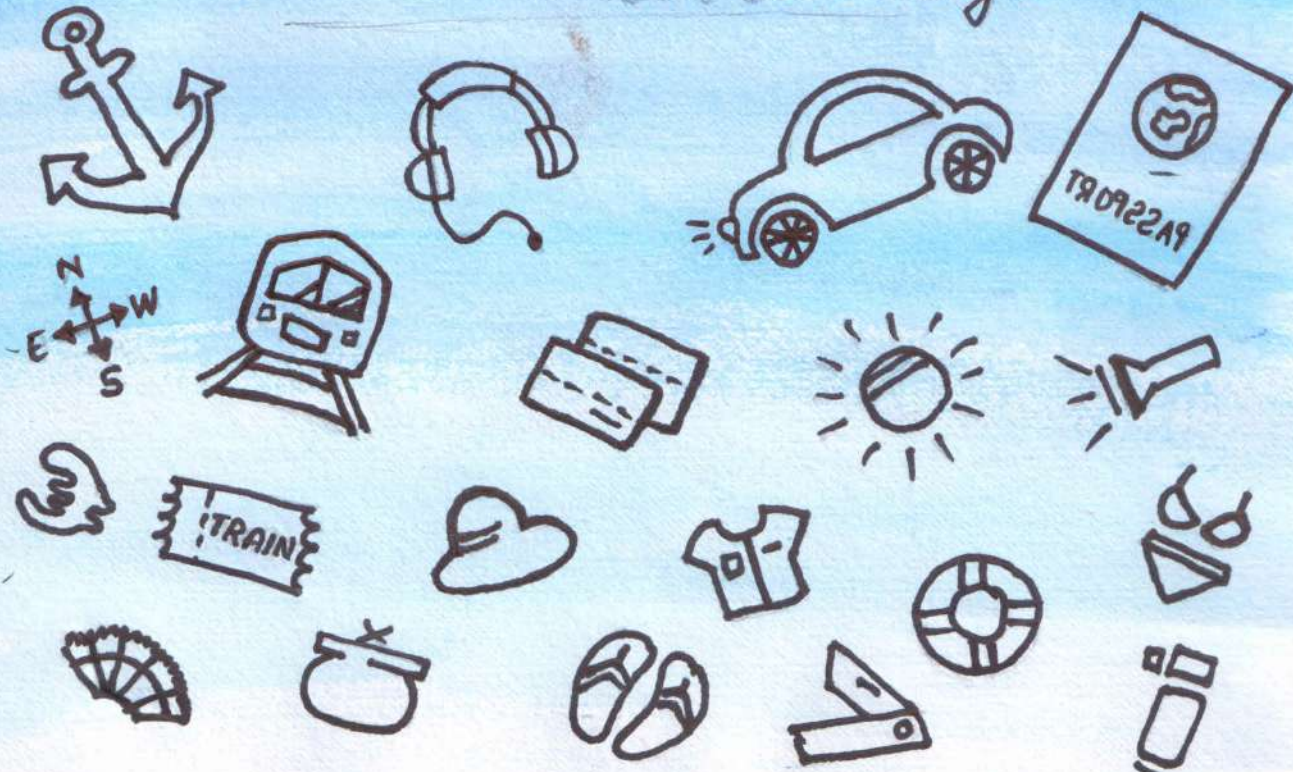




# FIKA

*Indo - Sweden Exchange*





1 April, 2019



This was the onset of a beautiful journey; little did we know that it was going to hold some of our fondest memories. Our journey began with the farewell of our Indian families, and the greetings by our Swedish ones. A delay of two lengthy hours was enough for anxiety and anticipation to kick in. We successfully manoeuvred past these with the help of the sweet company of each other. After a tiring 14-hour flight, we stepped into the Gothenburg airport to be greeted by a few students and teachers, which was a heart-warming welcome for our exhausted selves. The following was a car journey to the famed Lerums Gymnasium, what intrigued us, was as to how quiet and calm the roads were.



1 April, 2019



A warm welcome awaited us at the school, with what the Swedes call "fika" which is supposed to be a very important part of the Swedish culture. The fika itself consisted of "bulle" or what we know as cinnamon buns with vanilla cakes and a juice prepared from a local berry. The main purpose behind this exercise was to bond with our partners and get accustomed to the fact that we were going to live with them for the next ten days. This was short-lived by a graceful welcome speech by their beloved principal Ms. Astrid Kling, succeeded by a brief schedule of what the next ten days had in store for us. We then parted ways, lugging our heavy baggage behind us, letting our Swedish counterparts mesmerize us with their cosy little homes and lovely families.



2 April,



After a good night's sleep, we began the day by meeting at the school. This was when we got to experience the public transport facilities offered by the Swedish government, when we all came our own separate ways initially. The agenda for the day consisted of first visiting the Gothenburg Urban Development Centre, which was quite an adventurous journey, which included a few bus rides and a short ferry to reach an island. What the Urban Development Centre itself consisted was a small 3-Dimensional model of the city itself with already present infrastructure and future endeavours. A well-informed and knowledgeable guide, who gave us an idea about the importance of looking ahead and making a plan for the future and its execution, presented this to us, an insight provided to us regarding as to how some futuristic thinking can help achieve sustainability and peace for their citizens while also keeping in mind the environment at large. An adjacent building to the development centre was a construction of breathtaking beauty, known as the Kuggen building owned by the Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg. All this learning had now got us famished, and the Swedes were kind enough to accompany us to an Asian cuisine lunch in a small restaurant in the city. This was followed by a once in a lifetime opportunity of viewing the behind the scenes of an actual opera house.





2 April, 2019



We visited the 'Göteborgsoperan', which had a unique structure; the whole place was a replica of a ship, but with an opera at the epicentre instead of engines. A cheerful guide explained all this to us; we were then witness to the actual costumes, makeup, sets, practice rooms, production, and direction to arrive at the Main Auditorium, which could hold 1200 awestruck people. This was supposed to be the end of the day, but we were lucky enough to have one of the parents as the Vice-Dean of the Gothenburg University and hence got a tour and interactive session of the University as well as a brief introduction to the Swedish education system. The university itself was renowned for business, economics, and law, which had various bachelors and masters degrees for people all across the world. One important feature of their education system was the cost of their education, the catch was that they had to incur no costs for ones education in Sweden it was free of cost. Now coming to the best part of the day, we all met up in one house with a motive of watching a movie together, but this turned out to be a pizza party with us Indians teaching the Swedes our beautiful cultural dances and songs. This was when we actually bonded, like proper friends and not just mere acquaintances who had enrolled themselves into an exchange program.



3 April,



2019

The previous days had been quite hectic and exhausting and we definitely needed a day of relaxing and just spending some quality time with each other, and that was exactly what we did. The impeccable planning accounting for everything must be applauded on the Swedes behalf. We started the day with a tour of the school itself. A Gymnasium is an upper secondary school, which consisted of various courses ranging from Social Studies, to Natural Sciences, Economics, Technology and Arts. These were the University preparing programs for the children interested in book knowledge and wanted a career based upon the abovementioned subjects. The beauty of this education system is that they give equal weightage to vocational programs and university training programs, and hence had separate infrastructure for jobs like electricians, plumbers, carpenters and so on. One other innovative part of the school was the presence of a library, but this was not any ordinary library, not only the students but also the residents of the town used it too.



3 April,

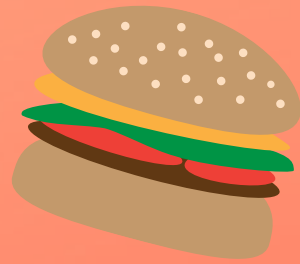
2019



To further understand and get accustomed to the Swedish culture and lifestyles, we had a classroom immersion, where we sat in groups and discussed with the Swedes about everything ranging from the differences and similarities of both cultures, common misconceptions, importance of a few matters in both the countries, and so on. The Swedes were quite taken aback with a few of our traditions and customs, but were satisfied upon giving them sufficient justifications for the same. They say that the best is saved for the last, which is exactly what the Swedes had planned for us. We had a joint cooking session where we together cooked Indian food. This was a fun filled experience with many life lessons learnt. We learnt on that day that only after we strive hard can we truly enjoy the fruits of our labour(literally), we also saw a lot of friendly competition between people, but at the end of the day we all came back together and sat on the same table and ate each other's food. We learnt teamwork and that sharing is indeed caring for each other.



4 April, 2019

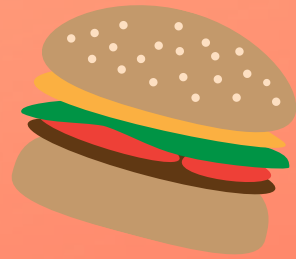


The day had come, for when we bore the weight of a whole country on our shoulders. The day had come for when we showed the Swedes India and where its beauty lies. We Indians had prepared a small presentation and a small dance to make them aware of what the Indian culture consists of, and the immense diversity present in this spectacular country. It turns out all that anxiety and preparation proved effective, it was received with warm applause and sincere congratulations. We then had another classroom immersion where we attended a history class. What we could infer was that, there remains to be a stark contrast in the ways in which they receive education and the way we do. The Indian education system mostly consists of subjective learning of facts, whereas the Swedish education system included a more practical approach and independency where they do not have set portions per se, to learn. They have to choose a topic that interests them, and write a thesis, upon which they are graded. This takes a more practical approach where the student doesn't depend on others to be taught on the subject, and the teachers here are just a guide to set them in the right course if they wander off.





4 April, 2019



After which we had lunch in the school cafeteria along with all the other students of the Gymnasium, which was another fun experience, with a side of luscious European food. We then went on to meet the mayor of Gothenburg. Who gave us an insight about the political system present there, and its benefits and flaws when compared to the Indian political system. One important thing we learnt was that, climate change also plays an important role in the political system in Sweden, so much so that they even have one political party dedicated only towards solving climate issues. Now, it was time for use to change into our good clothes, as we were to watch a dance show at the opera house that evening. Everyone looked exceptional with their beautiful dresses, so much so that the passer-by's were gaping at us. After a good photo session, we took our place in the mighty opera house to enjoy the rest of the evening with fantastic music and even better dance to make it a perfect little European evening.



5 April,



2019

On the fifth day of our exchange with Lerums Gymnasium in Gothenburg, Sweden, we started the day by meeting in school at nine in the morning. We seven students, two teachers, along with two Swedish hosts headed to the Lerum Central Railway Station. We then caught a train to Angered Central via Partille Central. Angered Central is considered as one of the underprivileged areas of Gothenburg, where the Million Programme is practiced. This was introduced in Sweden in the early 60s when the housing shortage became severe. The purpose was to build one million new houses. It was mostly financed by government trusts. This is one of the areas that is segregated the most, majority of the residents are of foreign background with the average income of 200,000 SEK per year. We then took a tram to Saltholmen, which is one of the wealthier areas in Gothenburg. The houses there are comparatively expensive, over 10 million SEK, because it is situated very close to the sea and has a beautiful atmosphere. After taking a tram back to the city of Gothenburg, we got lunch at a lovely Italian restaurant, Vapiano.



5 April,  
2019



Our next visit was to the Röhsska Museum. It is a museum focused on design, fashion and applied arts. The museum collection consists of over 50,000 objects. The majority of the collection consists of handicraft and design products from Sweden and Europe and arts and crafts from Japan and China. The objects in the museum collection tell stories about creativity, expression, styles, fashion and artistic ideals during different eras and in different parts of the world. It also offers lectures and workshops, and includes a charming cafe and a gift store. We met with our other Swedish hosts for our last scheduled activity, which was participating in a Strike for Climate Change. This strike was inspired by the celebrated Greta Thunberg, and was extremely exciting and informative. The best part of the whole day though, was when we got to go to one of the biggest candy stores in the city. Buying candy was the perfect ending to a wonderful day.

6 April, 2019



Our very first weekend in Sweden had arrived, these were the days where we did not gain educationally but culturally. The weekend was a dedicated family time, where we students got to spend some quality time with our Swedish counterparts and their families. What better way to relax than a picnic on an island. That is exactly what we did, we went to this nearby island which went by the name Marstrandön. A short ferry ride got us to Marstrand, a town surrounded by the sea and traditional Swedish architecture. While it is thought of as a predominantly summer destination, the island remains pretty all year round. To get a better view of the place, we went for a small hike in between the rocks to reach a small hillock on the island itself. The scenic beauty from atop was breath taking, with the oncoming winds rushing through our hair and the sound of the waves crashing against the rocks.



6 April, 2019



After which followed a good photo session and nice little chat with the families. We were enjoying nature at its best, when we could smell the invigorating scent of the ever so delicious fika. For the days spread, we had some cinnamon buns and hot coffee, which was the perfect combination for the chilly weather. It's really unfair how some feelings just cannot be put into words that do it justice, and I must say huddling together on a picnic mat, sipping hot coffee with a group of such loving people, talking, laughing, bonding, was a perfect example of this. Heaven on earth indeed. On our walk back, we stopped by at the 'Casrlisten' an age-old fortress converted to a prison, which housed many notorious criminals back in the day. After spending some more time, walking on the island, we then went on to grab a light lunch and take a ferry back home. We all spent some more quality time with our host families that evening and recounted how blessed we were to cherish such memories.



7 April,  
2019



Finally, a Sunday, a day we could wake up whenever we wanted. Sleep had become a luxury in Sweden with our hectic timetables and tiring days. We had finally found one day to wake up late and laze around in another country for a change. After a lazy morning, a few of us went shopping in a nearby mall, Nordstan in Gothenburg city, whereas a few of the students decided to extend their morning and stayed at home enjoying barbecues and walks in the forest.

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# 8 April,



The day started off with our third classroom immersion, the Swedes, <sup>2019</sup> were quite enthusiastic to show us how their classes were, also because this was an exchange program on their culture and education and hence had to focus their time on helping us learn the contrasts present in both the countries. The striking feature regarding this classroom immersion was the fact that we were interacting with students of our own age, whereas previously it was with students older than we were. Therefore, these students had also just entered Gymnasium the same way we had just entered College. One could say we had more in common than the rest of the students, and hence had more stuff to talk about when it came to the education system and the changes experienced in the shift from a normal schooling life to the higher system of education. After getting a taste of the difference in their education systems, we then went on to even get a taste of their scrumptious meatballs. The meatballs is a Swedish delicacy and its incomparable taste is without a doubt one of the main reasons that attract tourists from all over the world. Of course, the vegetarians did not get to savour this, and had to opt for the vegetarian complement, a falafel. Our next destination was the Youth Guidance centre; this was a unique feature of this little country, which was definitely a factor in improving their society and youth.



# 8 April, 2019



The basic idea behind this institution is that children should be able to seek help if their parents are not cooperative.

Therefore, they can approach this centre with issues of mental health or contraceptives or abortions, the centre has trained individuals in these respective fields that are friendly and approachable, who gave us an insight on the above-mentioned issues. This is very helpful for the young adults who need help and cannot get it easily. The best part is that everything is done at free of cost and hence people can come and go anytime without even worrying about the monetary aspect of things. After an insightful and educative afternoon, we went to the city to fulfil every Indians deepest desire, shopping abroad. We had a gala time picking out every item off the shelf and buying a few exotic items. What better way to pass time and bond, if not for a sport. Which is why we then went bowling, the weird part of all this was that the bowling arena was in a restaurant. The journey to the bowling arena itself was a hilarious sight to watch, with us Indians waddling our way through the streets with numerous shopping bags in each hand. The bowling game was a lot of friendly competition and a Swedish winner (we let them win). Overall, it was a brilliant end to a good day filled with a lot of fun and laughter.





# 9 April, 2019



The day started as any good day with, us waking up to our blaring alarms but with high spirits, because we knew that Sweden had surprises awaiting us and would not fail to bring a smile on our faces. After our daily morning routines, we joined everyone at the study hall at Lerum's Gymnasium. We then proceeded to take a train to Partille to reach the Renova Recycling Centre, which is a big waste to energy converting plant situated between Gothenburg/Lerum and Partille. We received a fully guided tour of the plant, starting from the bunker (the place where all the waste is initially collected) which can have 10,000 tonnes of garbage at the end of every week, followed by the incinerator, which burnt all the garbage that could not be recycled. We also saw a separation unit, which segregated and separates different parts of a component and recycles it in a proper manner. Along with the water-cleansing unit, which cleansed contaminated water, with the result as clean water, which is clean but not potable, as it tends to be a bit saline. There was then an educational session of how our homes have to be the place, segregation of waste begins at and the importance of cultivating such practises from the ground level that would be our homes in this case.



# 9 April, 2019

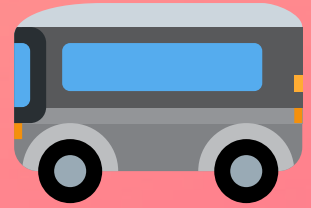


We most definitely learned a multitude regarding healthy waste management habits, and it is now our responsibility to spread the word back at home in India, so that one fine day we can also add waste management and disposal to the list of things that we pride about India. They say that "Food is the ingredient that binds us together" and we can testify to this, because we ourselves had a small cooking session, where we cooked authentic Swedish food with the help of our lovely partners. We had a lot of fun and could taste the fruits of our hard work (literally). Following was a skiing lesson, in the ski dome situated in Gothenburg. The ski dome was an artificial cross-country skiing experience, where all of us learnt how to ski under an hour, which I feel is impressive. During the activity itself, we not only had fun, but also learnt many things. We learnt that sometimes you fall down, but all you have to do is get up, dust the snow off and keep smiling. This activity also strengthened our unity and promoted togetherness where if one person fell down, all the others would run to help them get up. This once again shows that if life gives you obstacles, you knock them down and keep moving forward. Overall, we had a fun filled and exciting day. Which added on to the many memories that we had in Sweden.





10 April,



**“There is no real ending. It’s just the place where  
2019 you stop the story.”**

It had come down to our final day in this magnificent country. However, that did not stop us from waking up with bright smiles on our faces, intending to enjoy every little bit of the time we had left. We had a self-evaluation session, where we all reflected on how thoroughly we enjoyed the whole experience and how nothing could be done to make it any better. If they already hadn't done enough for us, the Swedes again initiated another excursion, where we went along the banks of the river Sävån. This excursion was a whole other experience, as for the first time did we get to witness an actual snowfall, we Indians were so excited to see snow that a few of us got a bit too excited and were almost engulfed in the waters of the gushing river. We got to witness the beauty of nature very close to the cities, which has become quite rare these days with concrete jungles and sky scrapers all over the world. Upon our return, we had a small farewell congregation planned, where we exchanged a few words and the principal of the college gave a heart-warming speech that made us shed a tear or two. They even gave us a t-shirt for us to wear with pride and cherish the multitude of memories that we made with these people and the place.



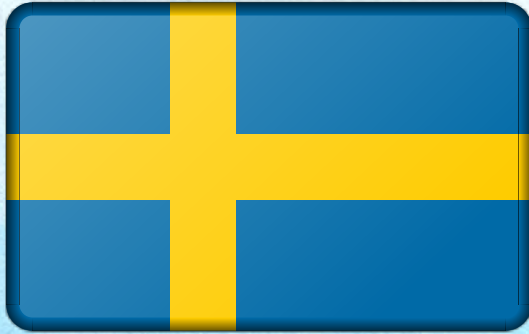
10 April,



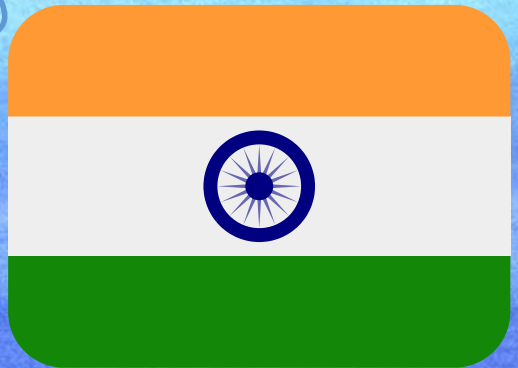
2019

After which, we just stayed back in the school as we wanted to spend the last few hours together in one place. We didn't really have to do anything to pass our time, we had bonded so much over the past few days that we always had something to talk about, recalling the best memories and how badly we were going to miss this place and its people. It was then that the reality of things hit us, the reality that it was in fact the last few hours we had together. It was when, tears were shed, and hugs were cherished. It is said that all good things come to end, C'est La Vie. However, none of us wanted this to ever end, we were living the utopian life. A semi colon is used when an author could have chosen to end their sentence, but chosen not to. There will be no end to these lovely memories and fantabulous experiences that will forever be cherished;

Maria Kleiven  
Johanna Hassel  
Jesper Huber  
Isabelle Löfqvist  
Stina Garphem  
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