

Stockholm  
Smörgåsbord

## Stockholm Smörgåsbord

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# Go-Far 2014: Stockholm

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by Andrew Toh

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The choice of Stockholm for the 10th instalment of Go-Far marked a departure from previous years. Apart from being the farthest the programme had ever ventured, there was also a lack of a common theme that would tie our stories together.

While previous years dealt with the subject of overcoming adversity (Japan, 2013), or the pains of living in a hermit kingdom (Bhutan, 2012), we came up against the challenge of covering a first-world city with few of the attributes that had characterised past destinations.

With that in mind, we started by looking for traits that best distinguished Sweden from the rest of the world.

The stories we chase with were diverse. We arrived in Stockholm with pitches varying from the Nordic state's generous family policies to its thriving book industry, and even Sweden's unique state-owned alcohol monopoly.

Following the violent racial riots that rocked Stockholm in 2013, we also wanted to investigate the issues faced by the country's immigrant population.

While it has been a privilege being able to report from Stockholm, a modern city that is chock full of history, what was more striking was the realization that every city, no matter how perfect from the outside, could still have its own set of eccentricities upon closer examination.

These are just some of the stories about this remarkable city that lie within these pages. We hope you'll enjoy these stories as much as we've enjoyed writing them.

{ PARENTING THE SWEDISH WAY }

# LATTE PAPAS

In the past few years, more fathers in Sweden are playing a bigger role in caring for their babies as the society deals with changing gender expectations.

by  
TAN TAM MEI  
photographs by  
TAN PEI LIN



In his spare time, Viktor Wallström, 29, grabs his hiking boots, windbreaker and hunting gear and sets off for his cabin in the woods north of Stockholm for a week. He also packs lots of diapers for his 14-month-old son, Henry.

Bundled in warm clothing, the toddler gets a ride on dad's back, snug in a modified baby seat. Mr Wallström packs light for these father-and-son trips: no baby bottles, no baby toys, and no prams.

Though this might seem like a scene out of *Survivor: Baby Edition*, he is doing what many Swedish fathers do – he is on long parental leave to look after his child while his wife works.

"I'm the outdoorsy one, and my wife is the musical one. I like going into the woods, hiking and plucking mushrooms. So I usually take Henry on these expeditions since I'm the one on parental leave now," he says.

He is part of a growing tribe known in Sweden as "latte papas" – men who go on state-funded leave to be their children's primary caregivers, a role still associated mainly with mothers.

Latte papas can be seen everywhere in public, one hand on a stroller and the other holding a mug of coffee.

Mr Wallström, who works in public relations, is into his fourth month of parental leave. Besides looking after Henry, he also handles the cooking, washing and cleaning up.

He plans to stay at home for six months.

**"I finally understand what it means to be a parent. It's tough work, trust me, and I've been in the military."**

...  
**Johanochcissi Kristensson**  
Analyst

His wife, Linnea, 31, stayed home for almost a year after Henry's birth before returning to her job as an international coordinator with the Stockholm police.

"My wife gets to go to work; it's a good thing for her career. Henry gets to spend time with two parents who are active in his life. I get to bond with him during this stage of his life, so I think being on parental leave is fantastic," says Mr Wallström.

Experts in Sweden say that when fathers take more parental leave, it benefits not only their own families but can also enrich the labour market and reduce gender discrimination.

Forty years ago, Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce parental leave, giving both parents an equal chance to stay at home with the child.

The state grants couples 480 days of paid benefits, with 60 days for each parent that cannot be transferred between them. If either does not take the non-transferable leave, it is forfeited. The remaining 360 days can be shared equally or transferred between parents.

Like the Wallströms, many couples combine their parental

(RIGHT) Being on parental leave allows Mr Wallström to witness special moments, such as Henry learning to walk. (FAR RIGHT) Mr Wallström has to constantly come up with new games to engage Henry and get him to listen to instructions.



Even though his son Henry spends elongated periods of time with each parent respectively, Viktor Wallström feels that this arrangement does not cause Henry to harbour any special feelings toward a specific parent, but rather, bringing them closer as a unit.





Henry loves it when Mr Wallström carries him so he can look at cats outside. Henry excitedly gestures at them and asks to go out.

leave entitlement with leave benefits from their jobs to extend their combined time off to a total of about 18 months.

Parents on paid leave are entitled to 80 per cent of their monthly salary for the first 390 days, with an earnings cap of 37,083 Swedish krona (about \$6,500). The remaining 90 days are paid out at a flat rate. Those who are unemployed are also given paid parental leave.

The generous benefits given to Swedish parents appear to be working, as more couples are having babies now. According to the World Bank, Sweden's total fertility rate (TFR) edged closer to replacement levels in 2012 to reach 1.91, up from 1.65 in 2002.

In comparison, Singapore's TFR has declined steadily over the years to 1.19 in 2013, well below the replacement rate of 2.1.

According to Statistics Sweden, mothers take an average of 75 per cent of parental leave, while fathers take just 25 per cent. But more fathers are taking a longer time off, splitting the parental leave more equally with their wives.

As a result, Sweden — a country well known for its gender-egalitarian policies — is seeing rising expectations that fathers should bear some of the burdens of unpaid work at home.

"Nowadays, people find it strange if fathers don't stay at home with the child," says doctoral student Ida Viklund, 30, of Stockholm University, who is specialising in parental leave.

Ten years ago, fewer than 5 per cent of couples shared parental leave equally. This has risen to about 15 per cent, according to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the government body that manages parental leave.

That is a welcome increase, but Ms Viklund, who has a two-month-old daughter and is on parental leave, says that "from a mother's perspective, it isn't as much as we would hope for".

She and her management consultant husband will share the parental leave equally, but she notes that Swedish mothers continue to take the main responsibility for childcare.

To encourage parents to share leave more equally, the Swedish Government introduced a Gender Equality Bonus in 2008. The more equally parental leave is divided, the more payouts a couple receive.

But Ms Viklund says the bonus is less of a factor encouraging dads to take parental leave than the changing attitudes to parental roles in younger families.

She believes that when men stay home, they make the "painful" discovery of just how tiring it is to be a full-time caregiver to a baby and manage the housework as well. That awareness helps men maintain a harmonious relationship with their wives and children even in the event that the couple breaks up in future.

Johanochissi Kristensson, 34, who took nine months of parental leave last year to care for his son Algot, now two years old, says: "I finally understand what it means to be a parent. It's tough work, trust me, and I've been in the military.

"Before, I didn't understand the importance of making sure Algot was fed or rested at exact times. I thought my wife was being inflexible and unreasonable. Now I know if you don't follow these details, all hell breaks loose."

He adds: "If you want to compare work and taking care of a child, I'd say work is easier. But although caring for a child is much more taxing and demanding, I have no regrets."

Dr Sebastian Lantz, 30, stopped practising medicine to go on eight months' leave to care for his son Ebbe, who is now 13 months old.

"I didn't need to learn to cook and clean because I'd been sharing those responsibilities with my wife since we first got married. But I had to learn how to change diapers and feed him, that was more challenging," he says.

"You feel so much closer to the child and are part of his life. My time now with Ebbe will hopefully translate into a better relationship when he grows older and enters the rebellious teenage stage. I'm also secretly proud that he says 'Daddy' a lot more than 'Mama' now."

Research in Sweden has shown that when the father is more involved in childcare, it can enhance the cognitive and social development of the child. It can also influence the child's future in terms of increased chances of higher education attainment and lower chances of criminal behaviour and delinquency.

Ms Viklund says: "In Sweden, we want to focus on the child's perspective, so one thing we stress is the children's right to have both parents around them. They should be given the opportunity to be close to both parents and not just the traditional caregiver, usually the mother."

Sociologist Marie Evertsson, 45, of Stockholm University, says: "In Swedish cities, it is uncommon for women to stay at home to be housewives and most families are dual-income households."

Her research shows that parental leave enables both parents to achieve work-life balance, with equal opportunity to advance their careers.

Having mothers and fathers spend roughly equal periods on parental leave means the labour market and employers will be less likely to discriminate based on gender, she believes.

Sweden is one of the top four countries in Europe with the narrowest gender gap, as reported in the Global Gender Index 2013. The report, which is published by the World Economic Forum, measures gender equality in areas of economics, politics, education and health.

Still, a gender wage gap persists in Sweden, with the average woman receiving 86 per cent of a male counterpart's total pay, according to official data.

Says Associate Professor Evertsson: "If men increase their share of parental leave, this changing social norm will make it difficult for employers to single out the 'riskier' gender. Right now, the assumption made is that women are the 'riskier' gender because they would stay at home much longer than men on parental leave.

"Once these assumptions are changed, gender equality in the labour market will increase and the gender wage gap will decrease."

Most Swedish employers have learnt to deal with employees going on parental leave by hiring temporary staff or moving employees around to step in for those who are away.

Niklas Löfgren, a spokesman for the Social Insurance Agency, says: "Companies know that in the long run, parental leave is a good thing. It keeps companies running because in order to have a big labour force, you need more parents to work and have more children."

He said some companies even offer to top up 10 per cent of their employees' parental benefit payouts to attract top talent and retain valuable employees.

The company Mr Wallström works for, Tele2, is one of those with such incentives. But he and his wife say they did not split their parental leave for the benefits. Rather, they chose to take leave to spend time with Henry because they see themselves as "equals in this relationship".

Mr Wallström says: "Staying at home exceeds your expectations in two ways — it's tougher than you think, but it's also more satisfying than you would expect. But for my son, I would give up my work; in fact I would give up anything and everything."

# Second Home

a photo essay by TOH EE MING

The shift towards 24-hour nurseries shows that it is now possible to juggle irregular working hours and be a parent. Photojournalist Toh Ee Ming examines if Sweden is one of the best places in the world to raise a family.



Principal ballerina Gina Tse remembers the nights when she would dash from a performance to the childcare centre to pick up her son, Jacy.

There was that memorable Saturday night when she danced her heart out in the biggest role of her career - as Princess Odette in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* - and the thunderous applause continued long after the final curtain call.

Backstage, people were pushing forward to offer congratulations and press bouquets into her arms.

But the single mother had to get her four-year-old from the night *dagi* - a pre-school providing after-hours care.

It was almost midnight and freezing cold as she was pushing his pram. "I was still burning from the performance. I'd just danced in front of thousands, but in that moment, I felt most on my own. It brought me back to earth. This is life, this is the stuff that matters, trying to get him home before it's too late," she says.

That was three years ago, and Ms Tse says she could not have pulled her life together after her marriage collapsed if not for the flexible childcare available.

She is one of many parents juggling work and parenthood and needing childcare at inconvenient hours.

In the last five years, the number of children aged one to 12 years old in after-hours care has increased by 50 per cent, from 3,817 to 5,770, says Ms Erika Karlénus, political adviser to Education Minister Gustav Fridolin.

Across Sweden, there are about 170 municipalities with pre-schools that stay open during evenings, at night and on weekends. Most childcare centres typically open from 6am to 6pm, Mondays to Fridays.

**(RIGHT)** Hair and make-up artist Catharina Lundin drops her daughter, Juno, off at her night class, The Star. **(BELOW)** Five-year-old Jake has spent long hours in the night *dagis* for the last one and a half years. His mother, a South Korean expat, works as a nurse at the *Södersjukhuset* Hospital.



One place that opens 24/7 is *Galaxen Förskola* (Galaxy Pre-School), where Ms Tse placed Jacy. It is one of the largest branches of the private pre-school chain *Hälsans Förskola*.

"Sweden is becoming a 24-hour society, with more people working later, so they need night *dagis*," says Lena Wernholm, 63, its overnight care coordinator. Shift workers like restaurant workers, hospital and theatre staff and transport workers often need help with childcare.

For Ms Tse, 35, being a single mum has made it tougher. A whirlwind romance brought her from London to Sweden in 2004, but she and her husband split up when Jacy was three months old.

To build a new life, she returned to performing with the Royal Swedish Ballet. The day after her baby turned one, she enrolled him in overnight care at *Galaxen Förskola*. "The first three years of Jacy's life were the hardest, but the *dagi* saved me," she says.

Theatre hair and make-up artist Catharina Lundin, 43, is raising her two-year-old daughter Juno mostly by herself. Her musician boyfriend often goes out of town for shows. "I have no extended family, and Juno's grandparents don't live in the city," she says.

It costs too much to get help at home. Parents pay about 800 Swedish krona (\$140) a month at *Galaxen Förskola*, compared with 180 krona an hour for a professional babysitter.

"When I first started at the night *dagi* a month back, I wanted to hug the teachers for a long time. It made me so happy to know Juno was being taken care of," recalls Ms Lundin.

*Galaxen Förskola* has a team of eight teachers who take turns to supervise the night class. The children go to bed by 9pm, after which the teacher-in-charge is expected to stay up to watch over them.

Veteran teacher Karin Schylberg, 52, does not mind the hours. "It's nice and quiet at night. I get to spend more personal time with the children and know them better," she says.

There are about 20 to 30 children enrolled for night care.

"This childcare centre is popular among parents in the entertainment business and healthcare sector, as it's the only school in central Stockholm with this service," says *Hälsans Förskola* director Lena Rebane, 54.

In Sweden, it is legal for children as young as one to be enrolled in childcare.

The rising demand and trend towards 24-hour facilities mark another milestone in Swedish childcare arrangements,

with the needs of minority groups like night shift workers and single parents met.

There are about five of such childcare centres in Stockholm alone. Since 2013, there has been a state grant of 31 million krona a year to support municipalities that provide after-hours care. The grant will be raised to 80 million krona per year from 2015.

This recognises the fact that the labour market has changed and people are expected to work shifts.

Jacy is now six and no longer at the night *dagi*, but in October 2014 he attended a special reunion dinner in his old classroom, with other children he used to spend his evenings with.

Says Ms Tse: "It was very emotional for us, seeing Jacy's old teachers and meeting the other mothers again."



(ABOVE) The lively pre-school *Galaxen Förskola* becomes a different place in the night.



It is nearly midnight when Ms Lundin picks Juno up. She cuts a striking figure as she strides along Götgatan Street, sleeping baby in a pram.



(LEFT) Ballerina Gina Tse picks up six-year-old Jacy from his new school at *Karlbergsskolan*. "He's my world," she says simply. (CENTRE) These days, Ms Tse's schedule has freed up, and she now spends her time teaching young girls privately. (RIGHT) Ms Tse remembers rushing to fetch Jacy after her *Swan Lake* show in 2012, which she compares to running three marathons back-to-back. She says: "It was a completely different world - being a ballerina and a single mother. I don't think I'd have been so strong if I hadn't gone through it."

# Nobel's Gift to the World

by ANDREW TOH

photographs by TAN PEI LIN, HARIZ BAHARUDIN & WALLACE WOON

If it's October, it's Nobel Prize season and the action happens in Stockholm and Oslo where the winners are announced. Widely considered the most prestigious awards in the world, they go each year to those who made their mark in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and promoting peace.

Despite the existence of numerous other top international awards, winning the Nobel remains the star achievement.

"You have all these super-level prizes. But the Nobel Prize is super-super," says Professor Bertil Andersson, president of the Nanyang Technological University and chairman of the Nobel panel which picked the Chemistry winner in 1997.

Noting how keenly the world greets the news of the winners every year, he points to two key reasons for the Nobel Prize's continuing relevance: "The quality control has been there. It was also the first international prize that crossed borders and made a difference."

Apart from Prof Andersson, there are two other men in Singapore involved in the selection of Nobel laureates: Professor Carlos Ibanez, professor of physiology at the National University of Singapore (NUS), and Professor Lorenz Poellinger of the Cancer Science Institute at NUS, who both picked the winners of the Medicine prize.

The awards are named after Swedish businessman and inventor Alfred Nobel who was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1833 and died in 1896.

Best known as the inventor of dynamite, he was also a trained chemist and engineer, responsible for more than 300 patents.

He also had a reputation for being a recluse. He never established a legal residence and was constantly on the move, avoiding human society as much as possible wherever he went.

Prof Ibanez says: "He mistrusted people and was always a little suspicious of what they did. He never married or had a family."

Nobel made it clear in his will that the awards would not be bound by race or nationality, and that only "the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be a Scandinavian or not".

That was controversial in a Europe fragmented after years of conflicts, with Sweden and Norway in the middle of a separation following a 91-year union.

The Swedish monarch, King Oscar II, accused Nobel of anti-patriotism and tried to harass the executor of the will into rendering the contents void. He did not succeed.

The King was absent from the first Nobel presentation ceremony in 1901, reportedly due to an illness, but later changed his mind as he was persuaded that Sweden could gain from the publicity.

The creation of a peace prize also came as a surprise, as Nobel was better known as a scientist than a humanitarian. Historians say it is due to the influence of an Austrian pacifist Nobel met in the middle of his life, Bertha Von Suttner, author of the influential 19th century anti-war book *Lay Down Your Arms*.

In their correspondence, Nobel and Von Suttner often discussed war and peace. She became the first woman to receive the Peace Prize, in 1905.

The award includes prize money of eight million Swedish krona (about S\$1.4 million), which comes from interest earned from the proceeds of Nobel's assets, converted into a fund and invested in safe securities.

Some say Nobel was ahead of his time for the way he drew up the rules for a set of prizes esteemed and sought after for well over a century. "He was a visionary person. He didn't care if the people who received his money came from Russia, the



Professor Carlos Ibanez



Professor Lorenz Poellinger



Professor Bertil Andersson

United States, China or Germany," said Prof Andersson. "In that sense, he was very radical."

Nobel named four institutions to select the winners: The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awards the Physics and Chemistry prizes; the Karolinska Institute awards the Physiology or Medicine prize; and the Swedish Academy awards the Literature prize. The Peace prize is awarded by a committee of the Norwegian Parliament.

From each of the four institutions, a five-member group known as the Nobel Committee is formed, with each member holding a three-year term. The committee is responsible for gathering nominations from their respective bodies and other well-respected organisations.

After the initial nomination stage, the committee vets the list and prepares a report containing the final candidates for the Nobel Prize.

The final decision for the winner rests with the institutions, who decide the winner by a majority vote. The exception is the Peace Prize, which is decided by the selection committee itself.

The Nobel Memorial Prize for Economics, often thought of as one of the Nobel Prizes, was added later by the Sveriges Riksbank, the Swedish central bank.

Though the winners of the Peace and Literature prizes enjoy wide visibility each year, the science laureates often receive less attention not least because increasingly, technical achievements are hard for the man in the street to grasp.

In such instances, it is for the Nobel Foundation to raise awareness, says Prof Ibanez, and the media plays a big role in telling people about the prize-winners and their discoveries.

"I always read what the papers say after the announcement. I like to see what the journalists are saying to their audience, and I think that's key," he said.

Prof Poellinger quips: "It's not a bad thing to put on your business card that you're a Nobel Prize winner. I think everyone will recognise the value of that."

He added that Nobel laureates, regardless of category, are well received in the media and often consulted on a wide range of issues.

But the awards have not been without controversy over the decades.

Adolf Hitler forbade three German winners from accepting their prizes for Chemistry and Medicine. His Nazi regime later banned all Germans from accepting Nobel prizes after the 1935 Peace prize went to writer Carl von Ossietzky, who publicly opposed Hitler and Nazism.

In 1958, Russian writer Boris Pasternak was pressured by Soviet authorities into turning down the Literature prize after initially accepting the award.

In 1964, the world was shocked when French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre turned down the Literature prize, saying he had always declined official honours and this was no different.

The decision to award US President Barack Obama the Peace prize in 2009, barely weeks into his first term, drew flak from critics who thought it premature and undeserved.

Jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo was not allowed

to collect the 2010 Peace prize for his efforts to bring about political reforms in China.

One of the rules of the Nobel Prize is that the winners must be alive when the decision is announced. This was drawn into contention in 2011, when the Medicine prize was awarded to Canadian immunologist and cell biologist Ralph Steinman who died after the decision was made, but just days before the announcement. His award stayed.

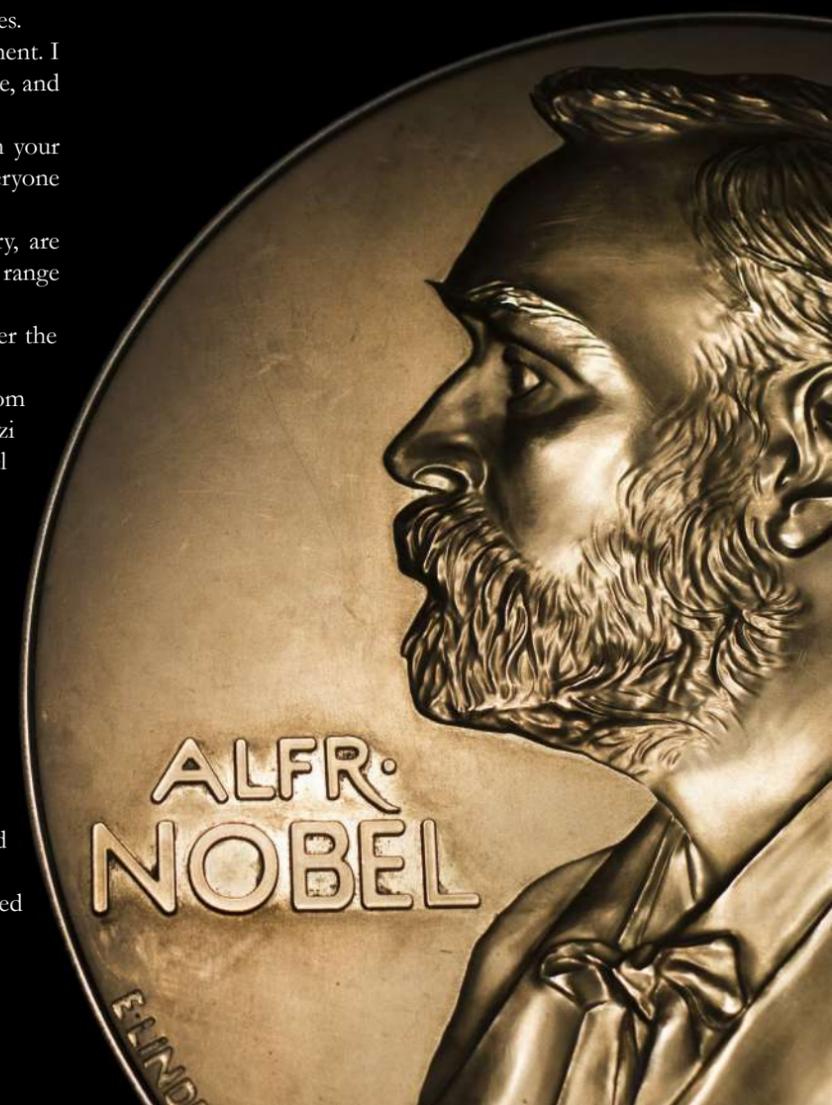
Some laureates wait their entire lives to win because it can take that long for the full impact of their discoveries to be appreciated.

"The Nobel Prize is about knowledge, science and literature," said Prof Ibanez.

"That is the essence of humans, the pursuit of knowledge. Those are the greatest things we are going to live with in this planet. It's a celebration of what is unique about humans."

For more about Alfred Nobel, the prizes and the laureates, please visit

[www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org)  
[www.nobelmuseum.se](http://www.nobelmuseum.se)





# One for the Books

by LIU KAI YING

photographs by TOH EE MING

Student Gustav Nyborg frequently visits the ubiquitous bookstores of Stockholm. The 21-year-old buys an average of three books a month, and prefers spending his free time reading to watching movies or television.

“I love owning books and having them at home. I read about an hour a day and find that there is more quality in books than in movies or TV shows nowadays,” he said.

Mr Nyborg is no outlier in Sweden, where most commuters can be seen engrossed in books and bookstores are thronged with young adults. Parents here often take their children to parks with books to read.

Here, print fiction continues to do a roaring trade, defying the global trend of shuttering bookstores and declining book sales.

## Printing Money

*Akademibokhandeln* is already Sweden’s largest bookstore company, yet it has no plans to stop expanding. A new outlet will open in Stockholm in 2015, bringing the number of stores in the city alone to 26.

It has also taken its empire online. In August 2014, its daughter company, Bokus.com, sold a record number of books that month in the parent company’s 17 years of business.

*Akademibokhandeln* chief executive Maria Hamrefors remains bullish about her firm’s prospects, saying customers continue to go with print because “stories are inspirational and bookstores give customers a chance to look at the books before they buy.”

Bokus.com manager Magnus Bragsjö said he has observed only an upward trend in sales. “There have been reports about book sales overall going down in Sweden but we haven’t seen that. We don’t see any decline in our sales.”

Indeed, the thriving book business in this Nordic nation reads like a fairy tale to its counterparts abroad.

Print book sales have gone down worldwide and Singapore is no exception.

With a population of 5.4 million compared to Stockholm’s 800,000, there are only 10 bookstores here. Of them, four are run by Japanese chain Kinokuniya, and the others by Times.

Conversely, in Sweden, there is enough business to go around such that smaller chains and niche shops are turning a neat profit too.

Pocket Shop has nine branches in Stockholm alone. Five of them are at metro or bus stations, allowing customers to grab a book before starting their commute. Between 2012 and 2013, the company saw a 9 per cent increase in sales, and another 4 per cent increase in October last year.

Similarly, independent bookstore Papercut, which trades in fashion and art books, reported a 10 per cent growth in customers from 2012 to 2013, while The English Bookshop, which sells only titles imported from the United States and Britain, reported a 150 per cent turnover since its inception in 2008.

## Bang for their Buck

As publishing company Stockholm Text sees it, the continued popularity of print books can be attributed to a drop in paperback prices.

“People are buying more paperbacks as the number of paperback books is going up and prices are coming down,” said the publisher’s chief executive Claes Ericson.

A book in *Akademibokhandeln* costs anywhere from 69 Swedish krona (\$12.10) to 89 krona. In contrast, catching a movie on a Saturday night sets one back by 110 krona.

The value-added tax for books in Sweden was also lowered to 6 per cent from 25 per cent in 2002, giving cost-conscious Swedes more incentive to stay in with a tome rather than spend the night out.

Sales of children’s books have been showing steady growth due to concerns about children’s reading habits.

Bokus.com’s Mr Bragsjö attributes this to the discussion in recent years about children spending their free time glued to smartphones and television screens instead of picking up valuable reading skills.

“Many parents are buying children’s books because they worry that their children are not reading enough,” he said.

Sophie Dalhberg, for one, isn’t taking any chances. The 33-year-old said she and her husband ensure their two children get their daily dose of books before going to bed.

“We go through about three books every night, two for my son and one for my daughter. We spend like maybe 200 krona a month and then we go to the library,” said the sports planner, who has an 18-month-old son and six-year-old daughter.

Gunilla Svensen, another parent who reads to her two-year-old daughter daily, attributes Swedes’ love of books to the culture.

“People like to have tall bookcases filled with books in their homes,” said the 39-year-old researcher. “People also like giving books as gifts.”

## A Late Start

It seems almost surprising that Sweden, a forerunner of innovation, has yet to witness the taking off of the e-book market locally.

In 2011, e-books entered Sweden and took up 0.5 per cent of the market. Two years later, that figure has increased only marginally to 1.5 per cent.

Observers say the lukewarm reception to digital books boils down to one main reason: readers unwilling to change their reading habits.

“In Sweden, people have been conservative and continue to read books on paper,” said Mr Bragsjö, adding that e-book sales at Dito, Bokus’s e-book arm, account for only 3 per cent of total sales.

Subscription services have emerged in hopes of expanding the e-book market. Readly for example offers users access to an unlimited library of books and magazines on its server for 99 krona a month. But some believe it would take a generational change before e-books start to come into their own.

Said Ms Dalhberg: “My daughter is six years old and she uses the iPad a lot, so when she starts to read, maybe she would prefer e-books.”

Still, others hold fast to their faith in print. They include non-fiction book editor Ann-Sofie Lindholm, 52, who heads a monthly, print-only, book club with about 16 members.

“It could be possible that one morning in the future, everyone comes to our meeting with only an e-book reader in their hands,” she said. “But I don’t think so. I believe print books will live forever and always be a common participant in the book club.”



“In Sweden, people have been conservative and continue to read books on paper.”

...  
Magnus Bragsjö  
Manager at Bokus.com

(TOP) In Sweden there is enough business to go around such that smaller chains and niche shops, like Antikvariat August in Drottninggatan, are turning a neat profit too. (BOTTOM) Sweden’s strong reading culture has helped big bookstore chains like Akademibokhandeln thrive. The Swedish equivalent of Borders, the chain has 25 over branches in Stockholm itself.



# A Viking Tradition

You don't need to swim in money to own a boat in Sweden.

by LUNA PHAM HANH

photographs by TOH EE MING

Sweden has one of the world's largest archipelagos, with more than 60,000 islands, half of which are close to Stockholm. On the mainland, there are some 95,000 lakes and 1,000km of canals.

It is not surprising then that one in eight Swedes owns a boat and one in three goes out boating at least once a year, according to figures from the Swedish Marine Industries Federation, known as Sweboat.

"We are Vikings, remember? Boating is in our blood," says Sweboat chief executive Mats Eriksson, 52. "It's a 1,000-year-old tradition."

Like many Swedes, Mr Eriksson spent his childhood summers sailing on the family vessel, sometimes for weeks. Now he owns a boat and two dinghies, and sometimes sails to work along the Hammarby Canal.

In many countries, sailing is a luxury because of the high costs of berthing, repairs, and even the price of boats. But not in Sweden.

Every year before winter comes, hundreds of boat owners from the community boat club Årstavikens Segelsällskap (ÅSS) in Stockholm gather at its gravelled harbour to store their vessels for winter. A crane lifts one boat after another, as owners help pull on ropes and stabilise the vessels onto metal legs.

Almost all 700 members of the club join in. The members are also placed on a roster for the maintenance and security of the 345 boats registered in the club.

The result: berthing fees at ÅSS are as low as 3,000 Swedish krona (\$521) a year, much less than commercial marinas,

which charge up to 50,000 krona a year.

There are more than 1,000 clubs like ÅSS, with a collective membership of 250,000, according to Sweboat.

Boat-building also has a long tradition in Sweden. This gives rise to many new boats on the market each year, with an average starting price of 10,000 krona.

"Everyone owns a boat here," says Mr Richard Warton, 58, a marketing consultant. "One can be unemployed and still own a boat."

Most of those who own boats also do their own repairs on their vessels. Retiree Tom Göransson, 62, rounded up seven friends to buy a boat. He says: "We spend more time working on the boat than we are in the water. But we have a good time together working on it."

Sailors in Sweden can moor their boats at any of the 430 guest harbours in the country. Equipped with changing rooms, saunas and barbeque pits, the harbours allow sailors to spend many days out on the water. According to Sweboat, the Swedish Marine Industries Federation, the Swedes spent five million nights on their vessels in the summer of 2010.

To many like Staffan Salén, 44, sailing is a long family tradition. His late grandfather, Sven, started sailing as a child in the late 1890s before he took up competitive sailing and went on to win an Olympic bronze medal in 1936.

Mr Salén's father, Sven Hampus, was a world champion in the 6m-class in the 1960s. In 2012, Mr Salén won a national gold medal in dragon-class sailing.

"Sailing has played a big role in my family in the last 100 years," says the businessman. "Everyone in my family sails."



Boat-builder Kristoffer Bielanski has lived on the MS Gratia for the past decade with his wife and their cat.

Those who have moved to Sweden appear to have picked up the sailing bug too. On Hammarby canal is a 45m-long boat called the MS Gratia, and it is the home of Kristoffer Bielanski, originally from Poland.

"I lived in Warsaw, which was 300km from the sea," says Mr Bielanski, who moved to Sweden 42 years ago. He spent 20 years as a diver before starting his own boat-building company, Hummerfish, with two friends.

He has been living on a houseboat with his wife Marta for the past 10 years. Mrs Bielanski grows tomatoes and flowers at the stern, and he is building a new hot tub at the bow. Shelves

filled with books on boat-building and architecture line the walls of the living room.

"It's like living in a villa," says Mr Bielanski. "I have space outside my boat, and I like being close to the water."

Many appear to share his view. Norra Hammarbyhamnen Street is one of many in the capital lined with houseboats.

Just being on a boat seems to be enough for some. The Swedes even have a word for it with no English equivalent: *bryggsegla*, which means to spend time on a docked boat without any intention to sail.

# FASHIONABLY GREEN

Sweden has always been known for its enthusiasm to jump onto the green bandwagon. Now, Swedes are giving new life to worn-out clothing. With a new process developed by researchers at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm and through the help of retailers, consumers now have the option to recycle when it's time to clear their closets.

by LIU KAI YING

photographs by TOH EE MING and TAN PEI LIN



Sales assistant Ronja Oldmar, 22, carries a big paper bag as she strolls into the largest H&M outlet in Stockholm.

Inside the bag are unwanted old clothes that she hands to the cashier in exchange for a 50 Swedish krona (\$8.70) voucher.

H&M will send these clothes for sorting, and whatever cannot be reused will be recycled. The retailer has collected more than 250kg of clothes across Sweden since the inception of this recycling policy in February 2013.

While it has been said that certain styles tend to come back into fashion, clothing retailers in Sweden are taking this a step further by recycling textiles and promoting green fabrics not just as a trend, but as a way of life among consumers.

## Making Old Clothes New

In July, researchers from KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm created the world's first garment weaved entirely from recycled cotton.

Old clothing is cut into small pieces and dissolved in a chemical. The resulting clear liquid is filtered, then processed into fibres.

The researchers have patented the process and started their own brand, Re:newcell. The company has been in talks with retailers to use these fibres in their garments.

"Everybody has promised to start delivering, but technology has never been really good enough until now, so this is something that is helping retailers to keep their promises," said Re:newcell representative Henrik Norlin.

One fashion company interested in this recycled material is outdoor sportswear brand Houdini, which has outlets in 16 countries.

"Not everything we sell is 100 per cent 'cradle to cradle' but the goal is to try and get there," said Mia Grankrist, a marketing executive at Houdini.

Houdini also collects unwanted clothes from consumers but unlike H&M, does not reward them.

"It's good in a way that you get people to hand in things, but it also encourages consumption and that is not something we should do. If you can encourage people to rent or buy second-hand, then that's truly sustainable consumption," said Ms Grankrist.

## Small Businesses, Big Ambitions

Smaller boutiques are also looking for ways to offer environmentally friendly fashionwear, but they face challenges.

Elux Kuddus, who founded label Lovealot with her husband Kudret, wants to use recycled fibre in her digital printing designs. However, she is concerned that the ink used in digital printing may fade if applied on a recycled material.

"The technique chooses the material," said the 26-year-old designer. For now, the firm has hired an intern to find material that works with Lovealot's printing technique and is good for the environment.

To her, the most important thing is balancing profit and quality.

"We could just produce less and make sure that the clothes we produce is of good quality, and use this idea to influence other people so they know we care about the environment," she said.

## Greater Awareness among Consumers

Mrs Kuddus' view is shared by Pontus Ryderberg, 27, a manager at G-Star Raw in PUB Galleria, a mall in central Stockholm.

He finds consumers are now willing to pay more for environmentally friendly clothing and credits the change to a heightened awareness of sustainability.

"People are understanding more about sustainability, what it does and where their money is going. So when they buy something that is very expensive they know their money is put to good use," he said.

On the other hand, Houdini's Ms Grankrist attributes Sweden's passion for recycling to *allemansrätten*, a constitutional right for Swedes to roam freely even on privately-owned land.

"It's been our culture for hundreds of years, so I think that's why we're taught to be respectful to nature," she said.

Whatever the underlying reasons, as far as H&M shopper Ms Oldmar is concerned, recycling old clothes is not just trendy.

After receiving her voucher, she heads to the H&M Conscious collection to find clothes made with recycled or sustainable material. The line's higher price tag does not faze her.

"I would pay 50 to 100 krona more for clothes made out of recycled cotton. 70 per cent of my clothes are like that," she said.



(TOP) These test tubes contain samples of spandex and viscose at different stages of the recycling process — from when it is first cut out from garments to when it is already broken down. (LEFT) Researchers from KTH Royal Institute of Technology pioneered this method of using chemicals instead of heat to break down the textiles into liquid form. (ABOVE) Henrik Norlin, spokesperson for Re:newcell, believes that people should consume less. "Swedes consume one of the highest amount of resources. If all the people in the world use as much resources as us, we'd need 3.7 globes," he said.

# Begging for Their Lives

text and photographs by TAN PEI LIN

**M**ore Romanians have decided to call Stockholm's streets their home after word has spread about the prospects of a better life.

Since arriving in Stockholm in September last year, 21-year-old Andrea Grancea has been visiting one of Stockholm's busiest streets, Sveavägen, almost every day.

But the Romanian, who is two months pregnant, is not there to check out the upmarket labels or hang out at the cafes serving 50 Swedish krona (\$8.70) coffees.

The young mother had left two daughters, aged four and six, back in Romania to come to Stockholm to beg. Just around the corner from the flower shop on Sveavägen, she sits right in front of an optical shop and shakes a used coffee cup, calling out to passers-by.

"I miss accompanying my two babies to school and playing with them at home. But I have no choice. I have to do this for a better life for them, and help pay for their school, food and medical fees," says Ms Grancea as she fiddles with her mobile phone, scrolling through photographs of her daughters, Carmen and Giorgiana.

There are no official statistics on the number of beggars as the open borders in the European Union (EU) allow all EU citizens to travel and stay in other EU countries for at least three months as visitors.

In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU, allowing the unfettered flow of Romanians into Sweden.

"The reason is quite simple. Sweden is a rich country, the currency is good, and if they get Swedish krona in their cup then it's a good income," said Thomas Bjarke, manager of Crossroads, a collaborative effort between non-governmental organisations across Sweden that helps EU migrants.

Ms Grancea came to Stockholm to join her mother and boyfriend, 23-year-old Madalin Lita, who is also the father of her children. Competition is stiff for them as most of the streets in Stockholm are dotted with beggars, each with an outstretched hand and hard-luck story to tell.

"They can always leave and return, refreshing the three months that they are allowed to stay as visitors, so no one really knows how long they have been in the country. There is a regulation to monitor movement, but there is no enforcement," said Mr Bjarke.

## Being 'Self-sufficient' in a First-world City

The news that there is money to be made in Sweden usually spreads by word of mouth within Romanian villages. Many hop onto a bus to Stockholm with just a few belongings, in hopes of getting out of the poverty cycle.

Some, especially those among the first to make the trip, do not know that this 'job' is no more complex than settling on the sidewalk, holding out a cup and asking strangers for spare change.

On good days, they can make up to 70 krona a day, but most of the time their keep amounts up to an average of 30 to 40 krona.

To these beggars, sitting on hard concrete in the biting cold for hours a day is nothing compared to the hardship that they face in Romania.

"Of course it's better here. Back home, I'm poor, and I can't provide for my family. At least when I am sitting here in the subway, begging for money, I still can get a little to send back to my family," said 35-year-old Claudia Sbircea, who has been begging for three years in Stockholm. She and her husband have been supporting their family back home by travelling in and out of Sweden for three-month periods.

## The Impenetrable Social System

For Mrs Sbircea, getting a job in Stockholm is nearly impossible. Her husband has also been unsuccessful in finding a job.

It is difficult for them to secure jobs if they "don't have any contacts, skills or speak Swedish, compared to other EU migrants," said Annika Remaeus, a programme officer at the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden.

She added: "As an EU citizen, you can only stay in Sweden as a visitor, which means that you don't have the right to be in the social system. Even if it is an emergency, investigations will be conducted and when the authorities find out you don't speak Swedish and haven't been working, the most they can do is assist with a ticket back home."

But there are some, like Bienvenido Flores, who try to help.

Known as the 'spokesperson of the beggars', the 47-year-old has been assisting them for about three years. He spends his time advising the beggars on which of their needs can be met and how to go about doing so.

Mr Flores said that getting into the Swedish system is almost impossible for the Romanian beggars because they don't speak Swedish or English and more importantly, lack a network of contacts in Sweden.

"Without any friends here, it's hard to survive. People won't give them jobs because they don't know if they can trust them, and if no one recommends them for work, it's even tougher," said Mr Flores, who has worked in social welfare all his life.

## Not Just Romanians

But it is not just Romanians who turn toward begging. Despite the Swedish welfare state, some Swedes still slip through the guarantees of their social security, and are forced to beg due to unfortunate circumstances.

In the underground tunnel of the Central Station, a blonde blue-eyed hunched figure stands out among the flock of Romanian beggars carrying her own sign and cup.

30-year-old Lena Pettersson has been on the streets since December 2013. After going through a heart operation that took a toll on her health, her husband, Jasper, became the sole breadwinner of the family. But he was robbed on the way home one day, resulting in the nerves in his hand being severed. He lost his job as a welder, and they had to leave their home as they could not afford the rent.

"The main aim is to get a roof over our head, so I don't have to stand here and beg for money. I have never had to do this in my life and I don't want to do it, but I feel like I don't have a choice," said Mrs Petersson. She is currently in contact with social services to work out an arrangement.

When asked what the steps were to getting an apartment, another beggar, 39-year-old Micke Eriksson, broke into a sheepish grin and replied: "I wonder that too."

"The place that social services offered me is where the drug users live. I don't want to live there. It's a place where people on the street live, but they are just crazy people," said Mr Eriksson, who has been begging for a year and a half. He gets about 300 to 400 krona a day.

"Swedish people help us by giving more because we are Swedish," said Mr Eriksson. At that moment, a young Swedish woman drops a 100 krona note into his cup, proving his point.

## The Swede's Willingness to Give

With basic rights seemingly unattainable for the Romanians, non-governmental groups and individuals are spearheading initiatives to try to alleviate the plight of these beggars.

There are few, if any, governmental initiatives to help this group. When contacted, the authorities declined to comment.

One of the major programmes is run by Crossroads, with support from the EU social funds. Crossroads is an information centre that provides EU migrants, including beggars, with advice on their options. Beggars often visit the establishment in Stockholm for free showers and meals.

Other initiatives include individuals stepping up to collect clothes, hygiene products and dried food.

For instance, Stockholm University students Nilo Rahimi and Ninni Sundin used social media to collect donated items and received an overwhelming response. Cash even started rolling in, allowing them to buy more specific items such as diapers.

Swedish attitudes towards beggars have changed over the years, from initial surprise to becoming accustomed to the sight of them. Now, Swedes are increasingly aware and critical of the consequences of this growing number. The citizens have demanded that their government step in and deal with this contentious issue, pointing out that these communities are setting up their own makeshift settlements on the fringes of Stockholm.

Meanwhile, Ms Grancea and her family live in a settlement outside the inner city. She keeps its whereabouts vague, as previous settlements have been forced to shut down. These makeshift homes last for about two to three months, before they are discovered and the dwellers evicted.

With winter approaching, this community will face harsh conditions out in the cold. Still, Ms Grancea is determined to continue begging in Stockholm.

"We have to keep coming here for the sake of our children. I don't know when we can return to Romania and never come back here to beg again," she said.

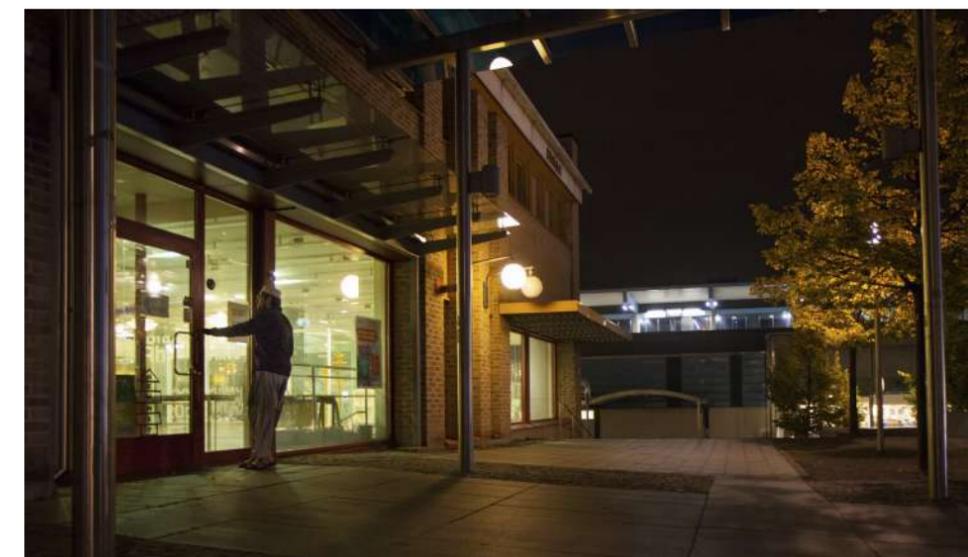


(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) As the eldest of five children, Andrea Grancea feels that it is her duty to help her family by begging; According to studies, 90 per cent of the city's beggars come from Romania. Sweden is one of the few countries in the European Union where begging is legal; Beggars like Ms Grancea dot the streets of Stockholm. She is expecting her third child and hopes to marry the father of her children when they have saved enough. They met at a fair when she was 14 and he 16. It was "love at first sight".



# *Assalamualaikum* Sweden

a photo essay  
by HARIZ BAHARUDIN



(MAIN) While many Muslims in the area are glad for a proper place to pray at the Khadijah Islamic Centre, Administrator Abdul Kadir Habib says there is still a lot to be done, including the construction of a proper prayer hall and an ablution area. (TOP) After the Eid al-Adha prayers, volunteers at the Khadijah Islamic Centre start giving out food and candy to the children, in accordance to Swedish tradition. (BOTTOM) Located near many immigrant suburbs like Husby and Rinkeby, the centre is a vast improvement from their previous prayer area, which was located at the basement of a restaurant.

It is the eve of Eid al-Adha, the Muslim festival known in Singapore as Hari Raya Haji that involves korban or animal sacrifice. Like many Islamic institutions all over the world, the Khadijah Islamic Centre in Kista, Stockholm, was busy with preparations for the special day.

When I got there, however, I was surprised to find that there would be no slaughter of sheep. Instead, balloons were being blown up and tied to the ceiling, alongside colourful streamers. Small plastic bags were being packed with candy and chocolate, and children were laughing as they tried to keep some of the treats for themselves.

I had never seen Eid celebrated this way before.

By ushering in the special day with the Swedish tradition of preparing sweets and holding a party, the Khadijah centre,

which opened in August 2014, hoped to promote this aspect of Swedish culture. It is the centre's aim to help Muslim immigrants find a middle ground between their faith and Swedish culture, and to establish a sense of community for people to draw support from.

The centre used to be a public library, but its activity rooms are now used for religious classes and community events. Those facing difficulties in settling down in Sweden come here to seek advice from Muslims who have been in the country longer.

"When you are a small community in a big country, you always need to be part of the wider society. What we hope to do here is to welcome people into our community and reconcile between a Muslim identity and a Swedish identity," said Imadur

Rahman, a member of the centre's board of management.

Although many people use Khadijah as a place of worship, its aim of being a community centre is slowly being realised.

"We used to pray at a basement of a restaurant and it was not comfortable. But to me, the best thing is how Khadijah has a community spirit, and everyone is helpful. Whenever you need someone to talk to, you can go there," said Usman Berg, 42, a researcher originally from Pakistan.

About 5 per cent of Sweden's population of 9.7 million are Muslim and most are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants.

The number of Muslim immigrants is growing fast as awareness spreads of Sweden's welfare state, with its comprehensive, low-cost health care and free Swedish-

language classes for all newcomers. According to the Swedish Statistical Board, the top four largest growing groups of foreign-born residents in 2013 were people from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

Also, people born in Iraq, Iran, Somalia and Turkey were among the 10 largest groups of foreign-born persons in the Swedish civil registry in 2013.

Muslims have been moving to Sweden in recent decades and, like many others, tend to live in immigrant-heavy enclaves. In the capital Stockholm, these areas include the districts of Husby, Rinkeby and Kista.

"People come from all over, from Somalia, from Malaysia, from Bangladesh, from Sudan," said Mr Rahman from the Khadijah centre. The 30-year-old arrived from Bangladesh

when he was 23 and now works as a researcher for telecommunications giant Ericsson.

With people from so many different countries, yet sharing the same faith, he said, it is important to establish a sense of community spirit for immigrants making a new life in an unfamiliar new country.

“Our job is to come up with strategies and find activities for people to bond over. Especially young people, at some point of their lives they could become isolated from society,” he added, referring to the challenges of practising Islam in Sweden.

The centre has its work cut out for it, even if its officials prefer not to discuss more sensitive aspects of the growing Muslim presence in Sweden.

In 2014, Agence France Presse reported Sweden’s head of intelligence services Anders Thornberg saying that as many as 300 Swedes could have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militant group, whose brutal tactics in the name of Islam have been condemned by Muslims everywhere.

“A hundred cases of people who have left to join the fighting have been confirmed, then there are the presumed cases, and there are those that have not been counted, which brings the total to between 250 and 300,” he was quoted as saying.

Expressing concern about the rising number of young Swedish men becoming militants in Syria, Mr Thornberg said: “They’re going beyond the limits of human behaviour. They’re fighting and killing other people.”

In October last year, Sweden passed a law banning its citizens from taking part in foreign-armed conflicts.

My attempt to ask people at the Khadijah Centre to discuss what it means when Swedish Muslims join a group like ISIS were unsuccessful, as they preferred not to comment.

They stressed that their focus is community building, and that they want their centre to not only be a place where Muslims can perform their prayers but also meet and bond.

They want to help new arrivals to dispel doubts about settling in Sweden and encourage them to work hard at school or at their jobs.

“Many Muslims who come here are nervous and get advice that is not good. They think they do not have to work because they will not be taken seriously, and end up just depending on the welfare system,” said Abdul Kadir Habib, 43, another Khadijah board member, who is from Eritrea.

“But then someone says to them ‘Assalamualaikum’ (“peace be upon you”), they hear something familiar in this very unfamiliar place. They open up their hearts and they start listening and working. They take the first steps to living their life in Sweden.”



As preparations for Eid al-Adha are underway at the Khadijah Islamic Centre, Imadur Rahman and his wife Ailin Abdullah take some time off to play with the children.



Jaber Hilaly (left) from Bangladesh has been a student in Stockholm for four years, and actively participates in activities at the Khadijah Islamic Centre. He tries to help others settle into life there. One such person is Aidarbek Anarbek (right), who hails from Kyrgyzstan.



Usman Berg, a researcher at Eriksson, buys fruits every day after attending the evening prayer session at the Khadijah Centre. The 42-year-old is thankful for the centre, because it is much better than the place he used to pray at before.

“Whenever you need someone to talk to, you can go there.”

... Usman Berg, researcher

Khadijah Centre administrator Abdul Kadir Habib offers advice to a family who has just arrived in Sweden. Despite being a busy man, Mr Habib tries his best to help any one in need. He hopes that the centre will help Muslim immigrants settle down in Sweden.

Kimo Ahmad comes from Syria and has only been in Sweden for one month. The 28-year-old misses his home and his loved ones, who constantly send him videos of what is happening in their country. He prays at the Khadijah Centre, and is glad for the support there.



# Immigrant Women Shine

by SEOW BEI YI

photographs by TAN PEI LIN & STEFANUS IAN

**S**imet Sager is 26 and living the life she always dreamt of. After graduating with a degree in nursing, she moved 500km from her family home in the Southern city of Lund to the capital Stockholm, to work at a children's hospital.

As an ethnic Iraqi, her life would have been quite different if her family had not emigrated to Sweden when she was seven.

The move meant she could be educated all the way to university and choose her career. For daughters of immigrants from conservative societies, living in Sweden has opened up opportunities they might never have otherwise had.

These girls are not only thriving, but also outperforming immigrant boys.

Still, many struggle to reconcile their ethnic identity and Swedish nationality.

Ms Sager recalls how she had dreaded telling her mother that she wanted to be a nurse. To some in Iraq, she said, nurses were regarded as "bad girls" because they worked long, late hours.

Her parents surprised her by being supportive, but her mother had friends who would ask: "Are you happy she's a nurse?"

And when she left home for Stockholm, it raised relatives' eyebrows. "They were like, 'You're not married. Why are you on your own? You should be with your parents,'" she said.

Life is a constant balancing act. "My relatives are a part of this society, but at the same time, they don't want us to forget where we came from," she said. "You're always in between."

Over the years, the waves of immigration to Sweden has changed.

While there was an influx from the other Nordic countries in the 1950s and 1960s, the early 1970s saw more refugee immigration and family reunifications from countries in the Middle East and Latin America.

In 2000, about 11 per cent of the Swedish population was foreign-born. That has risen to around 16 per cent of its 9.7 million people in 2014. In the same year, Sweden has received

more than 70,000 asylum requests, with Syrians making up the largest group.

Not everyone welcomes the newcomers. In recent elections, the Sweden Democrats, a nationalist anti-immigrant party, gained a surprising 13 per cent of the vote, adding a twist to social tensions.

As the immigrants settle in and their children go to school, the girls outshine the boys.

According to Statistics Sweden, 28 per cent of foreign-born women aged between 25 and 64 have three or more years of post-secondary education, compared to 23 per cent of the men.

More girls with a foreign background apply for places in tertiary institutions than their male counterparts too.

There are many reasons tossed up to explain why the girls outperform the boys.

For one, conservative immigrant parents expect their daughters to stay indoors, so, unlike the boys, the girls are spared the possibility of mixing with bad company.

Although immigrant parents push their children to do well in school, researchers say the girls are more motivated to succeed.

"My relatives are a part of this society, but at the same time, they don't want us to forget where we came from. You're always in between."

...

Simet Sager, a 26-year-old nurse

"It's a reaction, a compensation mechanism," said Professor Mehrdad Darvishpour, 54, a senior lecturer at Mälardalen University. "As immigrant women, you are in a lower position compared to both other immigrant men and the (ethnic) Swedish. You have to gain more education before you can find a good position in society."

But as immigrant women end up empowered by better education, equal rights and a more liberal culture, the immigrant men struggle with a loss of status at home and in society.

"Women's situations become better than in their home countries, and for men, it's the opposite," said Prof Darvishpour. In more patriarchal societies, men have a higher status and are the breadwinners of the family.

As these immigrant men struggle with unemployment or perform lower-level jobs than before and their womenfolk go to work, traditional gender roles are affected. Women become less dependent on their husbands, and, as a result, gain more confidence and expect more from life.



(ABOVE) For many first generation immigrants, learning Swedish is the first and most important step to integration. At a class conducted at the National Federation of Immigrant Women's Associations (RIFFI), English teacher Farah Sadalla uses actions and song to help the students remember specific Swedish words. These classes also hope to break the isolation of new immigrant women, encouraging them to interact more with other individuals. (LEFT) Having lived most of her life in Sweden, Simet Sager, a first generation immigrant from Iraq, still struggles to find a balance between her ethnic identity and as a Swede.

In some immigrant groups like Chileans and Iranians, the rate of divorce is considerably higher than for ethnic Swedes, and often it is the women who initiate the break-up. Conflicts arise especially in families that are not financially secure and have problems integrating into Swedish society.

Diana Waruhiu, 33, a new immigrant from Kenya, said even having to share household responsibilities when women go out to work is a challenge for the men.

Arian Furi, a 25-year-old from Iran, feels it can be hard being an immigrant man in Sweden. While immigrants in general face some discrimination, he said the prejudice is amplified for men because they are over-represented in crime statistics.

A Swedish language teacher at an adult education institute, he said: "You're not only discriminated against, you're also feared. People don't want to sit next to you, people don't want to look you in the eye; you become intimidating to the majority. Being a man and an immigrant, it's like you're being judged both ways."

# School of Hard Knocks

by SEOW BEI YI

photographs by TAN PEI LIN

It is a Monday morning in Tensta, a suburb north-west of Stockholm. All is quiet but for merchants setting up the fruit market and a stream of students making their way to school.

They tread across the gravel courtyard, wearing windbreakers, jackets and, for some girls, Islamic headscarves. Blonde, blue-eyed Swedes are nowhere to be seen. In the distance, a yellow pillar proclaims the school's name, "Ross Tensta Gymnasium".



**R**oss Tensta Gymnasium is a multicultural high school that adopted American-inspired teaching methods more than 10 years ago. It is no stranger to change but grapples with an image problem for being in an immigrant-heavy area.

Ethnicity is not usually mentioned in Swedish schools, but principal Sofie Abrahamsson does not shirk from the topic if it crops up. The 40-year-old recalled a recent conversation with a student. It was not about homework or the school's programmes, but identity. He had told her: "I'm a Turk."

Like many of his schoolmates, the teenager was born and raised in Sweden and speaks Swedish fluently. Yet, when asked about his nationality, he said he identified as being both Turkish and Swedish.

It underscores Ross Tensta Gymnasium's challenge in trying to be a good school. Almost 90 per cent of Tensta's 18,800 residents have immigrant roots.

The school is therefore often perceived as non-Swedish, despite most of its students having lived all their lives in Sweden. There are about 700 students, aged 16 to 18, of almost 50 ethnicities with roots in Somalia, Turkey and Iran, among others.

As it is the main high school in the area, its reputation is closely tied to the social issues of its neighbourhood and it is not all rosy in Tensta. The suburb has thrice the unemployment rate of Stockholm, and almost five times as many residents receiving financial assistance.

In 2011, there were almost twice as many reported muggings and bag snatchings in Tensta as in the capital. These are among factors that put off students from outside the area.

"Most of our students are Swedish, but they identify with something else," said Ms Abrahamsson, one of the school's two principals. "That is something we can't change. But we want to give our students something. We're here to educate them."

She and the other head, Runar Krantz, 46, believe their multicultural school offers students a broader world view and allows them to learn to communicate better with people of different backgrounds.

Every student has a teacher-mentor. The staff look out for those with learning difficulties or behavioural issues in

relating to teachers or peers.

"Apart from grades, we want the students to have a sense of identity and the belief that they can become who they want to become," says Ms Abrahamsson.

Students and alumni interviewed said they appreciate that their teachers go the extra mile to offer support, especially as many have parents who cannot help them with schoolwork and cannot afford private tuition.

Rani Alhallak remembers how his parents could not help him learn Swedish because they were from Lebanon and knew so little of the language themselves.

"In Tensta, the students need more help, more people to talk to, and a person to look up to," said the 25-year-old, who now works as a bank manager.

His teachers were a big help.

"It felt like your teacher was your friend," he said. "This didn't have to do only with your studies. If you had problems, you could just go to your teacher and talk to him."

When he was in school, half his class of about 28 students were ethnic Swedes. They came from outside Tensta, attracted to the natural science programme that the school runs in collaboration with the prestigious Karolinska Institute.

But that has changed. Since free school choice was introduced in the early 1990s, students no longer have to go to schools near their homes. More middle-class students are choosing city centre schools instead.

Mr Alhallak thinks that having the word "Tensta" in the school name is probably turning off some students.

Being in an immigrant-heavy suburb means the school battles perceptions that it has poor teachers, produces poor results and, above all, that its students are not "Swedish".

It has not been able to shrug off those perceptions despite drastic changes more than 10 years ago when it adapted the teaching methods of an American private school.

The Ross School was started in East Hampton, New York, in 1991 by Courtney Ross and her late husband, former Time Warner chairman Steve Ross.

It has children from pre-nursery to grade 12, and prides itself on an interdisciplinary curriculum with a strong emphasis on history and culture.

In 2002, the Stockholm supervisor of secondary schools suggested that Tensta Gymnasium adopt the Ross teaching model as a way to combat falling enrolment. The revamp started in 2003 with 30 million Swedish krona (\$5.3 million) set aside for it.

Class size was reduced from an average of 32 to 20, with every student given a laptop for research and presentations. In the staff room, teachers were grouped into interdisciplinary teams so they could come up with elements like project work and extra teaching materials that used knowledge from their respective subjects.

The premises were renovated to provide more open study areas and encourage interaction between students and teachers, and between teachers and administrators.

The result is a cosy environment with open discussion spaces, display cases for student projects and natural lighting indoors. All this is a contrast with the drab uniformity of Tensta, where most apartment blocks were built in the 1960s. The school, originally called Tensta Gymnasium, added the "Ross" brand in 2009.

"It wasn't easy, but it was very, very fun," recalled former principal Inger Nyrell of the long process. "I've always believed in the development of education and I think it's good for teachers to develop and to change. Otherwise, you lose your passion for teaching."

Although many younger teachers supported the changes, some older ones believed that a public school should be free from "foreign influence". After their retirement, in 2012, they published a strongly worded letter protesting against the Ross model.

Ms Nyrell, who is retired, maintains that the change was a success overall. "A lot of municipal schools in Stockholm have closed," she pointed out. "But this school, despite being in a suburb and having a large immigrant population, has survived and maintained its number of students."

Alumni like Mr Alhallak say the Ross name has increased interest in the school, and people do ask about its programmes. But it remains a neighbourhood school with students who enter with low academic scores.

Still, students who thrive there speak up strongly against its

(FROM LEFT) English teacher Elisabeth Braconier feels that a student's ethnicity does not matter when it comes to learning; the Ross Tensta Gymnasium is one example of the school's alignment with the Ross model of education; 44-year-old Hazha Mohammed Fadhi has been teaching chemistry and biology at Ross Tensta for six years.

negative stereotypes. Zaynab Gohari, 17, was hesitant about applying until a teacher advisor at her previous school told her Ross Tensta Gymnasium produced many students who had gone on to find success.

"Everyone else said not to go there, that the teachers were not good," said Zaynab, who had better grades than most of her peers when she joined.

She found the school better than she expected.

"The teachers are very good, but there are students who don't want to get educated, and don't have the interest to get educated," she said. "That's what destroys the reputation of the school. Our school has a low entry point, everyone can come in."

Alumnus Ahmed Abdirahman, 28, shares her view. Now a researcher at a broadcasting corporation, he was at Tensta Gymnasium when it first picked up the Ross concept and still maintains close ties with his alma mater.

"It's a beautiful school," he said. "It's modern, it's multicultural, and there are great teachers. But not many choose to go there because of how it is labelled."

As long as Tensta's socio-economic problems persist, efforts to change the reputation are likely to have limited success.

"No matter how much investment the school has done, from buying a new education model, to travelling the world and rebuilding the whole space, it will all come back. That means the grades of incoming students remain low," he said.

Principal Abrahamsson remains steadfast in believing in her school's potential. Of its battle against perceptions, she said: "The whole world is in our school. But we're in Stockholm, in Sweden. Unfortunately, in Sweden, the name still matters."

Now in the midst of planning its vision for the next five years, she said: "It's not easy to transform a school into something new, but in that, we have succeeded."

The Planka movement

advocates for

free public transport

through fare dodging.

It cost transport operator

Storstockholms Lokaltrafik (SL)

over

300 million krona

last year.

by STEFANUS IAN

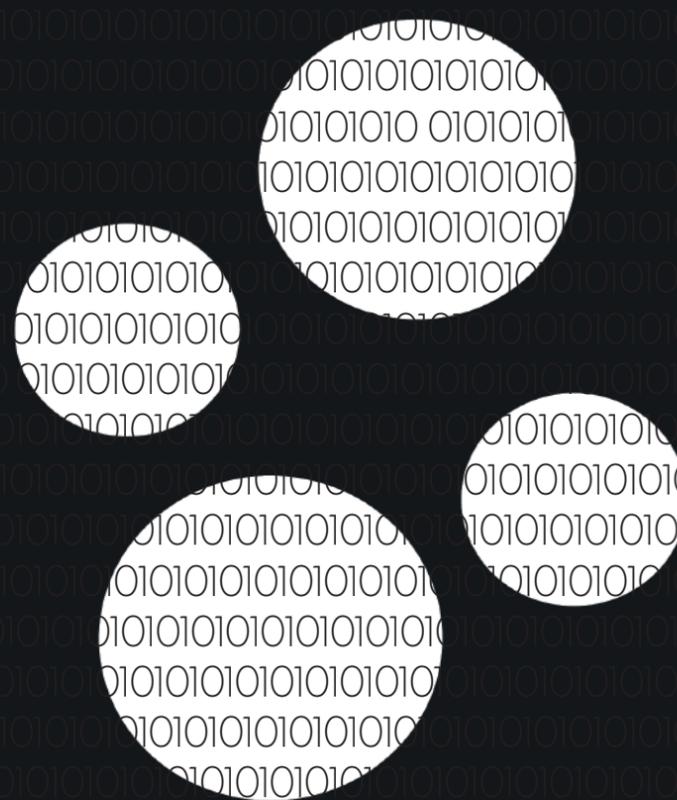
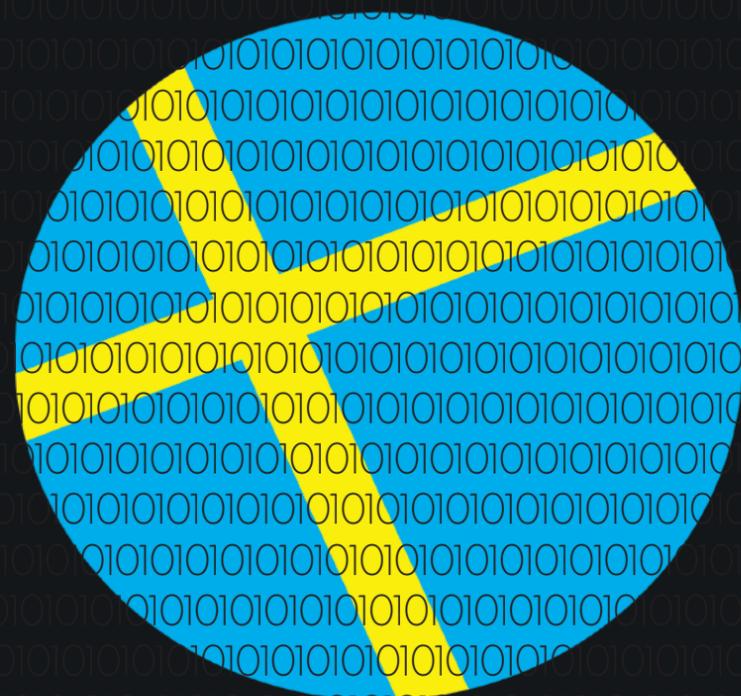
photograph by TOH EE MING

To read the full story about the Planka movement, visit  
[www.gofar.sg/2014sweden](http://www.gofar.sg/2014sweden)

## FARE FACTS

-  The Planka.nu campaign was launched after transport fares were raised in 2001.
-  Planka has 500 fee-paying members who pay an "insurance fee" of 100 Swedish krona (\$18) per month.
-  Members have to commit to squeezing through the gantries every single time they take the subway.
-  It is observed that girls often do it in a group, while boys do it alone.
-  When caught, the fare dodgers are slapped with a 1,200 krona fine.
-  Half of the fees paid are used to settle fines.
-  The other half pays for their headquarters' rent, merchandise and funding of like-minded organisations.
-  Most of the members pay through online banking and the system works on a trust basis.
-  A small group of members run Planka, rotating their position every two years and work pro-bono.
-  The concept has spread to other cities like Gothenburg, Oslo and Helsinki.





BRINGING

THEIR A-GAME

by BENJAMIN LIM

photographs by HARIZ BAHARUDIN

At the Museum of Science and Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, a certain British archaeologist by the name of Lara Croft stood guard with a pistol in hand. Behind the protagonist from the *Tomb Raider* video game series was an immensely packed exhibition hall. Teenagers, young adults and families had flocked to try their hands on the close to 100 video games on show at Game On 2.0, on the final day of its year-long run.

The world's largest video game exhibition had been on display in Stockholm from October 2013 to September 2014 and was hugely received in Sweden. "The museum never had so much press coverage until the exhibition opened," said Anna Westerling, project manager of Game On.

"People went crazy over the fact that so many video games were made available here and they could relive their childhood memories."

On average, 920 people visited Game On every day – a strong figure that highlights the rich gaming culture in Sweden. The Nordic country is also home to the world's largest computer game festival Dreamhack, held twice a year in Jönköping, a three-hour drive from Stockholm.

What started as just a gathering for competitive gamers has now evolved into a full-fledged festival comprising video game tournaments, music concerts and lectures from game developers. 2013's Dreamhack event attracted 22,810 visitors and 7.7 million more online viewers, with a total prize pool of more than 3.1 million Swedish krona (\$563,200).

But the country is not just home to thousands of gamers; it also produces a considerable pool of talented video game developers. Unbeknownst to many gamers, Swedish-made titles constituted some of the recent big hits. In fact, the country is one of the 10 biggest game exporters in the world.

## The Power of a Single Game

*Minecraft*, currently Sweden's most famous export, took the world by storm with its innovative concept when it first surfaced as a demo in 2009. Players have no specific goals; instead they are encouraged to explore and build in a Lego-like world with graphics that might seem primitive for a 21<sup>st</sup> century video game.

The amount of freedom afforded to the players was unprecedented – in essence, gamers were challenged to create their own games within an infinite world. And the responses were ecstatic.

Some of the most spectacular creations in the *Minecraft* world include a functioning 16-bit computer, the entire country of Denmark, and an ongoing construction project of the universe in the hit television series *Game of Thrones*.

In the first two years of its official release in 2011, *Minecraft* sold 33 million copies and earned 220 million euros (\$354 million). Originally launched on the PC, the game is now available on consoles, mobile platforms and most recently Sony's PlayStation Vita handheld device, further driving the game's sales.

*Minecraft*'s success transformed the game into an iconic brand. Lego released its lineup of *Minecraft*-themed toys, *The*



In an open-world environment created using blockish-looking graphics, players build structures, hunt animals and fight monsters in various game modes.

*Simpsons* parodied the game in one of its episodes' opening sequences, and a movie is currently in the works with *Night at the Museum* director Shawn Levy reportedly helming.

But *Minecraft*'s biggest leap to international success came on September 15, 2013 when global giant Microsoft purchased game developer Mojang for a staggering US\$2.5 billion (\$3.18 billion), making it the largest ever acquisition of a video game company.

To put the deal into perspective, automobile maker Volvo Cars, one of Sweden's largest brands with a 77-year history, was sold to China's Geely Automobile in 2010 for US\$1.8 billion, less than what five-year-old Mojang is worth.

As Jacob Kroon from Sweden's *Dataspelsbranschen* pointed out, the Mojang-Microsoft deal is significant not just in terms of numbers, but more importantly the future of the Swedish video game industry.

"*Minecraft* is testament to how a single game developer can change the world, and also how much potential in Swedish video game companies remains untapped," said Mr Kroon, whose organisation represents the industry's interests in the country and ensures its steady growth by working closely with politicians, stakeholders and other industry leaders.

"More eyes are on us now – people are becoming more aware of Sweden as a successful game development hub and not just a country that makes cars and exports weapons." (Sweden was ranked the 11<sup>th</sup> largest arms exporter in the world by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.)

Like Mojang, King rose to become one of the most valuable game companies in the world with the success of a single game – *Candy Crush Saga*.

The puzzle video game was released for Facebook and both Apple's iOS and Google's Android mobile platforms in 2012. It had more than 66 million players worldwide in 2013 and netted US\$790.1 million in the first half of 2014 through in-

app purchases.

King completed its initial public offering (IPO) on March 26 last year with US\$22.50 a share on the New York Stock Exchange, making it the biggest IPO for a mobile and social gaming company with a valuation of US\$7.08 billion.

The company, which now has offices and studios worldwide, recently acquired Singapore gaming startup Nonstop Games for up to US\$100 million. This marks the first time a local game studio was acquired by an international company and also brings Singapore closer to a booming gaming industry.

## A Friendly 'Silicon Valley'

Both King and Mojang are part of the new wave of Swedish game companies that has sent the Swedish gaming industry's earnings soaring over the last few years. According to *Dataspelsbranschen*'s latest report, 2013 was the industry's biggest year with a total revenue of 712 million euros, almost double its earnings in 2012.

DICE, the third largest Swedish game company behind Mojang and King, became an international brand with its highly acclaimed *Battlefield* military shooter series. The franchise pits two teams of up to 64 players each in epic war zones set in real-world locations.

With more than 18 games under its belt, *Battlefield* recently overtook '70s pop band ABBA as the biggest Swedish cultural export in terms of sales.

Fans of historical strategy games may also be familiar with the *Europa Universalis* and *Hearts of Iron* franchises developed by Paradox Interactive, another Swedish powerhouse with a turnover of 22 million euros in 2013.

Mojang, DICE and Paradox are all within walking distance of one another in Södermalm, the culturally rich and hipster district of Stockholm. Regarded as the birthplace of these multi-million dollar companies, Södermalm has become a hot destination for game developers to work in Stockholm and be part of an ever-growing community.

Other Swedish game development hubs are based in Gothenburg, Malmö and Skövde, totaling 170 companies in the country.

It is similar to Silicon Valley in the US but without the fierce rivalry that typically defines the tech industry. Instead

companies thrive in a friendly and open environment, to which Paradox's CEO Fredrik Wester attests.

"We speak the same gaming language and culture. Developers work hard in the office, and then at the end of the day meet up with their friends at the pub to discuss games and the projects that they are working on. I even meet Christofer (Sundberg, co-founder) of Avalanche Studios from time to time to exchange ideas."

This camaraderie among Swedish companies is also hugely beneficial in times of financial trouble, said Dan Thronström, who works at Avalanche's subsidiary company Expansive Worlds, just around the corner from Paradox's office building.

"When a project ramps down and if a studio has to let go of its employees, usually other Swedish companies are contacted to see if they would be hired. It's like a community here and we know that we are all sitting in the same boat, so we try to help and support one another as much as possible."

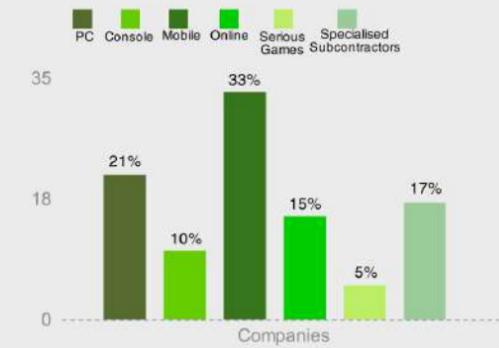
## Partnership For Success

Often, the exchange of ideas is not confined to just a *fika* (Swedish term for coffee break) or a couple of beers. Swedish companies are known to collaborate with one another on game development, and this has allowed several companies to specialize and focus on niche aspects of game design as subcontractors for bigger studios.

Expansive Worlds itself was the product of a collaboration between Avalanche Studios and a small game company Emote Games when they worked on the 2009 game *The Hunter*.

Avalanche later decided to acquire Emote's intellectual property after the company ran into financial trouble and

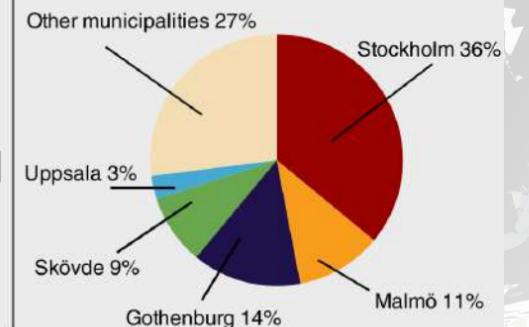
# Swedish Game Industry Scoreboard



Distribution Platforms for Swedish Developers

Overview of the gaming platforms that Swedish developers are working on, past and present.

## Distribution of gaming companies in Sweden





filed for bankruptcy.

Avalanche, the AAA (big budget) game developer which overtook Paradox to become the fourth largest Swedish studio in 2013, then set up the new studio in 2010 to continue developing *The Hunter* and diversify their product range with more free-to-play games, said Mr Thronström.

Paradox and its studios also have a history of collaborating with other companies, including Fatshark who has made a name for themselves by being a successful subcontractor for AAA projects.

*Magicka: Wizard Wars*, an action-adventure game, was developed by Arrowhead Games in conjunction with Bitsquid, a subsidiary of Fatshark. The two companies are currently working together again for *Helldivers*, a shooter game slated for release this year.

This philosophy of fostering cooperation is one of the main reasons why the Swedish gaming industry has been able to grow so huge within such a short span of time as it allows small companies to practice their skills and build a strong portfolio before they embark on their own projects.

More importantly, it demonstrates the high level of efficiency and flexibility in the country, allowing the industry to react quickly to new and changing trends in the global gaming market.

## Investing in the Future

Financial constraint is the biggest obstacle that many small companies like Might and Delight face, and Mr Kroon believes

that more government support would help them overcome the hurdle and, more importantly, take the industry to the next level.

Singling out neighbour and industry rival Finland's funding system, he said that Sweden's industry could also benefit hugely from generous grants and tax rates offered by the government.

"Without such support, companies like Rovio (developer of the *Angry Birds* mobile game) would not have existed, let alone become one of Finland's largest companies now. What we need is a national strategy where the government acknowledges that the game industry is hugely beneficial for our economy and offers its support.

"With additional investment, I think the industry can even be on the same level as the telecommunications sector in a few years' time," said Mr Kroon.

Torbjörn Bengtsson from Stockholm Business Region Development concurs.

"Sweden's telecommunications sector and IT startups like Spotify have benefited from investment in the past. The gaming industry is risky because it's a hit-driven one, but hopefully with *Minecraft's* success it would be more appealing to investors," said Mr Bengtsson, whose agency is tasked with attracting foreign investment to develop Stockholm's IT industry.

He added: "Finland may have much more governmental support but our industry is still bigger and doing better than theirs, so surely there's something that Sweden is doing right."

1

Early access to computers and IT in the early '90s has equipped Swedes with the necessary skills to develop games.

2

The gaming industry has grown significantly over the last few years, with revenues increasing by 76 per cent to 752 million euros in 2013.

3

CEO of Paradox Interactive Fredrik Westers has been with the company since 2003.

4

The fifth largest Swedish game developer in terms of turnover has at least three games in development that are due for release in 2015.

5

Small game developers have to find new ways to make games and stand out in a saturated market, says Anders Westin, CEO of indie studio Might and Delight.

6

His indie studio, Might & Delight, is using old-school techniques of props-making and photography to create its new side-scrolling shooter game.

7

Game On 2.0 featured some 100 video games from the past two decades during its year-long run at Stockholm's Museum of Science and Technology.

8

Expansive Worlds (with producer Dan Thronström), is Avalanche Studios's foray into the free-to-play gaming market, and its 2009 game *The Hunter* still receives regular updates and new content.



# *This System Works*

Sweden's state-run alcohol monopoly, Systembolaget, gives monopolies a good name.

text and photographs

by RAPHAEL LIM



Enthusiasts at a wine masterclass during the New Zealand Wine Fair sample a selection of white wines.

company's annual "responsibility report" attributed this to a shift towards more expensive products.

"We are becoming quite a mature market in terms of volume, so the total volume of wine sold is increasing only very slowly, but we see a movement from the cheapest stuff and upward," said Mr Sjödin.

## Guzzle Up

Systembolaget adjusts its margins so it receives enough to sustain itself. It has the same margin of 19 per cent on each bottle of wine it sells, in addition to a fixed margin of 3.50 krona.

Such a pricing model, however, has created demand outside of Sweden, with buyers from as far as London.

"What you call expensive fine wine is quite cheap in Sweden, compared with England and France, because the retail monopoly is not allowed to speculate in wine prices," said Dick Samuelsson, partner and principal of the Scandinavian Wine Academy, the largest sommelier school in the Nordics.

An expensive wine such as a Château Pétrus could cost 20,000 krona to 25,000 krona a bottle in Sweden, but might have an international value of 50,000 krona to 60,000 krona.

But Systembolaget does not see foreign buyers as a problem, as numbers remain small.

Said Mr Sjödin: "We haven't seen all our good bottles bought by Danish or Norwegian people. We know that it happens, but the absolute majority of bottles end up with Swedish buyers."

## Cheers From Public

Still, Systembolaget seems to have the public's support. Recent polls show that over 70 per cent of Swedes support the alcohol monopoly.

Fund manager Ulf Frykhammar, 49, said while Systembolaget's effectiveness in curbing alcohol use is a matter of opinion, there are advantages to it being the national procurer.

"They get the prices down and are actually rather professional in the way they select wines as well," said Mr Frykhammar, who shops frequently at its stores.

Lucas Spinnars, a brand manager at Stockholm-based alcohol importer, Fondberg, agrees. "I actually think the Swedish monopoly is doing a good job. The selection you can find in Sweden is way higher than what you can find in many places around the world."

For Systembolaget, what matters most is not wine enjoyment but that alcohol use is kept under control.

"If you make alcohol available all day round everywhere, it's so much easier to buy the bottle you weren't planning to drink. With Systembolaget, it's still available for anyone who can plan a little ahead," Mr Sjödin said.



Ulf Sjödin, head of category management at Systembolaget's purchasing department. The 48-year-old Master of Wine is in charge of selecting the range of products carried at Systembolaget's shops.

**W**ith global alcohol brand Absolut calling Sweden home, most may expect the Nordic country's tippable choice to be vodka. Absolutely not, as it turns out.

Sweden has long left its spirits-drinking past behind; in place of firewater are glasses of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Per capita wine consumption in the country has risen by as much as 59 per cent in the last decade, overshadowing traditional wine-loving European states such as France and Italy, where consumption levels have fallen over the same period.

## No Profit Motive

The Swedes tap mainly one source to feed their love for wine: Systembolaget, the nation's alcohol retail monopoly, which oversees drinks with more than 3.5 per cent alcohol by volume. Its stores have no discounts, are closed most of the weekend and have strict rules forbidding sales to underage or already inebriated patrons.

Alcohol is available in Sweden's restaurants and bars, but prices are prohibitive.

Systembolaget declares on its website that it exists for one reason: to minimise alcohol-related problems by selling the intoxicant responsibly, without a profit motive.

"We're a responsible company," said Ulf Sjödin, head of category management at Systembolaget's purchasing department. "We don't try to maximise sales."

The alcohol monopoly carries a large selection of wines, stocking over 3,000 different names at its flagship outlet, with even more variety online.

It is also one of the largest wine buyers in the world: almost 200 million litres of wine are sold every year, enough to fill 80 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

While Systembolaget is a non-profit group, the state collects some €1 billion (\$1.62 billion) a year in taxes from alcohol sold. And the number is growing.

Wine sales at its stores hit 13.5 billion Swedish krona (\$2.36 billion) in 2013, a 3.6 per cent rise from the year before. The

# On The Web



videos by  
LI ZHUODA  
RESHMA AILMCHANDANI  
TAN SI HUI

Watch the Go-Far videos at  
[vimeo.com/gofarsg](http://vimeo.com/gofarsg)



DAVID DURMAZ  
THE CAPTAIN

David Durmaz, an Assyrian born in Sweden, is the captain of Assyriska Föreningen Football Club – a club based in Södertälje, a city located 30km southwest of Stockholm.

With the club seen as a substitute national team by the Assyrian people, David feels the pressure of being a role model. Through his weekly routine of football training and teaching sports at an Assyrian primary school, David has grown to become a captain to his football team and to his people.



“ I feel so sad. They don't want to welcome people from different places. But it should not be about your race or your religion. In Sweden, everybody is meant to be equal. I can make a hundred dollars and give you fifty, and it's okay. But these days, it's 'all about me'.

...  
**Roger Hahne, general manager, on the far-right political party Sweden Democrats' anti-immigrant stance.**

”

## The Stockholm Identity Project

*For 12 days, the Go-Far team hit the streets of Stockholm and asked people what the city means to them.*



STREAM DREAM

«

For years, the music industry has been facing the scourge of piracy that costs them more than US\$15 billion a year.

Then along came Spotify, a music streaming service that encourages users to pay for their services. This video examines if Spotify has evolved into a new species of the same problem.

Spanning a total of 110 km, the Stockholm subway is the longest art exhibit in the world.

Painted a myriad of different colours, 90 out of the 100 subway stations in the city have been decorated with different sculptures, murals and installations.

The blue vine motif running along the cave-like walls of T-Central Station, is the work of Swedish artist Per Olof Ultvedt in 1975.

“The walls are a good distraction when you've had a tiring day,” said Ida Nilsson, 26, a student. “It's nice to take your mind off school and admire them. It's the perfect place for art.”



Read more articles from the Stockholm Identity Project on the Go-Far: Sweden website at [gofar.sg/sweden](http://gofar.sg/sweden).



# 10 Years of Go-Far

by TOH EE MING

photographs by HARIZ BAHARUDIN & TAN PEI LIN

From the get-go, we knew our trip was going to be different. “This year’s Go-Far is unusual because it marks the 10th year anniversary,” read the application email the cohort received in April 2014. And it was.

Our destination was 9,648km from home. Sweden was the module’s first European destination; previous Go-Far trips were within Asia.

Finding a theme for a first-world city was a challenge. There was no disaster, and no stories of survivors and recovery.

To mark the anniversary, the school invited alumni to relive their experience by joining us in Stockholm. The Chair, Prof Charles Salmon, accompanied us too. No pressure.

Then there was the party. We wanted to mark this milestone with something alums would remember. We began with designing a T-shirt and tote bag that would be given to all who attended.

The party was to be held in school, so we had a lot to do. We built the grandest installation to date: an overhead canopy of steel cages entwined with vines, complete with delicate dangling baubles, transforming the benches and causing some alumni to remark that they had “never seen the school so beautiful.”

Finally, on the day of the party, over 100 alumni members returned to the place where it all began. Seniors Bhavan

Jaipragas (Bhutan 2012), Philip Lim (Bangladesh 2009), and Liza Lin (Indonesia 2005) spoke of their most memorable moments on Go-Far.

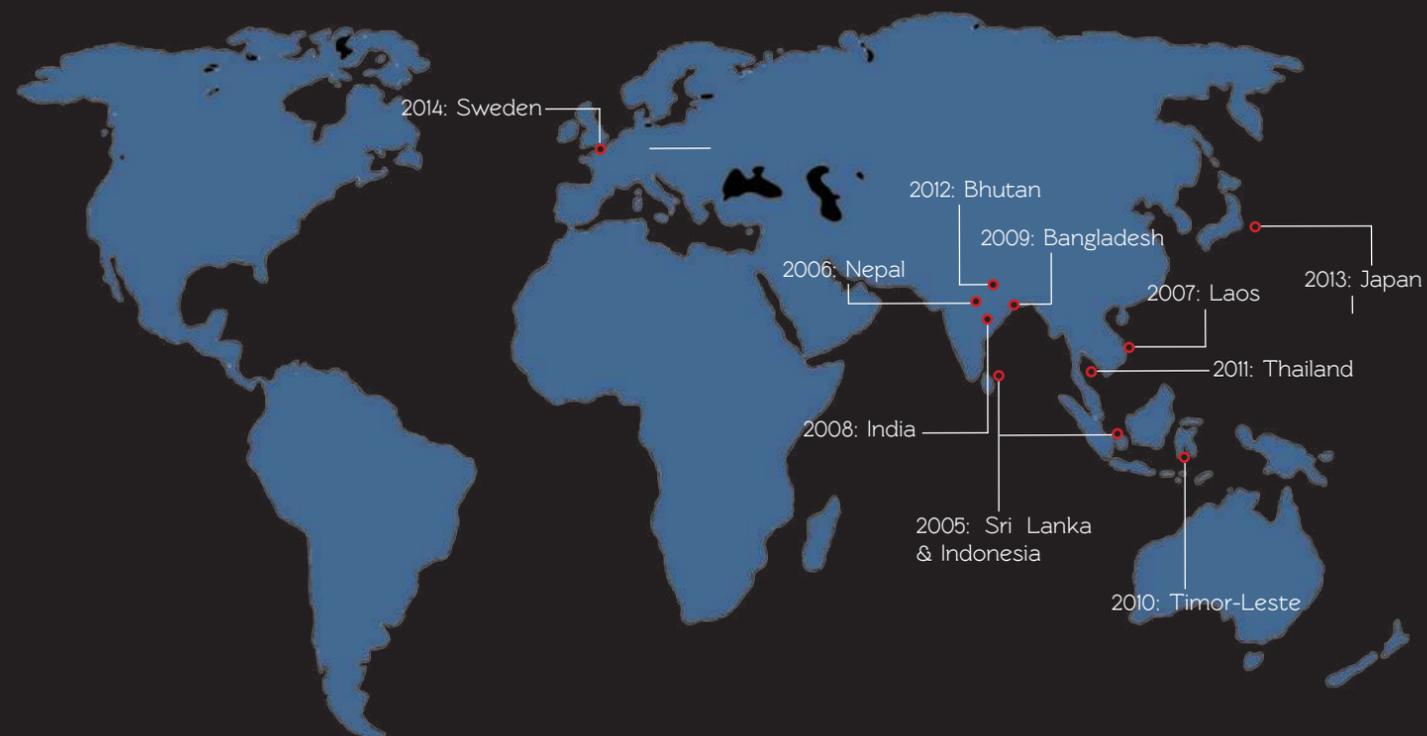
Many of the Go-Far alumni were now reporters at news organisations both local and international, like The Straits Times, The New Paper, AFP, Bloomberg, Al Jazeera, and Reuters. Others had joined the civil service and in almost all government ministries. A handful had set up their own companies, like the folks at the Little Red Ants creative studio.

To mark the legacy of our seniors, we launched Gofar.sg, to house a decade’s worth of stories on a single, comprehensive platform.

As we collected our archival material, we caught a glimpse of the pioneering batches’ ventures into uncharted territory. And boy, did they come back with stories to tell: of Maoist conflicts in Nepal, ravaged landscapes of tsunami-hit nations, the food crisis in India and the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan in transition.

The party we held was a celebration of what Go-Far stood for - shaping young journalists of the future.

The alums may have forged different paths, but they share something in common - a love for storytelling and documenting the human experience.





**Andrew Toh**

While he was the opinions editor of The Nanyang Chronicle, Andrew started a column featuring prominent NTU academics. He developed a passion for international and financial reporting after a six-month internship at Thomson Reuters.

Kai Ying was a reporter at the reviews and lifestyle section of The Nanyang Chronicle. She did her internship at Her World magazine. While on exchange at Bentley University in Massachusetts, she read gender studies. She loves meeting new people and listening to their stories.



**Liu Kai Ying**



**Luna Pham Hanh**

Born in Hanoi, Hanh has lived in Singapore for the past eight years. While at NTU, she did internships at Yahoo! Singapore, MediaCorp and SAP Asia. Hanh became interested in all things Scandinavian during her exchange programme in South Korea, when she made friends with students from Sweden, Norway and Finland.

**Raphael Lim**

Raphael just completed a half-year internship at The Business Times, where he wrote stories on politics, companies and the stock market. He was the photo editor of The Nanyang Chronicle and spent a semester abroad in Switzerland.



**Stefanus Ian**

Stefanus was a sub-editor for The Nanyang Chronicle and volunteered at local sports website Redsports.sg. He recently finished a six-month internship at AFP News Agency covering sports and politics.

Ben worked as both a reporter and photographer during his internship at The New Paper. He was the reviews and digital editor of The Nanyang Chronicle and a photographer for the George Washington University newspaper, where he had the opportunity to meet political and business leaders in Washington, D.C.



**Benjamin Lim**



**Hariz Baharudin**

Hariz spent six months at the Nepali Times reporting on the resilience of the people there. He was a sub-editor for the Nanyang Chronicle and contributed to the 'A Place Called Home' photography exhibition in Taman Jurong.



**Li Zhuoda**

Zhuoda was the opinions editor of The Nanyang Chronicle. During her internship at the Public Service Division, she filmed various multimedia projects, including one that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong shared on his Facebook page.



**Reshma Ailmchandani**

Reshma recently completed an internship with Channel NewsAsia, writing health, education and human-interest stories. She was studio director of the campus TV station, Nanyang Spectrum. Reshma also wrote sports articles for the campus newspaper, The Nanyang Chronicle.

Bei Yi started news writing as a reporter for The Nanyang Chronicle. She was among the first interns posted to the Integration Desk at The Straits Times, where she worked on multimedia projects, before moving on to Life! to write news and entertainment features.



**Seow Bei Yi**

After documenting the life of a homeless man through her lens, Pei Lin discovered her passion for storytelling through photographs. She recently completed a six-month internship in Nepal with ECS Media Pvt Ltd, reporting and producing photo essays on Nepali culture. She enjoys being the silent observer in her storytelling.



**Tan Pei Lin**



**Tan Tam Mei**

During her six-month stint at The New Paper, Tam Mei discovered the power of journalism to change lives through her coverage of human-interest, policy and crime stories. She spent six months in Rotterdam and hopes that her storytelling can touch people's hearts.



**Tan Si Hui**

Si Hui's interest in video production began when she was an intern at the current affairs department of Channel NewsAsia. "Always stay interested in someone else's life" is her motto when it comes to producing videos. With a zest for life, she is ever-ready to meet challenges head-on, even if that means getting a concussion.



**Toh Ee Ming**

Ee Ming was both a writer and photographer with the Nepali Times, where she found herself in the unlikeliest of situations - from taking pictures of wild vultures feeding, to capturing the excitement of Nepal's biggest chariot festival.



**Samuel He**

Samuel is an alumnus of Go-Far from KWSCI's Class of 2008. He is now a director at Weave, a production house. In 2014, his photography project, 'Community Quilts', was among 13 others to receive a grant from the SG50 Celebration Fund.

Hedwig began her two-decade career in journalism with The Straits Times in 1981, where she covered several beats, including courts and education. She also worked at The New Paper as news editor and at The Sunday Times before joining NTU in 2004. She now teaches news writing and reporting, science and health journalism, the advanced writing workshop and overseas reporting for Go-Far.



**Hedwig Alfred**



**Tay Kay Chin**

Kay Chin runs the photojournalism programme in KWSCI and is a co-founder of Platform, a gathering of Singapore-based photographers. With more than a decade's experience in the newsroom, he held various editorial positions in newspapers in Singapore and the United States before becoming a freelance photographer and lecturer. He led the first Go-Far team to Aceh, Indonesia, in 2005.

# GO-FAR 2014



# Lööking Back

by TAN TAM MEI

I'm chatting with 'latte papa' Viktor Wallström in his home.

His apartment looks like the children's section of an IKEA showroom with bright colours, empty space and pinewood furniture. And I'm sitting in the middle of it all, grateful that this newsmaker has allowed a cub reporter from Singapore into his home.

In Singapore, the plan had been to meet fathers who put their jobs on hold to look after their babies in parks and cafes. Now, through a friend of my newsmaker, the doors were literally opened and I could see this dad at work myself.

This is what journalism is about, I told myself, exploring people's lives. And this is what Go-Far is about - no matter where you are in the world, reporters must gain access to their newsmakers and engage them.

In Stockholm, we also learnt we had to be flexible with our story ideas. One of our photojournalists, Pei Lin, worked for several days with a Romanian beggar for a photo essay before the newsmaker changed her mind and said no to being photographed. Pei Lin then broadened the scope of her story and produced

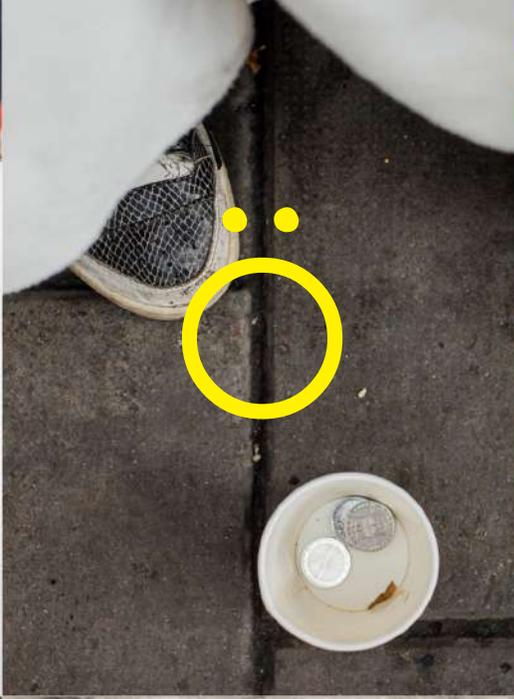
a news feature on the steep rise in the number of Romanian beggars in Stockholm.

And we had many opportunities to hone our news reporting and writing. The stories were everywhere; we just had to think on our feet.

Some teammates chanced upon the opening of the new Swedish Parliament and took great photos and talked to people in the crowd who had gathered to see the grand procession. Their quick thinking resulted in a colourful addition to our multimedia website. By the end of the trip, we had more than 100 online posts.

As foreign correspondents, we were reminded to keep the Singapore reader in mind. This led us to stories about gaming, online music-streaming and wine. And we looked for stories that Singaporeans are talking about: ISIS, immigration, having more babies and childcare.

Someone had said it was going to be easier reporting in a first-world country. Let me tell you that's just not true. This book is a testament of our 12-day effort in Stockholm and I'll let the stories speak for themselves.



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