

Beyond Stockholm worth trip in Sweden



Rick Steves

You can blame my Norwegian heritage, but I'm not so hot on the Swedish countryside. Even so, you can't say you've seen Sweden if you've only been to Stockholm. Rural Sweden — especially the province of Småland — is worth adding to any Scandinavian itinerary.

Covering the entire south-east coast and running deep into the interior, Småland's most appealing corner is bookended by the smallish towns of Växjö and Kalmar. In between lies Sweden's famous Glass Country — "Glasriket" — which sparkles with glassblowing studios.

It's no surprise that glass-making caught on here. The necessary resources are abundant: The region is densely forested (endless wood to fire the ovens) and blanketed with lakes (ample sand to melt into glass). Glassblowers have been at work in Småland since at least 1742.

Glass Country's first boom came during the difficult 19th century, when a sixth of Sweden's population emigrated to America as the country's iron mills were closing. The Småland laborers who stayed behind were highly skilled at working with materials at high temperatures. Glassmaking became their salvation, and by the early 1900s, this region had more than 100 workshops creating everyday glasses, vases, bowls and bottles. One local who left for America later helped design the iconic Coca-Cola bottle.

There are fewer glassworks now, as cheaper imported glass has taken its toll. Today's Glass Country artisans have refocused their efforts, emphasizing high-quality, high-end art pieces and welcoming guests to tour (and shop at)



With its stout watchtowers and park-like ramparts, Kalmar Castle is the main attraction in the Old World town of Kalmar. **DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI**

their workshops.

There's something deeply satisfying about a visit to a glasbruk. Even at the bigger places — and especially at the smaller ones — you'll feel genuine artistic energy in the air, as glassblowers persuade glowing globs of molten glass to take shape. Demonstrations are intimate; you'll be close enough to feel the heat from the glowing furnaces.

The storied Kosta Boda workshop dominates, with a flagship campus in the village of Kosta that's complete with plush hotel, art glass gallery and a discount seconds shop. But there are many friendly independent producers scattered throughout the woods, where you'll be invited into a simple barn-like studio to watch glassblowers at work. Nearly all demonstrations are free.

Glass Country also sustains the only surviving hand papermaking workshop in Scandinavia. Tucked next to a giant modern paper plant, the tiny 300-year-old Lessebo mill follows each hands-on step for making fine paper: soaking cotton and linen fibers until they become pulp, packing the fiber into a frame, then pressing, drying, glazing and hand-tearing the paper into the perfect size and shape. Swedes covet this traditional paper for special-occasion invitations and announcements.

If art's not your thing, check out local critters at the Moose and Farm Animal Park. At this offbeat attraction (just outside the village of Kosta), you'll walk through the moose-happy gift shop before taking a mile-long stroll around the perimeter of a pen holding

live moose. Life-size dioramas with stuffed moose round out the attraction. You can even buy moose sausage to grill on-site.

Because this 70-mile stretch of Glass Country is relatively undeveloped, most visitors tour the glassworks by day, then sprint to the nearby coastal town of Kalmar for dinner and a bed. History students may remember Kalmar as the place where Norway, Sweden and Denmark signed a 1397 treaty that united their countries into one huge kingdom. That union lasted about a hundred years before dissolving in the 16th century ... and since then, even the European Union hasn't been able to put them back together again. (Norway is not an EU member.)

Historic Kalmar has an

Old World ambiance that's rare in Scandinavia. It's dominated by a moated castle that's a great medieval experience. With stout watchtowers, park-like ramparts, and a creaky, drafty interior, this place was a royal hub for centuries. But when the Swedish border shifted south in the mid-17th century, the castle lost its strategic importance. No matter — it's now the biggest attraction in Kalmar, and well worth a visit.

Besides the famous castle, the town offers a cozy, cobblestoned center. For a small city, you'll find a surprising number of good dining options. The restaurants survive on the town's short, intense summer season, when vacationing Swedes make the streets lively day and night. Drop by the café/tea parlor Kullzénska, tucked into an

18th-century house, and you'll be surrounded by locals enjoying warm berry cobbler and rich coffee — the classic Swedish fika, or coffee break.

If you're lucky enough to be in Kalmar on a hot summer day, stroll out to its beach — a festive and happy slice of Swedish life. With snack stands, sandcastles, and views of the castle, the beach makes Kalmar an unexpected fun-in-the-sun stop. For people-watchers, it's a combination of Swedish beauty pageant and tattoo show. For me, it's the best possible dose of authentic, off-the-beaten-path Sweden.

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CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Musician guided by questions in travels

By **Jae-Ha Kim**
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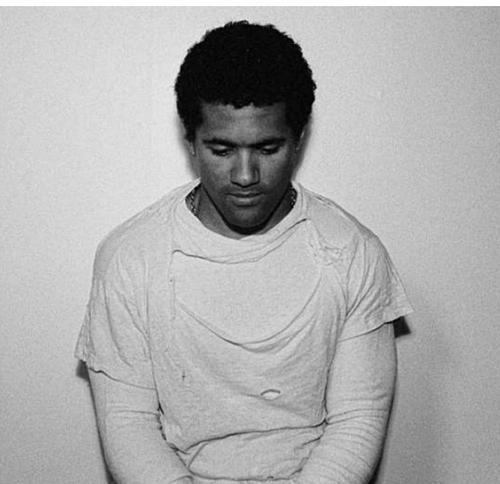
"I was raised amongst an odd amalgamation of folks," said singer-songwriter Henry J. Star, the stage name of Devin Badgett, 26. "As a result of this bizarre hodge-podge, I was introduced to many perspectives on art and culture that I likely wouldn't have discovered on my own otherwise. I read my first manga in middle school, thanks to my brother, and also got fed all kinds of beautiful Southern literature via the elders in my family. I followed my curiosity in these things like a string. I'm incredibly grateful to have grown up around such a wide range of interests and to have received endless encouragement in my creative pursuits as a child and an adult."

Star's debut album, "The Soft Apocalypse," features introspective songs that he wrote to "understand and heal."

This interview with Star has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: How did growing up in Tennessee affect your sensibilities as an artist?
A: Growing up in the American South as a mixed-race person made me acutely aware of the complexities of prejudice. This had a deep impact on my perspectives from a very young age. It has informed my creative voice in more ways than one.

Q: Does the music you hear in a particular setting inspire your own work?
A: I have really been enjoying a lot of the music by Danish artists recently.



Singer-songwriter Henry J. Star is looking forward to visiting Japan this year. **TYLER KRIPPAEHE**

The perspectives and sonic expression of artists like ML Buch have left a mark on my most recent work. While making "The Soft Apocalypse," I was fully enamored by the contemplative nature of Japanese ambient music — Hiroshi Yoshimura's "Green" and Chihei Hatakeyama's "Late Spring." These are artists I discovered by way of a deep dive into Brian Eno's discography.

Q: Have you worked on any songs while you were on the road?

A: Writing on the road seems magical ... (but) I don't. I'd love to come out of that shell!

Q: What is your bucket-list venue that you would love to perform in?

A: The Bijou Theatre in Knoxville. I saw some of the most important shows of my life in that room. It would be an honor to get to play there one day.

Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?

A: I am obsessed with the desert. Moab, Utah, is one of my favorite places to visit. There is something so compelling about seeing so much land that is as vast as it is uninhabitable.

Q: What untapped destination should people know about?

A: I can't say I'm an author-

ity on the subject, but I think that Utrecht is cooler than Amsterdam. Many folks only hit Amsterdam if they are lucky enough to hit (the Netherlands).

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?

A: Let questions be your guide. Find a local at a coffee shop and spark up a conversation. Leave time for side quests.

Q: Do you have a knack for picking up new languages?

A: I'm not so sure, but my wife is convinced that it is a gift of mine. I do love language learning, sounds and patterns. I was lucky enough to take Mandarin in high school and have had an ear and mind for it ever since. We are planning a Japan trip for the summer of '26, and I've been taking a deep dive into Japanese in preparation.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?

A: Osaka!

Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?

A: My laptop (for music creation), headphones, journal, a book, a sturdy backpack and my favorite pair of jeans.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

'Flexible' ticket canceled in advance, but no refund given

By **Christopher Elliott** | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I made a ferry booking with Brittany Ferries in January for an August sailing from Plymouth, England, to Santander, Spain. I'm 79, and unfortunately, health issues developed with my kidney disease. I realized that I needed to change my travel plans. If my condition worsened while I was in Spain, I wouldn't be able to return to the United Kingdom quickly because ferries are limited, and it's a 24-hour journey.

I canceled my booking with three months' notice. As soon as I completed the online cancellation, the website said that there was no refund. It wasn't clear that canceling meant losing my \$390 deposit. When I contacted customer service to explain my situation, they told me that the cancellation is final — no refund and no ability to change to a different route.

I had a "flexi" ticket and believed that I would be able to cancel without penalty. The website didn't warn me about losing my deposit before I clicked the final cancellation button. Can you help me get my money back?

— *Mike Marsden, Porthleven, England*

A: You shouldn't have lost your entire deposit, and Brittany Ferries' response shows a troubling lack of common sense in customer service.

Let's start with what should have happened. You purchased a "flexi" ticket, which, by definition, should offer more flexibility than a standard fare. The whole point of paying extra for a flexible ticket is to have options when circumstances change. Most companies offer flexible fares to give passengers the ability to make changes or cancel with reduced penalties.

The bigger issue here is Brittany Ferries' website design. Any booking system that doesn't clearly warn customers about significant financial penalties before they complete a transaction is fundamentally flawed. Before you clicked the final button, you should have gotten a warning stating that: "You will forfeit your deposit if you proceed with this cancellation."

Your health situation makes this even more

unreasonable. You made a sensible decision to change your travel plans based on legitimate medical concerns. A responsible company would have shown flexibility, especially given the advance notice.

Under U.K. consumer protection laws, businesses must provide clear information about cancellation policies. The Consumer Rights Act requires that terms and conditions be "fair" and "transparent." A surprise forfeiture of your deposit without an adequate warning likely violates this standard.

You could have escalated this to Brittany Ferries' senior management. I publish executive contact information for companies like Brittany Ferries on my website. Sometimes a message to the right executive can cut through the service roadblocks.

I contacted Brittany Ferries on your behalf, pointing out that you had a "flexi" ticket and that the company's handling of your case seemed unreasonable. We also noted that their

website failed to provide an adequate warning about the deposit forfeiture.

Brittany Ferries reviewed your case and issued a full refund of your deposit "on a goodwill basis." While they maintained that their official policy was correct, they recognized that your situation warranted an exception.

Your case highlights an important lesson: Always read the fine print on flexible fares. Some flexible tickets only allow date changes, not route changes or full refunds. If you're booking a ticket specifically because you might need to cancel, call the company directly to confirm exactly what "flexibility" includes.

And for future trips, consider travel insurance that covers trip cancellations for medical reasons.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.