

Famous hotels V

HOTELL GÄSTIS

(PRONOUNCED YESTIS)

KARIN ANDÉN



*The story of a simple hotel in Varberg,
where guests read 15,000 books and take
a bath like Lenin used to do.*

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HOTELL GÄSTIS

VARBERG

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Famous hotels V

HOTELL GÄSTIS



BY

KARIN ANDÉN

SVENSKA HOTELLFÖRLAGET

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CHAPTER I.

AN UNUSUALLY NICE HOTEL

In Varberg, there is an unusual hotel for usual people, with 15,000 books and a bath built like Lenin's. This hotel is called Gästis (pronounced yestis). Gästis is a shortened form of the Swedish word 'gästgivaregård', i.e. an inn or a 'guest-house-like-hotel'.

In a red house opposite the English Park, Varberg's oldest hotel is situated. The guests who stay here soon notice that this is a place with a difference. The bath that is built in the



The Torell House as seen from the English Park.

cellar from the 18th century is a copy of Lenin's favourite baths.

Everywhere, in the corridors and in the toilets, there are books to read, and for anyone who prefers to watch a film, there are hundreds of video

films to choose from, for you to take to your room. 'Everything doesn't have to cost money' is the motto here, and in the reception, you will find a long list of more or less practical things that guests may borrow without having to pay anything extra. There you will find everything from tennis racquets, braces to hold up your trousers and irons, to board games and umbrellas, and here you can also get yourself a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit or a cake. In the evening, dinner is served – and you don't have to pay for that, either.



Elisabeth and Samantha with their Gästis bikes.

With their beautiful bathrooms and comfortable beds, the rooms don't really come with any additional surprises. What is supposed to be there is there, and what's more, everything works. However, in other parts of the house, you will find the most unexpected things. In the lift, hundreds of book covers from the 1940s pass you by. In the winding corridors hang gigantic portraits. In all sorts of different places, you can find traces of the hotel manager's manic love for Lenin, books and guests. All of this, together with the care and attention of the staff has made Gästis known for being an unusually nice hotel.



Devilish books.

CHAPTER II.

TAKE A BATH WITH LENIN

About how a peculiar bathing experience in 1984 in what was formerly Leningrad gave the owner of Hotel Gästis the inspiration to build an unusual spa. In the 18th century cellar of the hotel, our guests can now take a bath in a copy of Lenin's favourite baths.

Lasse Diding dreamt about this bath of Lenin's for 25 years. During a trip to Leningrad in 1984, the leftist hotel manager discovered an extremely beautiful blue-tiled bath in the cellar of a former girls' boarding school, called Smolnij, in Saint Petersburg. Lenin was a regular visitor to these baths during the year of the revolution in 1917.

Varberg already had a bath culture at this time. When the railway and steam boats made the west coast of Sweden accessible at the end of the 19th century, it was trendy to travel to Varberg 'to take the (salt) waters' and to drink healthy spring water. Water was fetched from Svartekällan (the Black Spring) in Apelviken south of Varberg to be drunk in the newly-built Brunnsparken (the Well Park) in Stora Torget (the Main Square). The fantastic Kallbadhuset (The



Specialities offered at the Lenin Baths – Massage – Bath – Electric Treatment.



The stairway down to the Lenin Baths with a lamp from the film Gorky Park and a grandiose relief of Lenin in bronze.

Cold Water Baths) in Moorish style was situated by the sea beside the Societetsparken (the Society Park) with its splendid ballrooms for dancing. The environment for a watering-place was complete and Varberg was established as Sweden's spa metropolis.

— Our guests expressed a wish to have a spa and I wanted to build one that was not like any other spa, Lasse says. With a hundred thousand tiles in cobalt blue, a copy of Lenin's favourite bath was created in the Torellska Husets



Nook with Russian bath nymphs.

(the Torell House's) cellar. It was completed in 2007 and had a hot bath, a cold bath, a steam sauna bath and a foot bath. In our spa, you can also find an ordinary sauna bath, a rest room and a room for massage and face treatment. All of these are decorated with small curiosities, Soviet pieces of art and propaganda posters. Lenin looks out over

the bathers from a corner of the hot bath.

A bust of its founder, the Italian architect Quarenghi, was originally enthroned at the Lenin Baths in Saint Petersburg. During the year of the revolution in 1917, the provisional government had its seat in this house, and, at this time, Lenin often took the opportunity to use these baths. He always sat in the same place, that is, in the furthestmost left corner, in



When you lie in the bubbling water of the hot bath, your body feels light and as if it is floating; your thoughts fly away as though you had no worries whatsoever.

what is a bubble pool at Gästis, but was a Russian hot bath over there. The following year, the revolutionary government moved to the Kremlin and Moscow. However, in Saint Petersburg, they started to call the baths the Lenin Baths. In 1950, it was renovated and was given its official name and Quarenghi's bust was replaced by a bust of Lenin.

The bust of Lenin at Gästis comes from a unique collection that was exhibited at Galleri Doktor Glas (the Doktor Glas Gallery) in 1992 and that consisted of items that a



Soviet propaganda poster.

business man called Berndt Rehnholm had collected during



Double hand basin from Rörstrand (Swedish porcelain) with elegant flowery pattern, approx. 1890.

the course of his life. In this collection, there were a number of objects that were similar to those that had adorned the original Lenin Baths.

Since Rehnholm's widow refused to see her husband's collection scattered around the country, Gästis was given the chance to take over the entire collection and be the owner of the largest Lenin collection in Sweden. A selected choice of these objects is part of the spa's interior and can be seen by those who bathe there.



A gloomy Lenin in oak, from the former party headquarters in Tallinn.

Varberg's Lenin Baths have become widely known and much discussed in a number of publications. When the bare-footed Ernst Kirchsteiger visited our hotel (a Swedish tele-



A relaxing conversation in the Lenin Baths' library.



One of a hundred content hippopotami, after his bath.

vision celebrity known for his cookery and interior design programmes), he gave us gushing praise, and in Amelia Adamo's M-magazine (a Swedish magazine for mappies i.e. 'Male-Bashing Angry Professional Women'), it is described as one of the most trendy spas in Sweden. The original Lenin Baths lived on until the beginning of the 1990's and was visited by party members and civil servants that used Smolnij as a re-

creation centre. It has now been shut down.

— There's nothing like the good old days, our hotel manager sighs, but here at Gästis the Lenin Baths are still alive and going strong.

CHAPTER III.

EAT LOVELY FOOD AT ‘GÄSTIS’

With a view of the English Park, our hotel guests enjoy a sumptuous breakfast and evening buffet, free of charge. In the smoking lounge, they can smoke a cigar or a pipe.

Every evening, an impressive buffet is served in Gästis’s cosy dining room. Our hotel guests can choose from two home-made main dishes, salads, a number of cold cuts, bread and a cheese board, and then finish their meal with a cup of coffee or tea and a cake, everything free of charge. If you really want to spoil yourselves, you can let the chef show you why he has won many prizes for his cooking and make you a three- or five-course 5-star dinner.

Gästis’s eating rooms was an established concept in Var-



At Gästis’s buffet, anyone who loves food will have his fill.



A nice, mild Havanna cigar in the smoking lounge.

berg for more than fifty years. Single men used to come here for their evening meals and many of them had their own places at the table and could leave a napkin and half a bottle of wine until the next day. Our guests still appreciate finishing off the evening with a cigar and an after-dinner drink from the



Winston Churchill in the shape of a pipe.

hotel's large assortment of malt whiskeys, cognac and calvados. Those who enjoy life and can't be bothered to follow today's state-imposed health regulations like to spend a lot of time

in the condemned smoking lounge, together with a pipe or



Pipes and cigar cutters on a classical smoking table.

a carefully selected Havana cigar from the hotel's large collection. Here, you will also find the hotel manager's various collections of smoking and tobacco curiosities.

— Of course it's not good to smoke, the hotel manager explains, but that's the reason for us having a museum and a monument to show the vices of former times.

The selection of goodies in the breakfast buffet is considerably greater than what was offered in the 1940s. Today's



Indian colonial matches.

guests get newly baked rolls, different kinds of wholemeal bread, different kinds of cheese, yoghurt with different kinds of cereals, porridge and fresh fruit, all this together with their coffee/tea and morning papers. And if desired, there is still the alternative of sausage, egg and pickled herring like in the old days.



Gustaf Erling improvises in the dining room's music corner.



A selection of breakfast goodies.

CHAPTER IV.

A SIMPLE 'GUEST-HOUSE-LIKE-HOTEL'
FULL OF RUBBISH

In this chapter we'd like to tell you about Gästis's three hundred-year-old history and about the more or less worthless collections that its present owner has filled this 'guest-house-like-hotel' with.

During the reign of Magnus Ladulås (king of Sweden 1275-1290), the gentry were forbidden to demand accommodation from the peasant folk and a network of inns was built up in order to accommodate travellers and give them light, food and drink, and also horses. In this partially state-owned enterprise, the innkeepers were given privileges, such as being licensed to sell alcohol and, what's more, their servants didn't have to sign up for military service.

From the 17th century, the inn at Varberg was in the town square and in 1892 it moved to our Torellska Huset (the Torell House). Otto Torell, who was later to become the world famous geologist, grew up in this house dating from the 18th century. When the dining room at Gästis was renovated recently and layer after layer of 19th century wallpaper was pulled off the old walls, it was discovered that this room had originally been covered with letters from patients to Torell's father, who was an eye specialist.

After this inn moved, it soon got competition from the large and exclusive Stadshotellet (the Town Hotel). At Gästis,



Even during the 19th century, Gästis was popular among ordinary people in Varberg.

there were only about 10 very simple rooms together with a pub that served food, beer and Swedish schnapps. Gästis didn't always have the best reputation among travellers at this time. However, the people who lived in Varberg, who seldom travelled anywhere, thought that Gästis was an exciting inn where people got drunk, were involved in fights, and where you could hear the gossip of the town.

This simple inn experienced a new birth when people were granted a one-week holiday in the 1930s. Ordinary people couldn't afford the Stadshotellet's (the Town Hotel's) scandalous prices and Gästis was situated close to the railway that brought holiday-makers to Varberg.

When Lasse Diding took over the hotel in 1987 it was still a very simple place with thirty rooms and only two toilets. Over



An upper-class toilet with a view of Engelska parken (the English Park).

the years since then, the building has been rebuilt here and an annex has been added there, until we now have a hotel with 60 rooms, 70 toilets and a lift.

During these years, the hotel has also been filled with collector's items of a more or less worthless nature.



Old tin of throat lozenges. Our hotel cares about the mental and physical health of its guests.

— I started to collect things at the age of 3, says Lasse Diding, and have never thrown anything out since then. Whilst other collectors of bottle tops gradually stop collecting when they are 10, I'm still increasing my collection by regularly going to Poland - the homeland of bottle tops.

Together with five thousand ice cream sticks, the bottle tops is one of the few collections that is not represented in the



Rules for how to behave – this applies to staff as well as to guests. A fine of 10 crowns for bad behaviour by the main door.

hotel as yet. However, we have more than two thousand items of printed matter from museum shops around the globe.

On the walls of our hotel, these are hung up among a number of stolen signs that prohibit our guests from carrying out quite a few different

activities. In our hotel, you will also find a collection of Swedish tiled stoves and beautiful hand basins from the 19th century. We have assembled what we found when we rebuilt the old inn in a particular place in the hotel; these include: beer bottles, liquor bottles, tools, three small dolls, a few stuffed animals and a packet of Radix condoms from the 1930s.

— By having these collections, we show that the old inn's air of simplicity and generosity continues to live on, the hotel manager believes. Collecting is a way of life and just as life experiences are interesting, there is nothing that is not worth saving.



Suitcases that have been far and wide – left behind at Gästis.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORKING SONS AND DAUGHTERS

*About the workers and office clerks
that give life to the old inn.*

From early morning to late at night, our working sons and daughters clean the rooms, make food, bake cakes, rebuild the hotel, vacuum the corridors, mix drinks, write bills, email to guests, fold towels, give bathing guests a massage, furnish the rooms, make plans and talk to guests. It is thanks to these working sons and daughters that Hotell Gästis is kept alive. Together, these workers and office clerks (more than



Ann-Charlotte Svensson, reception. 15 years at Gästis.



*Sabine Schröder, head of staff.
27 years at Gästis.*



*Ellen Johansson, head of cleaning.
5 years at Gästis.*



Marcus Karlsson, caretaker. 13 years at Gästis.



*Jonathan Källqvist, care-
taker's office. 5 years at
Gästis.*



*Christine Nilsson, reception. 17 years
at Gästis.*



Daniel Ehn, all-rounder. Here he is officiating at a wedding. 14 years at Gästis.



Jörgen Lernsten, laundry. 3 years at Gästis.



Elisabeth Hallin, reception and library. 20 years at Gästis.



Inge Andersson, chef. 9 years at Gästis.

20 of them) that work in the hotel have more than two hundred working years behind them and therefore have considerable working skills and are used to all kinds of guests.

CHAPTER VI.

A DREAM HOUSE FOR BOOK LOVERS

All our guests are forced to join the Gästis book club and are allowed to read the hotel's 15,000 books and take their favourite book home with them.

These books can be found on bookshelves in the toilets, in the corridors and in each hotel room. In the cellar, there is one of the few 'bath libraries' to be found in the world, and you can even enjoy their company in the dining room. Everywhere you will find big books, small books, books that are difficult to read, books that are easy to read, books as thin as mourning veils, and extremely thick books, telephone directories, hard-backed books and pocket books, all of which you are free to read and take home with you. The rules of our



Toilet library.

book club are simple: read as many books as you want and take a book that you like home with you. If you would like to take more than one book home with you, this will cost 10 crowns per book.

— This environment is rather tempting for many of the book club members, says the hotel manager, who is in charge of the books. We have guests who steal a book here and there, but as long as the books are in the hands of book lovers then this doesn't matter so much.



The hotel manager with his books and specially sewn 'book pockets' in front of the lift's moving walls, which are filled with book covers.

Gästis's book shelves are added to when people from Varberg come by with boxes of books that they have inherited, second hand shops get in too many books, and guests hand in a bag of books when they leave.

— People throw out more and more books nowadays, and we think this is a terrible state of affairs, Lasse Diding tells us.

A special group of book lovers that regularly come back to Gästis and the bookshelves here, are writers. Jan Myrdal, a Swedish political writer, is a guest who has frequented Gästis over the last few years. Every year, the Jan Myrdal Society awards a writer with Jan Myrdal's prestigious prize - the Lenin prize - to a writer who works in the spirit of the great Master. To award a literary prize in Jan Myrdal's name as

well as in Lenin's name was just too much for the Swedish cultural establishment. When the prize was awarded the first time, it was questioned by all the big Swedish daily papers and on the Swedish television channel SVT, it was condemned by the cultural editors of two daily papers, i.e. Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter. It was even viciously attacked by Peter Englund, the new permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy (founded in 1786 to further the "the purity, strength, and sublimity of the Swedish language" and which awards the Nobel Prize every year), who was an old Trotskyite and spy in Sweden's military secret service.

— Completely normal, chuckles Jan Myrdal happily.



Jan Myrdal congratulates the extremely disobedient writer Mattias Gardell, the first writer to receive Jan Myrdal's prestigious prize – the Lenin Prize. In the background – a portrait of Torsten Jurell (political artist).

CHAPTER VII.

ROOMS AND SUITES

About no one room being like another and about how an old privately-owned town house became the hotel's annex – called Villa Gästis.

Besides Torellska Huset (the Torell House) from the 18th century, Gästis consists of four other houses that are built together by means of winding corridors and unlikely systems of staircases. Of the hotel's sixty rooms, all of which have their own personality, not a single one is the same. The size, the height of the ceiling, and the furniture differ from room to room, whilst the standard and technical facilities are all the same. What is characteristic of the rooms at Gästis



Assassins of German fascism.

are the specially built small book shelves, hand-woven carpets, unique posters, a comfortable armchair and a video ready to be loaded with one of the hotel's one thousand video films. In the toilets, there are tiny pieces of art with pictures from the annals of our region's toilet culture.



At Gästis, there is no shortage of sloping ceilings or beams from the 18th century.



Hotell Gästis annex, Villa Gästis, located in an old town house.



The wedding bed under romantic lamps in the shape of butterflies and a wedding photo of the hotel manager's great grandparents, who lived happily ever after.

The hotel's annex Villa Gästis is situated across the street. It has eleven rooms located in an old private town house from 1894. The entire house is full of pictures from the golden age of Mexican art, from Diego Rivera to Frida Kahlo. In the old vaulted cellar from the 17th century, you can find Gästis's wedding suite. This cellar room with its one-metre thick brick walls was all that was left after a devastating fire in 1889. The hotel's other suite is located in what was the old inn's stable until the turn of the 20th century. It has a separate entrance from the inner courtyard and has a little kitchen for those who are interested in self-catering.

At Gästis, we gladly listen to the most unexpected requests our guests can have, even when it comes to what kind of accommodation they may want.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLDING CONFERENCES

About finding the strength that is required for thinking in a big way and in the right way, and for planning intellectual attacks of a revolutionary kind.

Leaving one's usual environment behind for eating good food, browsing among books, smoking a genuine Havana cigar in the smoking lounge, relaxing in the Lenin Baths or just meditating in an old hotel setting, releases the energy that is needed to think in a big way and in the right way. The ambiance and atmosphere at Hotell Gästis has made many conference guests come back to the hotel for conferen-



Otto Torell room taking a rest.

ces time and time again. Here, plans have been decided upon and problems have been solved. At Hotell Gästis, there are four conference rooms, each with their own individuality. The largest is the Otto Torell conference room with six metres up to the ridge and visible beams from the 18th century. Here, you can look out over Engelska parken (the English

Park) or you can rest your eyes on the magnificent Rörstrand tile oven in National Romantic style from 1894.



Titan's visionary look is a source of inspiration in the Strindberg Conference Room.



The Rörstrand tiled stove, 1894.

The Strindberg Conference Room with copies of Strindberg's greatest oil paintings on the walls and a Strindberg bust in the toilet is somewhat smaller. Here, there is another tiled stove, a so-called splash-painted stove, which originally stood in a stable in the county of Halland somewhere. In Gästis's old stable, there is the newly-built Gästis Conference Room and the Varberg Conference Room with furniture and fittings that are connected with Varberg's and Gästis's



Varberg's fortress painted in oil by Arvid Lindoff, 1908.

history, in the form of a collection of paintings that have Varberg's fortress as their centre piece. In adjoining rooms, there is generous space for discussion and debate.

After having satisfactorily performed the duties they had intended, our life-loving conference participants are seen stuffing themselves with a three- or five-course slap-up dinner, with an exclusive after-dinner drink, in the old inn's 'eating-room' to round off. Other good sides of life are also at our guests' dis-



Carl Eldh's Strindberg in the toilet.



Varberg's beautiful Cold Bath House by the Children's Beach, alive with happy bathers.

posal. Few of our guests miss the Varberg's local market in the Main Square or Varberg's fortress with its Bockstensmannen, (the Bocksten man – remains of a man from the Middle Ages), the bullet that killed Karl the 12th (king of Sweden 1698-1718) and the paintings by Kreuger, Bergh and Nordström, who were members of the Varberg School of Artists. If you go on the town walk, there are other highlights that are unique to Varberg, and if the weather is on your side, you can finish your walk by visiting the fantastic Cold Bath House in Moorish style.

On the whole, Hotell Gästis and Varberg is actually a rather pleasant combination.

CHAPTER IX.

REVIEWS AND WRITERS' VIEW POINTS

*About how writers and other travellers have
experienced their visit to Hotell Gästis.*

“Gästis is an obvious
choice for me.”

Jan Myrdal



“After ten minutes at Hotell
Gästis in Varberg, we had decided:
yep, we would like to be ‘regulars’
here. Exciting fixtures, cosy at-
mosphere, and service mindedness
of a rare nature makes DI’s critical
test patrol melt on the spot.”

Dagens Industri
(Swedish Economy Magazine)



“Of course I’ll choose Gästis next time I’m in Varberg.”
Thage G. Peterson (former Swedish politician)



*Jan Myrdal - times 3- at
the hotel's blind entrance.*

“Guided by his genial taste, Lasse Diding has transformed a run-down family hotel in Varberg into a place that everyone seems to love - no matter what you think about Lenin, how much you like or don't like political background music or how provoked you can be by Mexican paintings of the revolution.”

GolfDigest



“Friendly Hotell Gästis is highly recommended and probably offers the best value in town in summer. Although it doesn't look like much from the outside, inside it's bright, clean, stylish, and colourful.”

Lonely Planet



*Fired three times
from the Swedish
newspaper Afton-
bladet.*

“His hotel is so exclusively crazy, so original and so full of a certain sort of kitsch, which he succeeds in twisting into elegance, that I would gladly finish my days here in the Lenin Baths.”

**Gunnar Ohrlander alias Dr Gormander
(political satirist and dramatist)**





Bruno K. Öijer without a cigarette in the smoking lounge.

“Ten stars for atmosphere, staff and the smoking lounge.”

Bruno K. Öijer (Swedish poet)



“In 2006, Hotell Gästis and Lasse Diding were awarded the prize Company of the Year and Entrepreneur of the Year in Varberg.”

The Varberg Entrepreneurs Association



CHAPTER X.

FINDING YOUR WAY HOME TO ‘GÄSTIS’

*About different ways of getting in touch with the hotel
by phone, by post or via internet – and, in addition,
instructions of how to get here.*

To book a room, a suite or a conference, you can get in touch with Hotell Gästis via email, by phone, or by using the hotel’s booking system on our home page. The same applies for booking the Lenin Baths and the different treatments there. Information about prices and special offers can be found on our home page.

Hotell Gästis is situated in the centre of Varberg approximately 200 metres from the railway station. It’s difficult to miss if you’re driving towards the town centre. The hotel has a number of different alternatives when it comes to parking. You can either park free of charge or you can pay for a parking space in a courtyard that is locked or in a garage. What has probably given Hotell Gästis an obvious place in this series of brochures about famous hotels is maybe primarily its remarkably welcoming atmosphere and the fact that this hotel welcomes a diversity of travellers and vagabonds.

Telephone: +46 (0)340-180 50

Email: gastis@hotellgastis.se

Home page: www.hotellgastis.se

Telefax: +46 (0)340-138 50

Address: Borgmästaregatan 1, 432 41 Varberg, Sweden



1. Hotell Gästis

2. Hotell Gästis Annex with a car park in a locked courtyard

3. Free parking space for hotel guests.

Famous hotels

A SERIES OF BROCHURES ON THE WORLD'S MOST REPUTABLE HOTELS

"I'm amazed by the excellent, unique and extremely personal interiors at Gästis."

Björn Ranelid

"In the most unexpected places, you suddenly find a hotel that you couldn't possibly imagine would exist."

Ernst Kirchsteiger

In this brochure, we would like to tell you the story of how, towards the end of the 20th century, a simple hotel in Varberg, Sweden was transformed into a cultural centre with 15,000 books on its bookshelves and the reputable Lenin Baths in the Torellska Husets (the Torell House's) 18th century cellar. Karin Andén describes the drunken brawls and the jovialness of the travellers' world and the inns in colourful descriptions that are illustrated with unique, magnificent pictures from the forgotten archives of contemporary photographers.

Titles already published in this series can be ordered from the publishers. I. Chelsea Hotel, New York. II. Grand Hotel, Stockholm. III. Raffles Hotel, Singapore. IV. Sands Hotel, London.

SVENSKA HOTELLFÖRLAGET