

It's Week 34 throughout the whole of the world but who's keeping count? Perhaps only The Swedish. While most of the planet may have problems remembering what day it is, the Swedes keep track of how many sets of seven have passed since New Year. This may not sound desperately exciting, but it's clever and it works. Such is Sweden.

A thousand years ago, they were burning down monasteries, looting villages and slaughtering entire communities for fun. Today, The Swedes have a reputation for being organised, progressive and sensible. Counting the weeks is certainly not the behaviour one would expect from former Vikings, so I visit Sweden to see if its people have forgotten how to misbehave.

Here in Stockholm, I have been invited to a Kräftshiva (pronounced kreft-fwever). It's a traditional Scandinavian feast which takes place in Week 34 to mark the end of summer. I'm expecting barbecued pigs on spits, and a bounty of ale served in a yak's horn. I'm expecting dirty stories about kidnapping women, and fights where big, strong men gouge out eyes in the name of fun. Come on you Vikings – Show me what you're made of!

At the dinner table, I realise I'm the only guest wearing one of those funny helmets with horns. I take it off and hide it, and then I'm introduced rather formally to the others. I'm sitting next to a lady called Helga who announces that only English ought to be spoken for the rest of the evening. And even though his English is perfect, her ex-boyfriend, Lars, doesn't like this, and so he pours himself another Pinot Noir. Excellent – maybe there will be some trouble. Hatless multi-lingual wine-drinking Vikings – Show me what you're made of!

Helga is having problems with her chair, and so I offer to swap, and this raises eyebrows. "A Swedish man would never give up his seat for a woman," she claims. "That's why the women here are very independent – we have to be! And as for holding doors open, I'd be surprised if a Swedish man even stopped it from swinging into my face."

"The girls here don't want to be looked after," pipes up Lars from behind a prawn. "If you buy them flowers, they accuse you of cheating. They can hold their own fucking doors open."

Door-slamming is hardly the most barbaric of acts, but it's a good start. Come on!

The main ingredient to a Kräftshiva is a special freshwater crayfish, and the traditional way to eat them is with the hands. The juice they are cooked in has to be sucked through the rib-cage (or the crustacean equivalent) and this results in a lot of uncivilized slurping. I'm in my Viking element as I rip off claws and suck the goo from heads. The alcohol is flowing freely so I put my hat back on and call myself Thor.

Everyone's now drunk and the men break into a traditional song. Real Viking stuff! I romanticise they are signing about dragging poor maidens by the hair for a night of unbridled passion. Not so. The translation equates to 'There is a young girl naked so we look to the sky and not see her' so I complain that it's not racy enough.

“We don’t have to *sing* about sex here in Sweden,” explains Lars, “we *do* it. Anglo-Saxons are very repressed and so that’s why they can only sing about it.”

“But you once were warriors,” I offer. “Don’t you have any traditional manly songs about fighting or pillaging villages and stealing cows?”

“Just like The Germans wish to forget the wars, we don’t want to talk about the Viking days. If you want that stuff, we have some good museums.”

And he’s right. They are good and there are plenty of them, and you can find out lots about the Vikings by reading the museums’ information plaques – in English, of course. There are longships and gravestones to get excited about, and fancy swords and helmets with jewel-encrusted horns, and the Gold Room in the basement of the National Museum is not so embarrassed about showing off its glittering treasures.

But if you’re looking for something more naturally resplendent, you only have to step outside. Stockholm sits beautifully on a series of islands in the mouth of a river, and as the summer sun says goodbye, the water teases the light onto elegant palaces and charming courtyards – it makes you wonder why the Vikings ever left. The architecture in the city is truly stunning with designs that can not be found in an IKEA catalogue.

So has the pine wardrobe replaced The Viking as the modern emblem of Sweden? Just like its furniture, its people are stylish, well-presented and practical – and markedly different from Anglo-Saxons.

“You must remember that we did not invade England, the Danish Vikings did. Culturally, Swedes and Anglo-Saxons are not alike,” suggests Lars.

“I’m glad about that,” chips in Helga. “If everyone was like Swedish men, we would never have any fun. The last time Lars made me laugh was in Week 11.”