

# You know you've been in Sweden too long when...

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Some Aussie ex-pats developed a list of “You know you’ve been in Sweden too long when...”. My friend who is acting as my host (and who is himself a U.S. ex-pat) says that the list is astonishingly accurate, and that your reaction to it goes through several phases.

1. Confusion. You don’t know what the list is talking about.
2. Amusement. You know what the list is talking about and you find it funny.
3. Realization. You find yourself agreeing with the statements on the list.
4. Acceptance. This list isn’t funny. It’s just the way it is.

For example, my friend explained points 73 and 74 to me. In Sweden, when the temperature reaches a certain never-explicitly-stated-but-everybody-somehow-agrees-on-it point, it officially becomes summer and you are not allowed to wear winter clothes regardless of the actual temperature. Similarly, when the temperature first dips below a certain point, it officially becomes winter and you are not allowed to wear summer clothes. My friend woke up one morning and noticed that it had dipped below freezing overnight. But it was warm when he got up, so he dressed appropriately for the temperature. What he didn’t realize was that 0C was the secret “winter point”. Everybody was bundled up for the coming blizzard, even though it was no longer freezing outside. I myself experienced a variation on 249. I was in Åhléns and there was a sign that read, “If you don’t see your size, please ask for it.” (Paraphrased from Swedish.) So I asked a passing employee if they had this particular pair of shoes available in a size 36. The employee got rather annoyed at me and told me to go stand in line at the register. Because if you want somebody to help you, you have to stand in line at the register and wait your turn – even though you aren’t actually buying anything yet. When you reach the front of the line, the register person fetches the shoe you want. Fortunately, I was satisfied with the shoe she retrieved for me without trying it on (I was buying it for somebody else). If I had to try it on for size, I probably would have had to stand in line a second time.

One of the “Adjusting to life in Sweden” books I read mentioned that the intense “nobody is better than anybody else” attitude in Sweden means that customer service is an oxymoron. If nobody is better than anybody else, then service personnel have no obligation to help you.

The book noted, “This may take quite a bit of adjustment for people who come from other countries. Except the British.”

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