



# The Modern Swedish Pilgrim

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# Tranquil Östergötland

Tranquil Östergötland is one of four areas of strength for tourism development in Östergötland, at the current moment. The tranquility of our part of the country is a great asset for locals and visitors, something which is too often overlooked.

What do we mean by tranquil in this context? We mean the activities that help us get away from everyday stress, views that make us relax and places where we can calm down and breathe. It is one of the most important things we Swedes long for when we are on vacation and what we experience as one of our biggest "shortages" in life. Ideally, we would like to help our visitors in Östergötland take a new sense of energy from their stay here.

Peacefulness and recovery can be different things for different people. Mindfulness, yoga, meditation, pilgrimage, cycling along the Göta canal, yoga paddling in the Gryt archipelago, the church boat to Capella Ecu- menica and similar activities that connect mental recovery to physical movement in nature have become more important than ever.

Pilgrimage has increased in popularity in recent years, but despite this, few know that there are pilgrimage routes in Sweden. Östergötland with Vadstena as its hub and holy Birgitta as the central figure has three routes, all of which go to Vadstena:

- The Birgitta Route starts in picturesque Söderköping. It is our first digitized link.
- The Monastery Route starts either from Kolmården in the north or from Alvastra in the south. The trail passes eleven monasteries along the way.
- The Maria Route is a perfect day trip through Omberg's beautiful eco park.





During a visit to the Pilgrim Center in Vadstena last fall, I asked myself the question, who is the modern pilgrim? I turned to the analysis and strategy company Kairos Future, which investigated the driving forces that make Swedes pilgrims. The report, which you now hold in your hands, shows that the modern pilgrim mainly seeks an inner journey, preferably in a historic setting with beautiful nature and preferably with others for company. The modern pilgrim is presented in the report as five groups with different driving forces:

- Stressed careerists, who use pilgrimage as a way to unwind, gain a better balance in existence and relax away from their hectic everyday lives.
- Those with an interest in history, who want to experience history by wandering in places where historical individuals have wandered before them.
- Church groups, who walk when, for example, the congregation arranges something and sees pilgrimage as a way to get closer to God.
- Seekers of a broader form of spirituality who see the walk as a retreat, or as a forum for profound conversation with strangers.
- Backpacker pilgrim, a younger group who wants adventure, meet people from other countries, eat and drink well.

Tranquil Östergötland welcomes everyone who wants to relax and get away, who want to become closer to themselves and others, and who want to enjoy historical sites and beautiful scenery. We can offer all that and more in Östergötland!

Best regards,  
Susanne H Fredriksson



## I. An inner and outer journey

Pilgrimages have been part of all the major religions since ancient times. Today, believers are still walking by foot to holy places to get closer to God and walk in the footsteps of religious authorities, but the driving forces behind setting out on pilgrimage trails have become more diverse and do not necessarily have to do with religious faith. The modern pilgrim might be looking for historic sights, for a meditative hike in silence to getting to know him- or herself better through an ‘inner journey’ – or, to the contrary, for socialising with other pilgrims. For some, feeling a historical connection to saints or other pilgrims who have walked the trails before themselves is at the centre of the pilgrimage.

The physical challenge tends to be much more important for those travelling far from home to walk a longer trail – such as the popular Camino de Santiago in northern Spain and southern France, also known as The Way of Saint James – than for those spending a Sunday on a trail close to home. Something all modern Swedish pilgrims have in common is a love of nature.

### I.1 How the study has been conducted

The study has been conducted in the form of a qualitative analysis of online discussions of pilgrimage. The source material includes blogs, forums, photo-sharing sites, and other social media. Text and photos have been analysed to identify common driving forces behind pilgrimage and different profiles of pilgrims. On top of this, online search statistics from Google has been used to see trends in the search interest as well as topics that people search for in connection to pilgrimage

The study has been focused on the Swedish market, and the Swedish concept of ‘pilgrimsvandring’. This concept is apparently only used within a Christian discourse, and is for example not used by Muslims discussing pilgrimage to Mecca. (Although the search term ‘Mecca’/‘Mecka’ does indeed have a weak connection to ‘pilgrimsvandring’ in the Google searches, as can be seen in the word cloud in Section 4.)



## 1.2 Nature more important than faith and spirituality

One might have expected religious faith to be at the basis of all pilgrimage. Indeed a part of the online discussions of pilgrimage and pilgrimage trails are connected to a traditional religious sphere, for example when walks along a pilgrimage trail are organised by churches and parishes. A larger share of the online discussion connects to spirituality in a broader sense, relating to the meditative potential of walking and describing the pilgrimage as an ‘inner journey’ of personal development.

What all modern pilgrims have in common, however, is a love of nature and outdoor activities. No matter what the specific goals when embarking on a hike along a pilgrimage trail might be – learning more about history, getting closer to God, or something else – those who are not fond of nature would most likely have chosen a different activity.

Some social media users, typically in discussions of the popular Camino de Santiago through northern Spain, explicitly state that you don’t need to be religious to be a pilgrim:

*Why not a pilgrimage? It doesn't need to have a religious nature.  
You got an amazing trail from Saint Jean Pied de Port to Santiago  
de Compostela*

*Anonymous, Flashback*

*I've got an itch to pilgrimage. I'm not really a believer but it would  
be a fun thing to do. I'm considering Spain*

*Anonymous, Familjeliv.se*

*I have walked the pilgrimage from Pamplona to Santiago de Com-  
postela in Spain. It was with my Spanish class in high school, none  
of us was religious.*

*Anonymous, Familjeliv.se*

While religion or spirituality is at the core of the pilgrimage for some, for others it is more of a ‘theme’ that makes a hike more interesting through an added layer of ‘storification’.





## 2. Driving forces: from inner journeys to food and wine

The following driving motives can be seen in blogs and social media posts discussing pilgrimages. They will be described in more detail in the following sections, and are here roughly ordered by estimated importance to the average pilgrim. (Although driving forces vary widely between pilgrims and between different types of pilgrimages.)

- An ‘inner journey’: finding stillness and getting to know oneself better
- Visiting historic places
- Walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, other religious authorities, or pilgrims in earlier times
- Getting closer to God
- Beautiful scenery
- Socialising: strengthening the relation with co-walking friends and family members, or making new friends along the trail
- The challenge of a demanding trail
- A sense of freedom
- Inspiration from celebrities
- Enjoying food, wine, and a local life that is different from back home



## 2.1 Five types of pilgrims

Through the way in which pilgrimages are discussed in blogs and social media posts, different profiles can be identified. The profiles are based on the different driving forces that are expressed, and can be viewed as separate target groups. They are ‘ideal types’, meaning that real individuals will often match more than one profile.

Three of the types are more relevant for pilgrimage trails in Sweden today: ‘the organised Christians’ (2.1.1), ‘the history buffs’ (2.1.2), and ‘the spiritual’ (2.1.3).

### 2.1.1 *The organised Christians*

This is a group which typically joins group hikes organised by churches or other civil society organisations, often in the form of one-day hikes in the local area. Some associations announce and discuss pilgrimage events in dedicated Facebook groups. This is for example the case for Pilgrim Vallentuna, which is a collaboration between the Church of Sweden parish, the municipality, and local NGOs in Vallentuna north of Stockholm. This kind of collaboration with religious organisations should be an opportunity also for destination marketing organisations (DMOs).

*The morning mass starts at 9am in Klashagen, with Karl-Erik Forsgren and the Trifolium chorus. After the service and coffee, the hike continues with focus on nature.*

*Woman, Pilgrim Vallentuna, Facebook*





Image 1. The triptych in Lillkyrka church in Åkerbo, visited during a pilgrimage (Instagram). The church featured in Ingemar Bergman's film *Nattvardsgästerna*.

For the 'organised Christian' pilgrims, pilgrimage is one among many forms of worship and means of getting closer to God. Pilgrimage is sometimes used as a starting point for theological seminars, as seen in the Facebook post in Image 2:



Image 2. Invitation to a seminar on pilgrimage theology (Facebook).





Other organised Christians join pilgrimages in the Holy Land – today’s Israel and Palestine. Here we can see an overlap between this group and the ‘history buffs’, introduced in Section 2.1.2, as part of the appeal for pilgrims in the Holy Land is to experience a connectedness to historical and biblical figures through visiting the places where they were active.

*Hans Weichbrodt teaches about Elia and the prophets of Baal on Karmel mountain in #israel. Amazing to be here in person! #pilgrimsresa*

*Anonymous, Instagram*



Image 3. Instagram post from a pilgrimage in Jerusalem ‘in the footsteps of Jesus’.

Experience of pilgrimage in the Holy Land can also add credibility when organising local pilgrimages back home:

*“Look we are walking to Jerusalem! Begin the Easter with a hike to Frösunda church together with Thomas Kuntze who recently pilgrimaged in the Holy Land. The hike ends at 2pm with the traditional Easter play in the church.”*

*Woman, Facebook*



### 2.1.2 The history buffs

For pilgrims visiting Israel and Palestine, a historical interest can be just as important as the religious motives, and places where well-known historical events have taken place are central.

*Via Dolorosa was ok in its historical context. But at the same time very modified and hyped. I don't like that. Masada was better.*

*Anonymous, Flashback*

Old churches, castles, and monuments along the trails are appreciated for their historical value not only in the Holy Land. The pilgrim who posted the below photo of a church along the Camino de Santiago speculates that it might have been built by the Knights Templar:



Image 4. The Santa Maria de Eunate church along the Camino de Santiago (Facebook).



For others, a sense of historic connection to pilgrims who have walked the same trails in past centuries is more important than the monuments:

*Whatever you believe or not, it is something certain with walking a road where thousands upon thousands have walked during the centuries. To follow the footsteps of past pilgrims. I believe that does something to the road, with the people living alongside or walking on it.*

*Woman, Nätmagasinet Livskraft*



Image 5. Photo from a break along the Camino de Santiago (Instagram).





Walking in the footsteps of a saint can add a special attraction to a pilgrimage trail, such as St Olavsleden between Sundsvall, Sweden, and Trondheim, Norway:

*I received my pilgrimage passport. The 27 October I will follow Olav the Holys example and plod through the forests of Norrland and fjords of Norway.*

*Man, Instagram*

A blogging pilgrim reports from a meeting with Sweden's most well-known historical pilgrim, Saint Bridget of Sweden, in Vadstena:

*When we turned around, Holy Birgitta was there! Alive in the flesh on the fence behind us! It was just Ingegärd Lindaräng dressed up, but so realistic... Thanks also to Birre who wrote such a nice material about Birgitta as a background to these pilgrimages to her honour.*

*Woman, Sturellas fotoblogg*

### 2.1.3 The spiritual

For some pilgrims, the pilgrimage has strong spiritual connotations without being explicitly religious. Many of these seek stillness and silence for doing an 'inner journey', while others are looking for deep conversations with other pilgrims to meditate on life's mysteries together. The question of how much interaction pilgrims wish to have with others is a divider, and different posts reveal different ideas about whether a pilgrimage is fundamentally about 'me' or about 'us':



Image 6. Saint Bridget (Sturellas fotoblogg).

*You have to do it like a real pilgrimage with long silent meditations. Or else it is a risk that you just chat and miss out on the introspective and spiritual.*

*Anononymous, Flashback*

*Such a diversity of people who meet each other, and the conversations along mountain paths, lakes, wild nature and oceans are both deep and unsuspected in the context.*

*Anonymous, Instagram*



Image 7 (left). Notes from a pilgrimage seminar (Facebook). Image 8 (right). Photo from a pilgrimage travel diary on the forum MinTur.se.

This difference between pilgrims is also a topic that is discussed online, and first-timers are reminded to be attentive to when fellow pilgrims wish to get some time on their own:

*Respect the other pilgrims need of solitude. Be attentive! Maybe the person does not speak out that he/she wants to be left alone, listen and watch the signs! If someone says "I'm thinking of staying a while" it might be a way to get to be alone.*

*Anonymous, Flashback*



#### 2.1.4 *The stressed*

Related to meditation, silence, and the ‘inner journey’ is a desire to relax and find stress relief. A Swedish hiking blogger describes how two long pilgrimages along the Camino de Santiago and St Olavsleden helped her realise that she needed to quit her stressful career as an HR specialist:

*This was where I finally became a PILGRIM. It me room to breathe. It gave me distance and put me in a context without expectations or demands. I met people who did not compare accomplishments in the form of salary, titles or education.*

*To hike the camino is a good way to let go. You can't plan ahead, you can't be in a hurry.*

*Woman Vandringsbloggen (from two blog posts)*

As stillness and meditation is central for many pilgrims (see Section 2.1.3), stress relief could be expected to be also be a common goal. Stress relief is frequently mentioned as a benefit of pilgrimage in traditional media coverage<sup>1</sup>. In social media, however, references to stress relief are mostly visible in posts marketing pilgrimage trails and events, rather than in posts by individual pilgrims who describe their experience. Pilgrim Vallentuna (previously mentioned in Section 2.1.1), for example, has organised one-day pilgrimages with stress relief as a theme:

*Time to “leave the stress behind!” Welcome to a stress free day on foot where nature, culture and spirituality helps us to find balance in life.*

*Tomorrow Saturday it is October 1! Then you are most welcome to hike with us again. Leave the stress behind! [...] A hike for people in the middle of life with focus on the methodology of pilgrimage to find balance. We practice shutting of the noise, daring to be slow and care free.*

*Woman, Pilgrim Vallentuna, Facebook (from two posts)*



The Church of Sweden similarly describes pilgrimage as ‘a temporary break from a hectic life’ on its official website<sup>3</sup>.

The observation that stress relief is a smaller theme among the pilgrims themselves, than among those marketing pilgrimages, does not mean that a focus on stress relief cannot attract pilgrims to a trail. It would however be advisable to conduct further studies, for example through a survey, to evaluate the potential of stress relief as a marketing theme before relying on it heavily.

#### 2.1.5 *The backpackers*

Finally, there is also type of pilgrims for whom a pilgrimage is similar to other forms of backpacking. They are primarily looking for adventure and for making friends with other pilgrims from around the world. This is a common attitude of people who are discussing the Camino de Santiago – which takes up a large share of Swedish online discussion about pilgrimage trails.

*When you have hiked six or wight hours and reach the place to spend the night it always is some pilgrims ending up in the same place. Eat, drink lots of wine and sangria together. Someone may have a guitar and you hopefully get friends for life. [...] Someone asked if people flirt on pilgrimage. Let's just say yes...*

*'GougeAway', Flashback*

This attitude appears to be absent regarding pilgrimage trails within Sweden, however. Marketing a Swedish pilgrimage trail as a backpacking adventure does therefore not appear be the a viable strategy in the short term.



## 2.2 Other driving forces: socialising, freedom, and challenge

Less common driving forces include socialising with family and friends who come along on a pilgrimage:

*This summer I will do a #souljourney #pilgrimage with the world's best aunt. Approximately 350 km in 16 days! End of the road is #santiagodecompostela #leochvinka #minresaräknas #mosterochsysterdotterpåvift #själsvandring*

*Woman Instagram*

Some pilgrims are primarily looking for a sense of freedom:

*I'm too thinking on soon get on the road as a pilgrim. I have some romantic idea of just go and see where God takes me*

*Anonymous, Flashback*

*I would say that you shouldn't plan your days in detail. That's part of the fun, the freedom to walk as it feels there and then.*

*Anonymous, Flashback*

There are also organised pilgrimages for which the goal is something else than the journey itself. Pilgrimsvägen Skåne Blekinge organised a pilgrimage for peace and justice in September 2017, something which was called for by the World Council of Churches:





*6–9th of September we will pilgrimage for peace and justice in Lund and Malmoe. You can join all of the days or just one. The theme is being a refugee and vulnerability, and we hike together with Lunds friend diocese in Germany.*

*Pilgrimsvägen Skåne Blekinge, Facebook*

For some pilgrims, the physical exercise or the challenge of a demanding trail is at the core of the pilgrimage. Even when this is not the focus of the pilgrim, the achievement of completing a trail is often applauded in social media:



Image 9. 'Daddy 70 years today and has completed the 800 km long pilgrimage trail' (Instagram).



### 3. Channels for attracting pilgrims

Pilgrimage experiences are often shared on mainstream photosharing sites, with the leading platform Instagram having 2,735 posts tagged '#pilgrimsvandring' ('pilgrimage') and 2,540 tagged '#pilgrimsleden' ('the pilgrimage trail').

Facebook is an important channel for people who have walked along a major pilgrimage trail, such as Camino de Santiago, or are active in pilgrim associations. The group Camino de Santiago – Swedish Pilgrims has most members (~3,700). The national association Pilgrim i Sverige ('Pilgrim in Sweden'), which organises local pilgrimage associations, has 656 members in its Facebook group. Pilgrim i Sverige also promotes pilgrimage through its website [www.pilgrimisverige.se](http://www.pilgrimisverige.se). Local Facebook groups include Pilgrim Vallentuna (299 members) and Pilgrimsvandring i Bergsslagen (56 members). There are also a number of Facebook groups dedicated to specific pilgrimage events, but these tend to become inactive soon after the event has taken place.

Some discussion among people who are thinking about trying pilgrimage can be found on major Swedish online forums such as Flashback (dominated by young men) and Familjeliv, a forum used by (mostly female) parents, but it is a relatively small topic on both of these.

Churches constitute an important channel in the offline world as well as the online world. Parishes in the Church of Sweden are often involved in organising and promoting the trails, and pilgrimages along local trails are sometimes included as a part of the scheduled programs together with



church services and other forms of worship. Churches should be considered as collaboration partners for any organisation aiming to promote a pilgrimage trail, as their active members can be an important target group who could potentially also be a way to reach a wider audience through word-of-mouth. The Church of Sweden is also an online promoter, both of pilgrimage in general<sup>3</sup> and of specific trails. For example, the Facebook page of the trail Pilgrimsvägen Skåne Blekinge, with connection to the Church of Sweden, has ~1.300 likes (and likely a similar number of followers).

Media profiles can be another channel for reaching out with pilgrimage information. The TV presenter Agneta Sjödin, who has written a book<sup>4</sup> about her pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago, is a source of inspiration for some:

*I've also considered the Agneta Sjödin trail*

*Anonymous, Flashback*

Agneta Sjödin's name is frequent in Google searches about pilgrimage as well. (See Section 4.) Simon Reeve, a British author and TV presenter who made a BBC mini-series on pilgrimage in 2013, is also sometimes mentioned in blog posts. If possible, engaging other well-known persons with experience of pilgrimage as 'pilgrimage ambassadors' might have the potential to raise the awareness of pilgrimage trails among a wider audience.



## 4. Topics and trends in online searches

The Camino de Santiago and its destination, Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain, are by far the most common topics when internet users in Sweden are searching for online information about pilgrimage through Google's search engine. Portugal-related searches have increased most between March 2017 and February 2018. The topics that have increased most in the last five years include yoga, indicating a growing interest in pilgrimage as a form of meditation (see Section 2.1.3). Other increasing topics are the Church of Sweden – one of the main promoters of pilgrimage in Sweden (see Section 2.1.1) – and expense, a search term which is likely used by those who are at an early stage of planning a pilgrimage.



Figure 1. Topics related to Google searches for 'pilgrimsvandring' ('pilgrimage') from Sweden between March 2013 and February 2018. A larger size of a term represents a closer association to the theme. (Translations to English by Google.)



The rising popularity of pilgrimage, which is sometimes mentioned in media and by organisations promoting pilgrimage, is not reflected by the search statistics (Diagram 1), which instead shows a relatively stable search interest during the past five years. The interest has each year been highest during spring and/or summer, when the weather is most suitable for outdoor activities. A peak in the search interest can be seen in early September 2014, with most of the searches being made in the southern county of Skåne. Several pilgrimage events were organised in Skåne around this time, but the data from Google does not reveal any specific topic or event that might have triggered the peak.

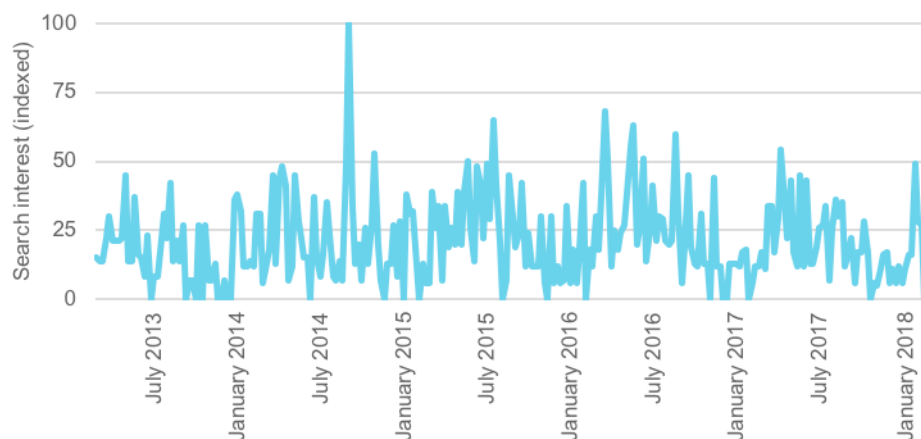


Diagram 1. Indexed historic search interest on Google from Sweden for 'pilgrimsvandring' (pilgrimage).





## 5. Outlook: Germany and Japan

### 5.1 The luther trails

The Luther Trails is a network of pilgrimage trails in Germany. Similarly to Birgittaleden in Östergötland, its focus is on a historical person: Martin Luther, the central figure behind the Protestant Reformation. The Luther Trails were promoted as part of the 2017 anniversary of the Reformation in a collaboration between authorities on the national level as well as in five federal states, Protestant churches, and the organisation Deutsche Lutherweg-Gesellschaft.

Marketing focused on historical events and historical buildings, with the message that pilgrims and hikers will ‘discover the heritage of the Reformation in the region beyond that of the history books’ and walk along roughly the same trails that Luther used on his travels. The trails connect various museums and other sites with a connection to Luther and the Reformation, and pilgrims with an interest in architecture are promised the opportunity to see architectural shifts in how churches along the trails were built before and after the Reformation. More information on the trails can be found on the website [luther2017.de](http://luther2017.de).

### 5.2 Kumano kodo

The only pilgrimage trail destination apart from Camino de Santiago which has been declared a World Heritage Sites by Unesco is the Japanese Kumano Kodo, which has seen a rising interest from international visitors in recent years. The area has seven ancient pilgrimage trails, and the marketing by regional tourism authorities draws heavily on the site’s thousand-year-old history and its mythical roots. The shrines and temp-



les that the trails pass belong to an old religion combining Shinto and Buddhism, which the website of Visit Wakayama presents as particularly inclusive: ‘The Kumano faith was unique in Japan because it was open to everyone regardless of class or sex, also welcoming the disabled.’ The website also advertises the availability of hot spring baths, which should have the potential to reinvigorate many tired pilgrims. See [en.visitwakayama.jp](http://en.visitwakayama.jp) for more information.





## Sources

1. E.g. Sveriges Radio (2008-03-06), 'Pilgrimsvandringar allt populärare i en stressad värld'; ÖP (2012-02-29), 'Pilgrimsvandring för både kropp och själ'; Skaraborgsbygden (2016-03-26), 'En vandring för pilgrimer'; Lokaltidningen Stenungsund (2017-06-21), 'Konfirmander på pilgrimsresa'
3. <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/pilgrimsvandring>  
<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/pilgrimsvandring>
4. Agneta Sjödin (2007), En kvinnas resa, Bazar



# ABOUT KAIROS FUTURE

Kairos Future is an international consulting and research company that helps companies and business leaders to understand and shape their futures. We work as consultants for strategic futures, providing our clients with trend analysis and scenario planning, strategy and innovation, strategic change and capability development. Our aim is to make complexity actionable. The company was founded in 1993, has its head office in Stockholm and representatives as well as partners around the globe. For more information, please visit our web-site [www.kairosfuture.com](http://www.kairosfuture.com) or contact us:

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