

Published in 2000, minor deviations can occur regarding the modern information about Mariehamn.

MARITIME WALK

Discover Mariehamn on foot

Mariehamn has many stories to tell - about its beginning as a simple peasant village, about its Russian godmother Maria (picture), and about all the great shipowners who have lived in the town. The town is best discovered on foot - everything is close by - go for a walk wandering through Maria's town where seafaring has always played such a vital role. Enjoy your maritime walk through the town of Mariehamn!

The maritime walk starts in the town square and leads through the Esplanade, an avenue of lime-trees, to the Western Harbour where the museumship Pommern and the Åland Maritime Museum (temporary closed for construction) are situated.

There are also two additional walks available from the Square: one along the sea promenade in the Eastern Harbour to the Maritime Quarter (no. 22 on the map) and the other to the town quarters with old wooden houses (no. 23 on the map).



Photo: Åland Sjöfartsmuseum, Åland Museum

1. The Town Square

It all started here - Mariehamn's development from a shabby farming village to a modern town with proud maritime traditions.

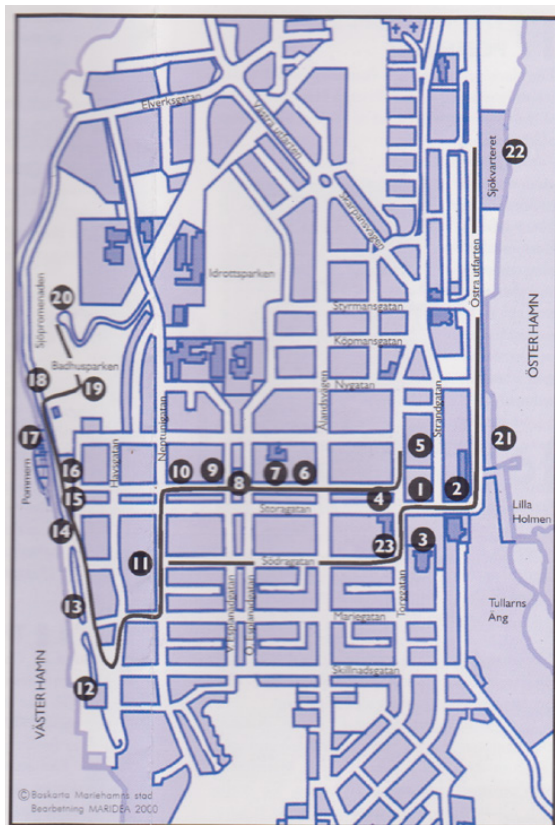
In the middle of the 19th century there were four grey and rundown farmyards up on the hill behind the present town hall. There were 33 inhabitants and life was poor and dull.

Nevertheless, when a town was to be founded in Åland, the shabby village of Öfvernäs was chosen as the place because of its location by a sheltered sea bay. On February 21st in 1861 His Imperial Majesty's Town Charter was issued and the Ålanders got their much longed-for town. During this time Åland and Finland were part of Czar Alexander II's mighty Russian Empire. The town was named after the Czar's consort Maria.

The plans for Mariehamn with pompous broad streets and two esplanades crossing each other began. Despite these grand intentions Mariehamn remained a simple peasant village for rather a long time. The houses were built in farmhouse style, and a dunghill lay at the market which spread "a highly repulsive and probably not salubrious odour" according to a complaint addressed to the town authorities.

The location of the town's first bank was a swamp where town-dwellers went hunting wild duck, and the present day lime-tree avenue was a large wooded marshland where cloudberry grew.

However, everything had its time. More housing sites were developed, merchants and ship-owners established themselves and institutions typical of a town were founded. By the turn of the century Mariehamn had about 1 000 inhabitants, in 1950 the population was more than 3 000, and in 2000 there are 10 500 people living in Mariehamn.



2. The Self-Government Building & the statue of Julius Sundblom

In the square there is the statue of Julius Sundblom (1865-1945), "the King of Åland". He was one of the foremost figures in the struggle for Åland's reunion with Sweden - a struggle that resulted in Åland's autonomy in the state of Finland. Sundblom became the first spokesman of the Åland Parliament.

Thanks to their autonomy, the Ålanders have the right to pass their own laws in several fields of administration and the white Self-Government Building is the centre for Åland's Legislative Assembly (parliament) and the County Government, as well as the highest administration.

South of the Self-Government Building lie the Åland Museum and the Åland Art Museum, and on the northern side the Hotel Arkipelag. This row of three buildings may symbolise the modern transformation of the old Mariehamn with wooden houses. The present Self-Government Building was built on the location of the town's first hotel.

3. The Town Hall

The Town Hall is one of Mariehamn's monumental buildings and it stands majestically up on the hill as if it possesses total control over the life of the town.

The young town needed a building for the town authorities and offices, not least, an assembly hall for solemn occasions for the town citizens. An architecture competition was announced and the winning building in neo-classic style, designed by professor Lars Sonck, was chosen. The foundation stone was laid on August 17th 1938, and in October 1939, when the dark clouds of war towered aloft on the horizon, the town authorities moved into their new premises.

The Town Hall's interiors and facade have not been changed to any significant extent and today the Hall is still considered one of the most prominent buildings in Åland.

4. The Esplanade

In poetry Mariehamn is often referred to as "the town of a thousand linden trees" due to the broad avenue with lime-trees stretching from east to west. However, this epithet is a slight exaggeration, as according to statistics, the municipality maintains about 700 lime-trees.

The first lime-trees were planted in the square in the 1890s and gradually thereafter as the town grew. The lime-trees were probably chosen because at that time lime-tree wood was considered fashionable.

5. Sittkoff

The statue of Nikolai Sittkoff (1828-1887), a merchant, ship-owner and vice consul, stands straight-backed and powerful in the town centre outside the shopping arcade carrying his name.

Nikolai Sittkoff moved his country shop from Bomarsund to Mariehamn in the 1860s and he became one of the leading figures of the young town. He has been described as a person who was "foreseeing and intelligent with initiative" and he commanded both his own and the town's affairs with great success.

Sittkoff became the first ship-owner of importance in Mariehamn. His shop at Strandgatan was well stocked with attractive merchandise, which his own ships brought back from abroad.

Sittkoff died in 1887 and he left a great vacuum after him. None of his nine children wanted to continue his business and all of them moved away.

6. The GE-Villa and the King of the Windjammers

The ship-owner Captain Gustaf Erikson lived in this beautiful white wooden house by the Esplanade. In his days Gustaf Erikson became known around the world as the greatest and last of the windjammer ship-owners.

He was born in Lemland in 1872 and he first went off to sea at the age of ten. He rose rapidly in the ranks and took his sea captain's examination in 1900.

In 1913 he bought the barque Tjerimai, began his career as a ship-owner and became world-famous. Gustaf Erikson truly put his faith in the future of sailing-ships. When other ship-owners sold their sailing-vessels in order to invest in more modern tonnage, Gustaf Erikson was ready to buy their old ships.

He is reputed to have said "The sailing-ships will be here as long as I live".

He purchased ships at a relatively low price, the ships didn't need any fuel and they were still competitive right up until the period between the two world wars.

Gustaf Erikson owned more than 40 ships during his lifetime. The biggest ones sailed the grain trade route between Australia and Europe.

The newspaper described Erikson as a man who possessed an "outstanding sense for shipping, unique energy and knowledge".

He also pioneered a new business idea: voyages on windjammers across the oceans for private people because "many modern people long for peace and quiet for a couple of months in the bracing sea air".

Gustaf Erikson died in 1947 and his son Edgar sold the family's remaining sailing-vessels. Some of them still are amongst us; the Viking in Gothenburg, the Passat in Travemünde and the Pommern here in Mariehamn. Today the shipping company Gustaf Erikson runs its business from the modern building on the same street corner.

The old white villa is nowadays at the disposal of the town of Mariehamn and the Åland County Government, and it is used for representation.

7. Trobergshemmet and Johannahemmet

This light-coloured wooden house was the home of ship-owner August Troberg. He was born in 1855 and by the age of ten he started his career at sea as a cabin boy onboard the barque Eugenia. He became a captain in 1877 and a few years later he established himself as a ship-owner in Mariehamn. In 1926 he was appointed as maritime counsellor by the President of Finland. At the turn of the century August Troberg was one of the leading ship-owners in town and his vessels made great profits. During World War I he wound down his fleet. He sold his biggest vessel, the four-masted barque Lawhill, to his neighbour Gustaf Erikson.

Cont. 7.

August Troberg and his wife Johanna lived a quiet life as pensioners. The childless couple made, often anonymously, generous donations to different institutions, among them Åbo Akademi, the Mariehamn Fire Brigade and Sailor's home. The Trobergs also donated the funds to build a church in Mariehamn.

In their will it was stated that after their death their home was to be used for health care or similar purposes. August Troberg died in 1935 and two years later the 15 bedded municipal hospital of Mariehamn was opened in the Troberg villa.

In the 1950s the Åland Central Hospital was built and the Troberg villa was converted into an old people's home with the name Trobergshemmet. An annex to the house was built 1958-60.

Today the old wooden villa houses the Johannahemmet.

8. The church

In 1884 the town-dwellers were given premises for Sunday services in the new elementary school. However, the imperial senate promised the young parish that a proper church would be built "as soon as possible".

As the years went by, the church building was discussed on several occasions, and eventually professor Lars Sonck's plans for a church building were approved.

The laying of the foundation stone on September 4th 1926 attracted a considerable audience and the bishop announced that two town-dwellers had promised to donate 1 200 000 marks for the church. In other words, an enormous sum of money that would cover not only the construction of the church but even its furnishing.

It was not until June 1927 that the local newspaper revealed that maritime counsellor August Troberg and his wife were the donors. The church was consecrated on December 11th 1927. One of the church bells originally belonged to the parish of Skarpans in Bomarsund. After the fall of the fortress in 1854 English troops had shipped the bell to England as booty. After some energetic struggles the bell was finally returned to Åland in 1925. Mariehamn received the bell under solemn ceremonies and three cheers for England were given.

9. The elementary school and the old Town Hall

The yellow building west of the church housed Mariehamn's old elementary school. It was built in 1884. The western wing of the building was built a few years later and housed a classroom for handicrafts. Today the building functions as a community hall for youngsters. On the opposite side of the Esplanade there is the old town hall, which was built in 1876. Today it houses a kindergarten.

10. The Lundqvist shipping company

The modern building at Norra Esplanadgatan 9 B houses the offices of one of the Åland shipping companies, Lundqvist Rederierna. Captain Hugo Lundqvist, the son of Mathias Lundqvist, a prominent Åland ship-owner during the sailing-ship era, founded the shipping company in 1927. In his days the shipping office was housed in the light coloured wooden villa east of the present office building.

Hugo was a visionary who realised that the era of sailing-ships would soon be over. The Lundqvist's shipping company became the first company in Åland to invest in motor-driven tonnage.

In the year 2000 the company is still familyowned and operates nine tankers mainly in the North Sea and the Mediterranean.

11. The Maritime College

The monumental building up on the hill is a college for ship's officers. Today the college offers almost one hundred study places. There are long traditions of both the seaman's trade and training in Åland. Back in 1854, navigation was part of the elementary school curriculum.

A national navigation school was founded in Mariehamn in 1868.

The school has developed according to the requirements of the times and in 1935 a curriculum for engineer officers was started. However, nowadays this education is offered at a separate school, Åland Technical College.

The building housing the Maritime College was built in 1939 and it, like several other buildings, was designed by architect Lars Sonck.

12. The Viking Terminal

The ferry traffic between Sweden, Åland and Finland has its cradle in Åland. Enterprising Ålanders wanted to have connections both eastwards and westwards all year round. On June 1st 1959 the newly founded ferry company Vikinglinjen put its steamer, the Viking, into operation.

A lot has happened since those days. In 1999 almost 5.6 million people travelled on the seven Viking Line ferries trafficking in the Baltic. About 700 000 of them came to Åland. The company's head quarters are in Mariehamn and the biggest shareholders are Ålanders.

Cont. 12.

The Silja Line ferries also call into Mariehamn several times a day and in 1999 the company carried almost 118 000 passengers to Åland.

The traffic in the Western Harbour became even more intensive after July 1st 1999 when the sale of tax-free goods was abolished in the EU. However, tax-free is still permitted in traffic to and from Åland due to the fact that Åland stands outside the EU customs union. In the year 2000 more than 4 700 ferry calls will be registered in Mariehamn.

13. The Birka Terminal

This is the ferry terminal for the Åland shipping company Birka Line Abp, founded in 1972. The shipping company has right from the beginning mainly concentrated on cruising traffic between Stockholm and Mariehamn. The present vessel, the Birka Princess, calls in at Mariehamn harbour once a day. In 1999 the Birka Princess carried more than 300 000 passengers to Åland.

14. The customs warehouse

The house was designed by architect Lars Sonck and built at the end of the 19th century. It housed the customs office and a waiting hall for those travelling on steamers.

The facade has been restored to its former condition apart from an additional annex at the back of the building. Nowadays the building houses the harbour master's office.

15. The Man by the Wheel

The sea gives and takes. This is the harsh reality for a seafaring people. Many Ålanders have found their way to watery graves, and in order to honour them the statue "The Man by the Wheel" was raised.

The statue was made by sculptor Emil Cedercreutz and donated by the Agriculture Counsellor Emil Sundström whose father J. E. Sundström drowned when the Thomas Perry was shipwrecked in stormy weather in the Atlantic Ocean in 1905.

The memorial wall consists of stones for all Åland seamen lost at sea when on duty. On All Saints' Days the Åland Ship Officers' Association holds a memorial ceremony by the wall.

A new Cape Horn monument by an Åland artist and Captain Allan Palmer will be unveiled in July 2000.

16. The Åland Maritime Museum

The proud maritime traditions of Åland are cherished in the Åland Maritime Museum, which was opened in 1954. Architect Jonas Cedercreutz of Helsinki designed the building for this specific purpose. The unique interior gives you the feeling that you are onboard a ship.

The museum owes a lot to Captain Carl Holmqvist. He was one of the initiative takers of the Åland Nautical Club in 1935 whose main task was to create a maritime museum.

The museum boasts - very much thanks to the efforts of Captain Holmqvist - one of the finest collections of items from the epoch of the windjammers. The collections include, among other things, many fine figureheads, ship models and portraits.

17. The Museum-ship Pommern

The black-painted barque Pommern, which today is firmly moored in the Western Harbour, is one of the foremost attractions of the maritime town of Mariehamn.

The Pommern was built in Scotland in 1903 for a German shipping company and she sailed under the name Mneme.

The Pommern endured many hard blows during her voyages and became known as a fast sailor. In 1923 she made a voyage from Copenhagen to Australia in 75 days, which is the record of the century on that route.

In 1938 the world was in turbulence and in August of that year the Pommern arrived in Mariehamn in order to await better times. Later on it seemed obvious that the Pommern had made her last voyage in merchandise shipping.

In 1953 the heirs of Gustaf Erikson donated the Pommern to the town of Mariehamn as a museum-ship, and thanks to them, Mariehamn now possesses this unique attraction. She is the only windjammer in the world kept in her original state. She even has a complete set of sails - 28 in all - new sails that have been sewn in the traditional way. Some sails are hoisted on solemn occasions.

18. The ÅSS Pavillion with marina

Architect Lars Sonck also designed the red building down by the harbour. This villa, called "the Eagle's nest" was originally situated up on the cliff in Badhusparken. The villa is built in 1896 as a summerhouse for one of the spa's doctors. In the 1920s the house was moved down to its present location.

The villa is owned by the Åland Yacht Club (ÅSS) and it houses a restaurant. The Club with a history dating back to 1897 has almost 900 members today. The marina has berths for 180 boats. The ÅSS has hosted several prominent competitions, including the World Championship for optimist dinghys in 1995 which participants from more than 41 countries.

19. Badhusparken & the Doctor's Villa

The names of the park and the light-coloured wooden villa with its beautiful stone foundations and orange roof remind us of the time when Mariehamn was a fashionable spa town. The town invested in tourism early and already in 1889 the first spa was built in the Western Harbour.

Affluent guests arrived here to spend a few weeks in order to undergo cures and treatments, which were complimented by an active social life. The guests enjoyed Swedish punch and danced at fine banquettes. In the park there were tennis and croquet courts.

In 1900 a pompous spa hotel was inaugurated opposite to the present Maritime Museum. The hotel with its 40 rooms was the largest building in town. 1914 was the spa's 25th and last season. 538 guests were registered for the season - the best result ever - but, as World War I broke out, the guests disappeared and Russian soldiers moved into the hotel.

On a February night in 1916 the hotel burnt down. The town-dwellers tried in vain to extinguish the fire by passing buckets of seawater from hand to hand. The following morning all that was left of the pompous spa hotel was a smoky heap of ashes. The story had definitely come to its end. The rest of the buildings in the park, apart from the Doctor's Villa, were allowed to fall into decay and later on wrecked. Today on the spot where the spa was once situated, there is a light-coloured stone building, which once served as a public bath, and today is run as a club by youngsters.

The Doctor's Villa, which also is Lars Sonck's work, and which during the spa era, was used as a doctor's consulting room, is still there. The villa is the property of the town and offers facilities for companies and education.

20. The water tower & the path of love

From the water tower up on Badhusberget hill one has a view over the town and the sea. On the hill there are lovely staired walking trails. The trail, which has been cut out of the cliffs and called the path of love, goes back to the days of the spa epoch.

There are two additional routes starting from the square for those who wish to learn more about Mariehamn.

21. The steamer pier

Those, who in the bygone days travelled to and from Åland, probably went by steamer. In 1866 the steamer "Amiral von Platen" started regular calls at Mariehamn and this was a festive day for the young town.

The domestic traffic steamers called in at the steamer pier in the Eastern Harbour while the others docked at the Western Harbour. Today the Eastern Harbour is mainly trafficked by private boats. The Mariehamn Yacht Club with its 350 berth marina is situated here.

22. The Maritime Quarter

Building wooden boats was almost an everyday business in Åland during the last century. From the middle of the 1800s well into the 1900s more than 300 wooden boats were built in Åland. The vessels were bigger and bigger and their voyages reached farther and farther.

The peasants of Åland established small shipping companies with shares and therefore this era in the history of Åland seafaring is referred to as peasant seafaring.

The shipbuilding traditions are kept alive in the Maritime Quarter. An exhibition in the boat and shipbuilding museum depicts the shipbuilding traditions in Åland from the 18th century onwards.

In a hall next to the museum one can study a genuine shipbuilding project; here the Ålandsskutan takes shape according to drawings from the 18th century. Also the sketch Albanus, the schooner Linden and the well-boat Jehu were all built here from the old plans.

In the Quarter there is also a smithy, a café and a fish smokery.

The white lighthouse by the entrance of the Quarter is called Kvarteret. It was built in 1898 and earlier stood on the island of Stegskär south of Mariehamn. The owner, the National Board of Navigation, has moved it to the Quarter.

23. Södragatan

Older wooden houses have been preserved on this street. Hilda Hongell, the first female building engineer in Finland, designed many of them. Some of the houses are decorated in the Swiss style, which was in fashion at the turn of the century.