

## Two is Company, More is Fun ? Block Social Club visits Scandinavia—July 2008



Travelling abroad for a significant number of Batswana is normally linked to business ? paid for by an employer ? sponsored studies, or shopping in neighbouring South Africa. Self-paid leisure travel is rare and rarer for large groups of people beyond family circles. But, fifteen adventurous Botswana women visited Sweden, Finland and Norway in July this year, aided by a backdrop of savings they make monthly in the name of Block Social Club. This would be a great chapter for Alexander McCall Smith's No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency next book on the formidable traditionally-built Mma Ramotswe. Block Social Club women, most of whom are traditionally-built, live their lives through work, family, faith, song, dance, and international travel. They are simply incredible.

Dumela met with the fifteen women who visited Sweden to learn more about Block Social Club's adventures. In existence since 1989, the club:

- has 20 members, all women, representing a variety of professions ? including post retirement small and medium-sized business;
- members contribute BWP300 (approx. SEK300) per month ? February to November;
- meets monthly to discuss the club's savings strategies and to socialize through good meals;
- plans and undertakes bi-annual trips to varied destinations.



Block Social Club, as its name suggests, is a social club whose fundamental objective is to provide a friendship base for financial and social support for its members. The club has become an exemplary force in women's balance of life. Work demands and extended family responsibilities are part of most, if not all of the women in the group. With a professional approach to managing life's challenges, under the umbrella of song and dance, Block Social Club celebrated 20 years of solidarity in January 2008, followed by the trip to Scandinavia in July.



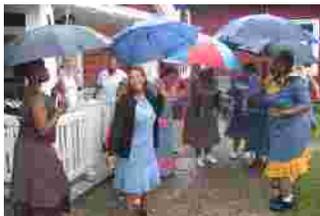
Not all time has centered on supporting each other in times of celebrations and sorrow. Since 2002, members have travelled to a number of countries as a group, including trips to Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa (Cape Town) for sheer leisure. The visit to Sweden, extending to Finland and Norway, is the longest travel members had made since the decision to spend savings on travel. Dumela learnt that the trip was born from immeasurable encouragement and support by Namibia's ambassador to the Nordic countries, Mrs. Theresia Samaria, who had been ambassador to Botswana and Mayor of Walvis Bay (Namibia) before her current ambassadorship. The fruition of

the trip received an invaluable logistics support by Botswana's ambassador to Sweden, Bernadette Rathedi.



Landing at Arlanda Airport on July 22, the 15 women had no time to waste. The first destination, shortly after landing, was Frihamnen, in Stockholm ? where they boarded a ship to Helsinki in the company of Ambassador Samaria. Travelling and sleeping on a ship was a first for most of the formidable women, and a major entertainment highlight of the trip. A bus trip from Helsinki to Tampere, where they attended a seminar on “Ladies as decision makers in the Finnish Society: Democracy and Politics” added to their professional flavours. Of major interest was lessons from the Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Tampere, a movement for business women. Dumela learnt that lessons from the seminar should go a long way in assisting Block Social Club members in their individual and collective political agendas.

With no rest from the Finnish excursion, all gathered at Ambassador Rathedi's residence for good food, song and dance ? a day after returning from Helsinki. In the midst of laughter and joy, a new adventure was born. Some of the women decided to travel to Oslo ? and six did on Sunday July 27, where there was more sightseeing.



The visit to Sweden benefitted from an invitation by BOTSFA's chairperson, Ulla Odqvist, to her childhood home in Kalvsund, which stands in a spectacular piece of farming land about 40km from Stockholm. The hosts, Kerstin (Ulla's sister) and Nils Paues, opened doors to a memorable day, with plenty of food, singing and dancing in the rain. Nils Paues treated the visitors to music on a hacksaw, adding to the nice sightseeing to the museums, where most of the traditions are preserved.



Other visits, before departure on July 31, included a visit to the King's Palace for an observation of change of guard; trip to Uppsala, whose university has hosted a number of African scholars; visit to Sigtuna to spend time with Per and Julia Järtby. And, of course, there was shopping, shopping, shopping!

Block Social Club women are simply amazing. They save for having fun together; provide emotional support to each other in times of joy and sorrow; and do the unthinkable, travel internationally, as a group, at own expense ? globally extending the footprints of the traditionally-built Mma Ramotswa.