

Northern highlights With a wild archipelago and a charming medieval capital, Sweden is a haven from the seething tourist hotspots. *Kate Morris* feels liberated. Photographs by Luke White



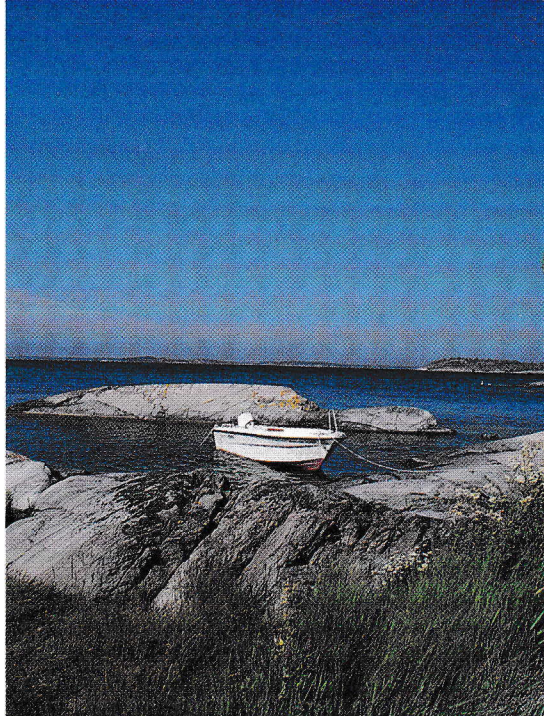
Kate Morris enjoys the space and open air on the rocky coast of Bullerön

As I have never been an ardent admirer of Ikea, Abba, or Seventies porn, Sweden was not on the list of my top-twenty travel destinations. How wrong I was to be so blinkered! Since being sent by *Harpers & Queen*, I am a convert, and already planning my next trip – winter in Lapland.

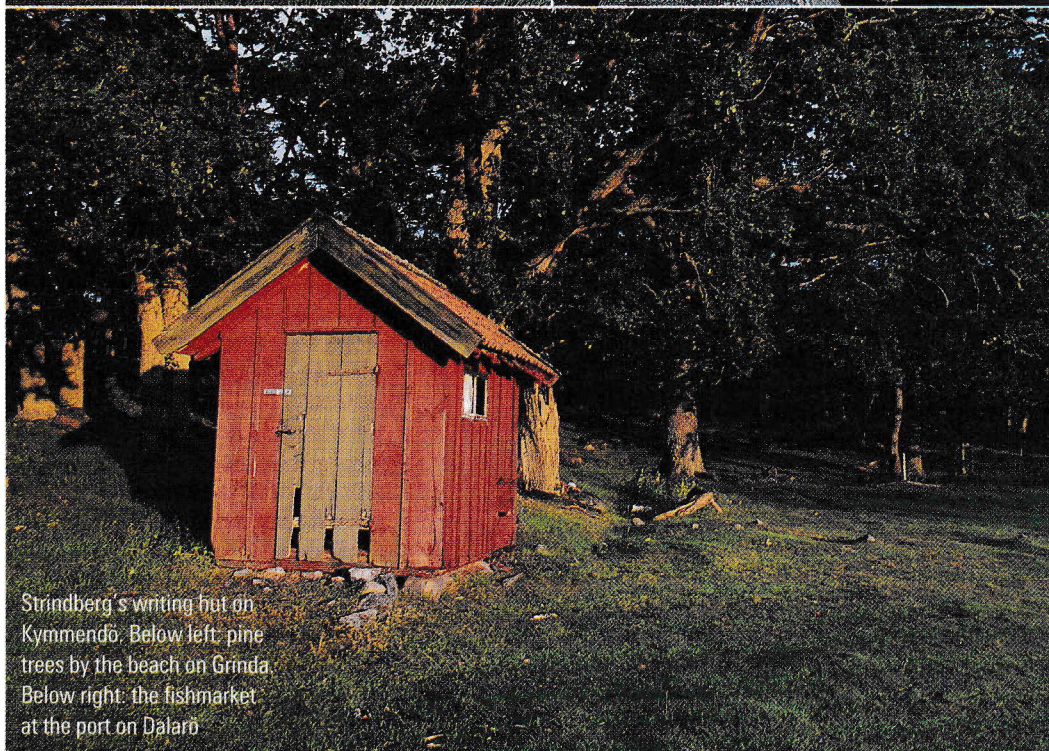
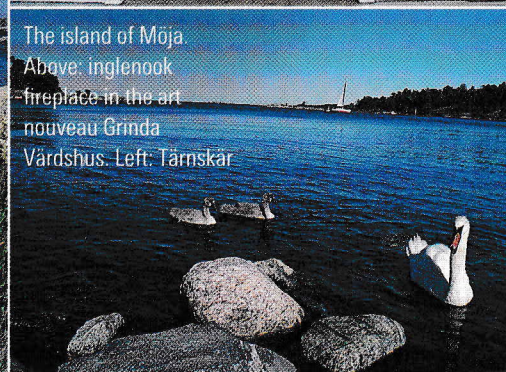
The graceful capital city of Stockholm, which consists of fourteen islands between Lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea, is an obvious place to begin a voyage of the vast Archipelago, which stretches 80km east into the Baltic sea. Made up of 24,000 islands, islets, and skerries, the Archipelago is as yet undiscovered by foreign tourists.

Stockholm is clean, quiet, and sparsely populated, so there is a liberating sense of space. The summer light is extraordinarily bright, throwing the myriad styles of architecture into sharp relief against the wide, cobalt-blue sky. The city's trams, squawking gulls, and horse guards, and the cobbled streets of the medieval quarter, Gamla Stan, imbue it with a quaint feel, strangely not at odds with the ultra-modern cafés, chic design shops, and new hip restaurants where designer-clad Swedes dine on *haute cuisine*. From the elegant centre of the city, it is only a two- or three-hour ferry ride to one of many and diverse natural landscapes of the Archipelago – urban sophistication gives way to unspoilt rugged wilderness, to pine and birch forests, fields of wild flowers, sandy beaches, and smooth rock-faces.

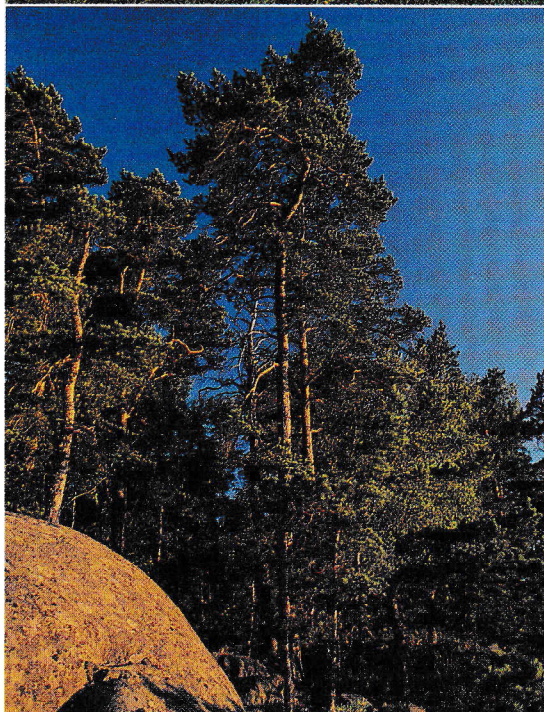
In the late nineteenth-century, the Archipelago was inhabited by remote farming, fishing, and hunting communities. August Strindberg and a group of writers and artists were among the first to rent cottages from the islanders during the summer. Strindberg described his first impressions in a fictionalised autobiography, *The Son of a Servant*: '... rough granite islets,' he enthused, 'with pine forests... stormy bay waters... Not the Alps of Switzerland, nor the olive hills of the Mediterranean, or the chalk cliffs of Normandy could ever force aside this rival.' ▸



The island of Möja
Above: inglenook
fireplace in the art
nouveau Grinda
Vårdshus. Left: Tärnskär



Strindberg's writing hut on
Kymmendö. Below left: pine
trees by the beach on Grinda.
Below right: the fishmarket
at the port on Dalarn



◁ Today, there are numerous ferries that run from Stockholm to some of the more visited islands, although timetables are quite hard to fathom. The summer season is short, but the advantage of this kind of holiday is that the views are unadulterated by high-rise hotels and big pleasure-cruising boats, and some of the outer islands are truly wild and unspoilt. It is a perfect destination for the robust traveller or keen sailor – anyone who enjoys hearty outdoor pursuits and games of Scrabble or backgammon when the rain sets in. This is most definitely not a holiday where you will stumble upon a sunburnt British

tourist downing lager and chips in a video theme-pub.

It can be quite hard to find a hotel room, particularly in the outer Archipelago (although most of the inhabited islands have youth hostels and B&Bs). It is possible to secure the traditional red-painted clapboard cottage on the water – with authentic wood-burning sauna, and boat – although, in July at least, Swedes are fairly reluctant to release their holiday houses for rental.

Camping is also an option. Sweden's public-access law allows anyone the right to enter privately-owned land or water, providing they

stay out of view of the owner's house. We rented an outboard motor and, after an exhilarating ride through the a billowing sea to the outermost Archipelago, anchored on the deserted and treeless islands of Tärnskär and Borgen, where we could, if we had wished, picnicked Robinson Crusoe-style in the nude. We had wanted to camp overnight in a hunting hut, barbecue some *fisk*, and wake to the sound of the waves, but the seas were high and the weather was turning bitter. We returned to the civilisation of a local *krog* on Ornö, where we drowned our sorrows in schnapps, and vowed to try again one day. □

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The bar in the Sandhamn's Vårdshus. Right: works by Carl Milles at Millesgården in Stockholm



Travel facts

Staying on the Archipelago

Grinda This recently-developed island is only an hour away from Stockholm by ferry. Step off on to a forest floor of pine needles and edible berries. The art nouveau Vårdshus is a nine-bedroom hotel (avoid number three, the small room). The food is spectacular – try its home-brewed schnapps and three kinds of marinated herring. The hotel can arrange for kayaks, motorbikes, and sailing boats to be rented. Double rooms cost approximately £60 per night (0046 8 542 494 91).

From **Dalarö**, it is a twenty-minute taxi-boat- or ten-minute bus-ride for a night or two of relative luxury at the Sma Dalarö Gard (0046 8 501 532 00). Breakfast is a grand buffet of cold meat, fruit, eggs, and cheese. The hotel has two wood-burning saunas on the waterfront. Dalarö has colourful turn-of-the-century houses, and

the look and feel of Cape Cod. The Custom House Museum, built in 1788 as a residence for King Gustav III, is worth a visit, as is the ark-style church, decorated with model boats.

Sandhamn (the 'St Tropez' of the Archipelago), **Bullerön**, and **Tärnskär** are three of the remotest islands that are popular with visitors. On Tärnskär, small hunting huts are sometimes available to rent: apply through Klaus Liljefors (0046 8 501 561 20).

We stayed in a basic B&B, Orno Inn on the outer island of **Ornö**, which has a stunningly beautiful horseshoe-shaped bay and a landscape of birch trees and sloe bushes. It is also bookable through Klaus Liljefors.

Möja, like most of the islands, is decked out with quaint, hand-painted signs proclaiming 'Bad': it took a few minutes to realise that they would lead me to a stretch of beach or a group

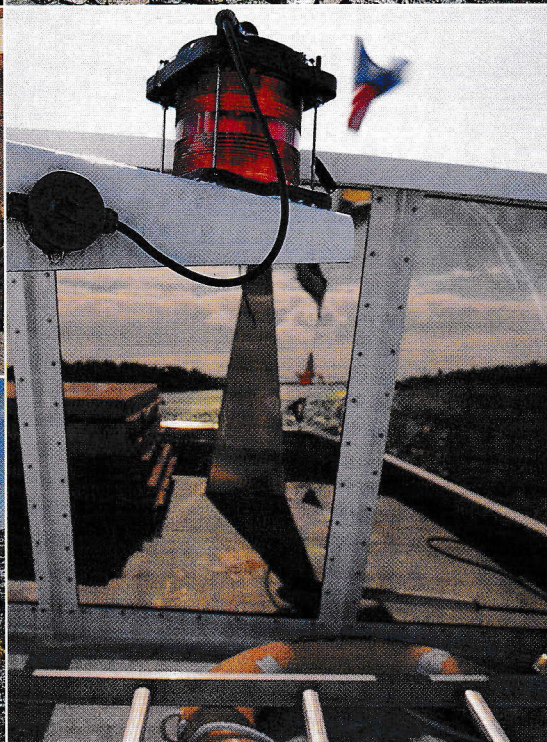
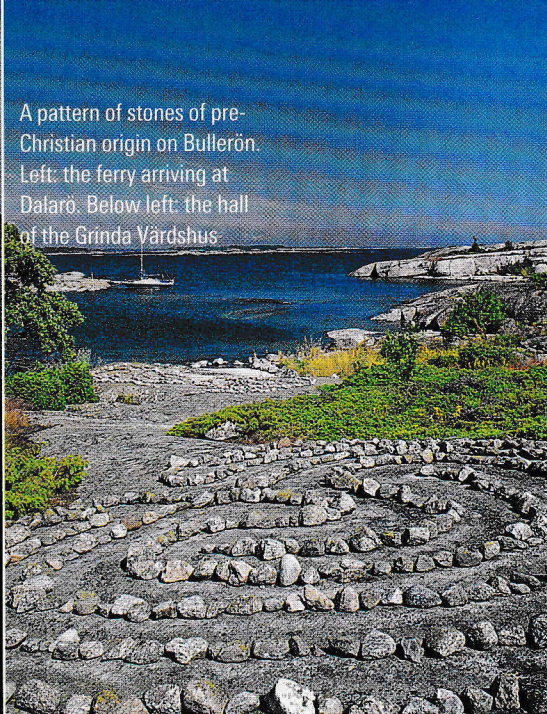
of rocks from which I could swim. We hired bicycles at Langviks Pier for £6 each a day, and whizzed down the road, past idyllic flower-strewn fields, to Wikstrom Fisk Restaurant. A husband-and-wife team catch and cook the fish. The smoked eel with dill is fantastic.

Kymmendö Known as 'Strindberg's island', because he retreated here to write *Hemsöborna* and later referred to it as his 'basket of flowers in the sea'. This is my favourite island: walking through the bucolic landscape to find Strindberg's writing hut is profoundly moving.

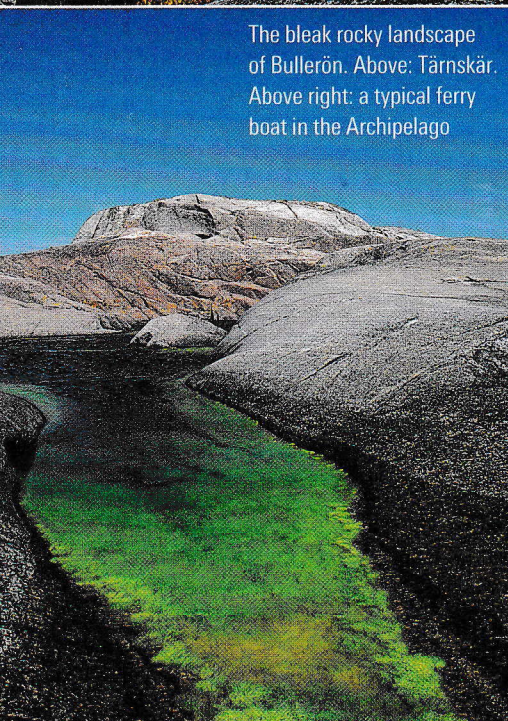
Booking Chalets can be rented through Destination Stockholms skärgård (0046 8 542 481 00; fax 0046 8 542 414 00); listings of chalets in the Archipelago can be found at www.dess.se. You can book accommodation in Stockholm and the Archipelago through Hotellcentralen (0046 8 789 2425).



A pattern of stones of pre-Christian origin on Bullerön. Left: the ferry arriving at Dalarö. Below left: the hall of the Grinda Vårdshus



The bleak rocky landscape of Bullerön. Above: Tärnskär. Above right: a typical ferry boat in the Archipelago



◁ **When to go** Pike and salmon fishing is best in the spring or autumn, but for all other outdoor activities the summer season is from mid-May to the end of August. The Baltic is numbingly cold, and for three months of the year most of the Archipelago is ice-locked – winter is good if you want to try long-range skating.

Where to stay and where to eat in Stockholm

For a bite of urban chic before diving into the windy waters of the Archipelago, try the Lydmar Hotel on Sturegatan 10, which has a hip jazz bar on the ground floor (0046 8 5661 1300; fax 0046 8 5661 1301). Rooms cost from £115 to £205.

We had an unforgettable meal at the Michelin-starred restaurant Fredsgatan 12, run by young owner and chef Melker Andersson. Dinner for two cost approximately £80.

What to do in Stockholm The Museum of Modern Art houses one of Europe's finest collections in a new building by award-winning Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. The Vasa Museum preserves the warship *Vasa*, which sank on her maiden voyage in 1628. The Nordic Museum houses a large collection of Strindberg paintings and drawings. The beautiful Millesgården in the suburb of Lidingö was once the home of sculptor Carl Milles, and contains representations of his most important works.

Shopping Östermalmshallen, the indoor food market, for Swedish specialties; Götgatan 31, for designer clothes, homeware, and a stylish café; Svenskt Tenn for Nordic design. NK is Stockholm's answer to the big department store, and sells cool Nordic design.

Tip A Stockholm card costs 199 SEK (about £15) a day, and gives free admission to 70 museums and attractions, including free travel on buses and trains, free parking, boat passes in summer, special offers and discounts, and a guidebook.

The *dagens rätt* (set lunch) offered in most restaurants includes a choice of three main dishes, salad, bread, and coffee, for 65 SEK (£5).

Getting around the Archipelago An Inter-skerries card from the Waxholmsbolagat ticket box at Stromkajen, Stockholm, costs about £20. You can travel as often as you like for sixteen days.

For assistance with timetables and booking excursions, visit the Stockholm Information Service at Sweden House on Hamngatan 27, Kungsträdgården (0046 8 789 2400; fax 0046 8 789 2450; website www.stoninfo.se).

How to get there Scan Meridian Travel (0171-431 5322) has self-catering Archipelago holidays. SAS Scandinavian Airlines (0845 607 27 727) flies daily to Stockholm, from £100 return.

Information Swedish Travel and Tourism Council information line: 0171-870 5600; e-mail info@swetourism.org.uk; website www.visit-sweden.com. □