

The Stockholm archipelago – Your own private paradise

Words by Alexander Farnsworth

A FANTASTIC SEASCAPE STARTS IN DOWNTOWN STOCKHOLM. With an estimated 30,000 islands, islets, and skerries – 1,000 of which are inhabited – the Stockholm archipelago fans out into the Baltic Sea like shards of broken glass scattered across the floor.

Many of the bigger islands closer to Stockholm, like the forest-clad islands of **Vaxholm**, **Gustavsberg**, and **Värmdö**, are inhabited year-round and considered idyllic suburbs of the capital. However, 30 or 40km out to sea the islands disperse into smaller, jagged, rocky and windswept outcroppings free of any vegetation.

It is this incredible variety of the Stockholm archipelago that gives it a special place in the hearts of Stockholmers, many of whom have characteristically red-painted summer houses there. While the archipelago is alluring for its sheer back-to-nature experience, many of the outermost islands lack any kind of facilities like running water and electricity. But this doesn't stop resourceful Stockholmers from building a small red cottage on a slab of rock. This is the Swedish idyll.

Of course, the Stockholm archipelago experience doesn't have to be so rustic. Boats and steamers to different destinations in the archipelago leave

hourly from both the **Grand Hotel** in Stockholm and **Nybrokajen**, opposite the Royal Dramatic Theatre. Depending on your preferences, there are lunch cruises, dinner cruises, jazz cruises, and a 'thousand island' cruise that takes 11 hours to circumnavigate most of the southern archipelago. Roughly speaking, the archipelago stretches almost 50km north and south of Stockholm, and there are boats to most settlements. Unlike Stockholm proper, there is a well-functioning taxi boat system in most of the archipelago ports for transfer to more desolate destinations.

For a quick fix of the archipelago experience, you don't need to travel more than 20 minutes from Stockholm: **Fjäderholmarna** is a tiny island a short boat ride from Stockholm. It has an excellent restaurant, **Fjäderholmarnas krog**, which is even open at Christmas for the traditional *julbord*, or *smörgåsbord*. And the popular **Rökeriet** restaurant serving smoked fish is located by the guest harbour.

Many artisans have studios and stores in the centre of the island. **Fjäderholmarna** provides a sample of the archipelago for people who don't have time to explore further. Boats depart from **Strandvägen** and **Slussen** during the summer.

In general, accommodation is available on most inhabited islands in the archipelago in the form of youth hostels and simpler hotels. Luxurious hotels can be found on some of the main islands like **Sandhamn**.

Vaxholm is another island accessible by boat and bus from Stockholm. It is a real town with



Agnetta Green & Magnus Ek, Oaxen Krog



idyllic well-preserved wooden houses from the turn of the last century, painted in the archipelago's typical delicate pastel tones. **Vaxholm** also has numerous restaurants, cafés, and shops. The **Waxholms Hotell** has great views of the nearby fortress and is a classic choice for either lunch or dinner.

In the middle of **Himmerfjärden** in the southern archipelago is one of Sweden's best restaurants. Rated 32 out of 50 of the best restaurants in the world by *Restaurant Magazine*, **Oaxen Krog** pioneers the use of local organic ingredients like fish, wild garlic, and seaweed. The restaurant also runs a small hotel located on a 1935-vintage ship.

Sandhamn in the outer archipelago is a key meeting place for sailors and yachters. It also has a vibrant party scene during the summer. The idyllic village, a historical sea pilot station, has an inn, hotels, the classic 100-year-old Royal Swedish Yacht Club, and numerous restaurants and bars. **Sandhamn** is also the starting point for the annual sailing regatta around the island of **Gotland**. The boat journey from Stockholm takes about three hours on one of the vintage steamers, but faster boat travel is also available. **Sandhamn** can also be reached by bus from **Stavsnäs**, followed by a short 30-minute boat trip.

Wherever you end up in the Stockholm archipelago, you can rest assured that there will be peace, quiet, and tranquillity, which is the way most Swedes would have it. ☺

KAYAK SWEDEN

Kayaking is a popular activity in Stockholm for locals and foreigners alike. But beware: wake-producing boats – and there are many – don't slow down for these 'water bikes', so it is best for those experienced in handling big waves.



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That said, there is an enormous amount of calm and deserted water available around Stockholm for paddlers. Paddling around **Kungsholmen** (the King's Island), for instance, takes only two hours or so, and yields beautiful water views of a residential island and the bustling downtown area in one go.

Kayaks can be rented at the **Smedsuddsbadet** area under the **Västerbron**, or Western Bridge, at the **Kafe Kajak** at the **Vinterviken kayak rental** place, a little south of town.



Fjäderholmarna