



TRAVELLER



WEST SWEDEN

Welcome to the good life

ADVENTURE • FOOD • CITY

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BOHUSLÄN

Home to one of the most striking stretches of coastline in the world, Bohuslän province in West Sweden is made for adventure. Visitors can thread their way between the 8,000 islands and islets of the archipelago in a kayak, hike through the ocean spray misting nature reserve trails, and cycle past charming fishing villages and outdoor artworks

PHOTOGRAPH: ROGER BORGELID



EDGE OF THE WORLD

Exploring the islands along West Sweden's Bohuslän Coast by kayak and fishing boat provides a vivid perspective of the region's culture and adventurous spirit

WORDS: JOSEPHINE PRICE

Marcus is pointing to the horizon, talking passionately about the bounty of the seas surrounding us. His pontification is becoming more enthusiastic as the light falls in curtains through the clouds, and I nod in agreement, unable to reply with a mouth full of prawns. We're perched on the edge of the world, discussing the good things in life, while feasting on some of the finest seafood soup I've ever had. It's an extravagantly rarefied meal, without a starched tablecloth or hovering waiter in sight.

Marcus, Ingela — owners of Skärgårdsdyllen, a kayak and outdoor adventure company — and I are huddled together on a secluded rocky islet in the Bohuslän archipelago on Sweden's west coast. This is their favourite place to eat lunch, and today it's providing valuable shelter from the wind.

We survey the horizon. Over there is an island that's good for wild camping, they tell me. Just beyond it is a narrow channel between two islands that's great for a spot of kayak surfing. And there are many, many more. Over 8,000 islands, in fact. Some are mere rocks peeking out of the water, others are large and dotted with houses. The sea is peppered with them — each a unique opportunity to explore.

We spent the morning attempting to weave between the islands by kayak, but the previous night's storm played havoc with our plans. I was in a kayak with Marcus and

despite us working as a team, my arms soon turned to jelly as we tried to battle through the choppy water. We eventually gave in and stopped for lunch. Our spread includes the aforementioned seafood soup along with some salty caviar spread, crusty hunks of bread, brie-like cheese, seaweed crackers and cinnamon buns, all washed down with local lagers. Seals pop their heads out of the water to check on proceedings from time to time, while opportunistic seagulls patrol overhead, keeping their beady eyes on any scraps that might fall their way.

Marcus and Ingela made the decision to leave the city with their young children for the crystalline waters and dark granite isles of the Bohuslän Coast back in 2008.

"Look. You see the water's green? That's from the sea shells," Marcus explains. We're deep in oyster country — a region that starts about 20 miles south of Grebbestad and stretches a further 20 miles north.

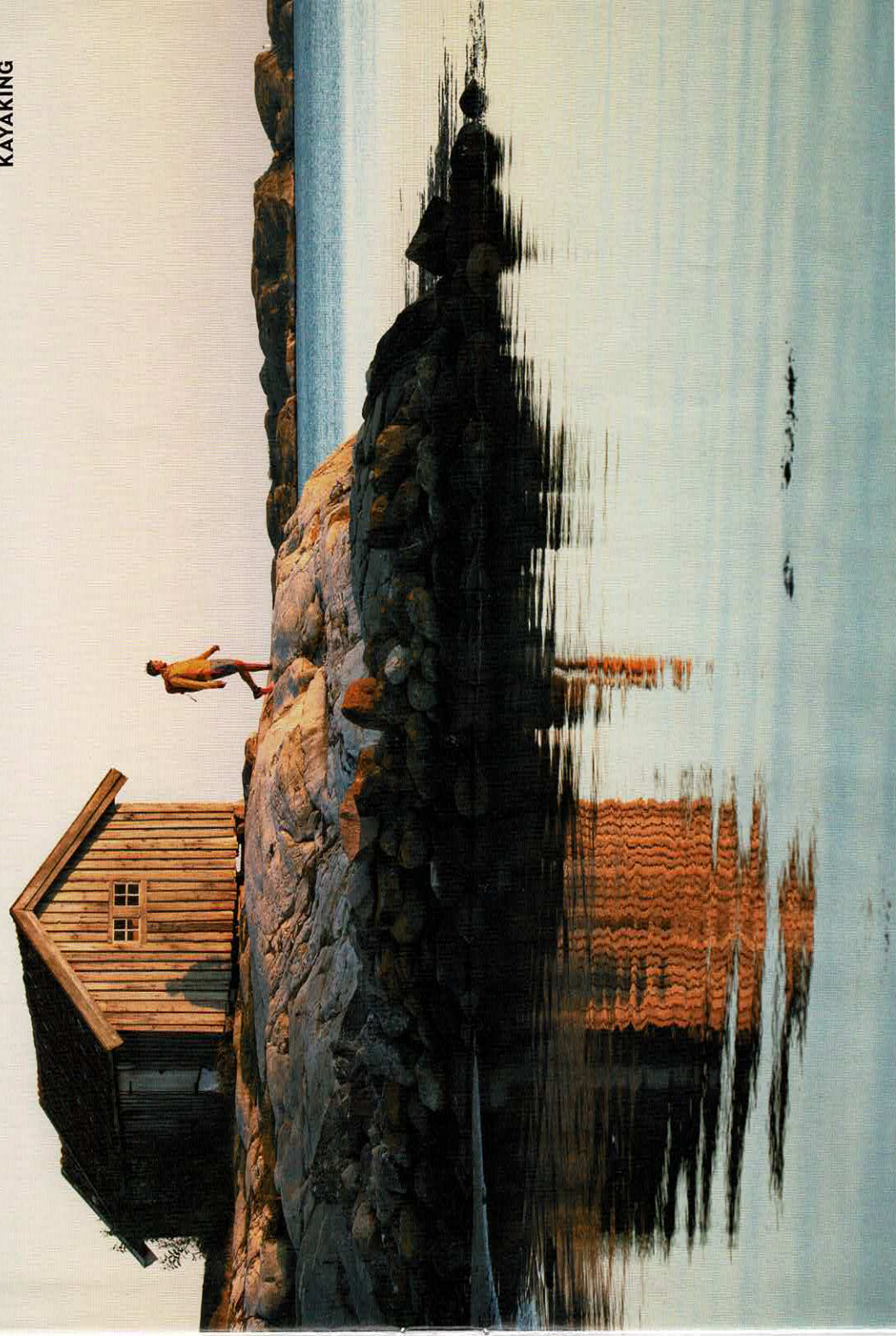
We slip the kayaks back into the water after lunch and continue on our adventure, discussing the local marine flora and fauna, and the growing problem with discarded plastic. The husband and wife team organises regular clean-ups to keep this stretch of the archipelago pristine. I ask what the locals do during the different fishing seasons. "During lobster season, we basically sleep in our wellies," Ingela tells me. "The mornings are a frantic rush to get out and get to sea in search of 'black gold'."

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

South Koster Island; kayaking in the Bohuslän archipelago; freshly cooked crayfish, Smögen

IMAGES: ROGER BORGEILD; JONAS INGMAN



I'm keen to get a glimpse of the subaquatic treasure hunt. So the next morning, I head off to meet Lars and Per of Everts Sjöbod, two brothers who run seafood safaris from their 100-year-old boathouse.

It's good to be back on the water. Our vessel is a nine-metre wooden schooner that was built in 1952. An intelligent sonar system maps the seabed so the brothers can get some idea of where to put their traps, but that's the only technology they rely on. They grew up here, catching mackerel with their father as kids, and have an innate understanding of the sea.

I jump aboard for a 'lobster safari', which involves combing through the 40 pots the brothers have sitting on the seabed around this part of the Bohuslän archipelago.

"What's the boat called?" I ask. Per smiles: "Tuffa." I ask if it means something in particular in Swedish. "No, no — it's just what the boat does," he replies with a chuckle. He purses then blows out his lips — "Tuff, tuff, tuff!" — mimicking the noise of the engine as it drives the vessel and we rise and fall with the crested tide, bouncing on each powerful surge.

We launch into a punishing routine of heaving up traps, inspecting the contents, putting in fresh bait and then throwing them back into the sea. All the while, the brothers tell me about the seasons and how to read the waves. My arms ache like hell, but I'm keen not to let the side down.

In an instant, my tiredness vanishes — I spot a snapping claw amid the bustle of black netting. Lars hauls it out of the pot and grabs the silver measuring tool. The crustaceans have to be at least 3.5 inches-long from eye to tail to be viable. We're in luck. Black gold.

We cheer, united in triumph. Lars points to a spot far beyond the nearest islands: "We have pots out there, too, but not today." I'm so tired, I concede it's for the best.

On the way back to shore, I look out across the archipelago. For a moment I'm tempted to head back out — to slip over the lip of the horizon and drop off the edge of the world. ▢

Images: Roger Borgellid, Jonas Ingman

SKÄRGÅRDSIDYLLEN offers kayaking and paddleboarding experiences. skargardsidyllen.se
EVERTS SJÖBOD conducts seafood safaris, fishing trips and boat adventures. evertssjjobod.se
westsweden.com/paddling

ISLAND HOPPING IN BOHUSLÄN



CHRIS DOYLE

Executive director of Europe & Central Asia, Adventure Travel Trade Association

WHAT MAKES THE WEST SWEDEN ARCHIPELAGO SPECIAL?

There's a relaxed atmosphere — a special sort of quiet — even during peak season, and plenty of nooks and crannies to explore. The archipelago has a dramatic, beautiful granite austerity and the relatively calm Kattegat Sea is ideal for watersports. The area around Uddevalla has plenty of good spots for camping, easy portages and dockings, and there are numerous small villages for food resupplies.

Before we had kids, my wife and I hiked, camped and island hopped our way around the islands just outside Gothenburg. They have well-developed cycling routes supported by a robust ferry system.

WHAT'S THE BEST ACTIVITY FOR ADVENTURERS?

There's kayaking, island hopping, hiking/trekking and cycling for the more active visitors, but the best thing about Bohuslän is how accessible it is. The hiking and walking on most islands is quite easy, even for people with physical limitations.

WHEN'S THE BEST TIME OF YEAR TO ISLAND HOP?

Any time! In summer, kayaking near midnight is still possible and you can check out all the midsummer celebrations. Winter brings dramatic landscapes set against the granite islands and steely sea. I'm an all-weather adventurer, so experiencing any given destination in every season is appealing to me.



Lobster safari
in Grebbestad
RIGHT: Cycling in Lagenen
camping sites