



FOOD

WEST SWEDEN ARCHIPELAGO

Drive along Sweden's Bohuslän Coast, stopping off at its islands along the way, and you'll pick up the freshest ingredients from the sea for a real feast

Darkness creeps into the room as the sun sets, the only light coming from a crackling bonfire outside. I'm sitting in the shadows as the flames dance across the wooden walls of the 100-year-old boathouse, waves lapping against the stilts. The distance between me and a light switch is mere feet, but I'm totally absorbed in the act of eating a juicy monster of a mussel. It almost slipped out of my hands a moment ago, coming dangerously close to falling between the cracks in the floorboards. I shouldn't be so precious about it. After a few days of driving along Sweden's west coast, my belly is full with seafood. But in a region that's forced me to leave the real world behind, the potential loss of a mussel becomes the biggest drama of the day.

I'm travelling along the Bohuslän Coast, hopping between the shoreline and some of its 8,000 granite islands that make up the archipelago. It's a strip that stretches north of Gothenburg all the way up to the Norwegian

border. Green forests are interspersed with colourful fishing towns built around grey rocky outcrops. It's all wildly beautiful.

I've settled into a very pleasant daily routine — a little driving, a spot of hiking, a tasty seafood meal, maybe a quick snooze, then a dip in the sea before watching the sun set from the shore. It's a change of pace from London; a proper escape.

Pushing another empty plate aside, I move on to the oysters that I'd shucked with Per, the owner of Everts Sjöbod boathouse. We'd scraped a fishing net along the bed of the ocean floor before spilling the catch — a ripe two-year-old oyster and a rare Japanese oyster — on to the jetty. "I've found pearls four or five times. I usually give them to the guests. But no pearl for you today, I'm afraid," commiserated Per. I don a glove and place the oysters on the dampened seaweed, which is scattered on the barrel we use as a work surface. Per shows me how to prise the oysters from their shells as we sip beer from a local microbrewery.

The following day, I kayak out to further explore the surrounding islands. "This is what all the locals do almost every day in summer: we paddle out to the islands and picnic on their beaches," explains Ingela, a local who runs a kayaking company with her partner, Markus. Ingela is picking seaweed out of the water and draping it across her lap as we paddle along in the kayak. It becomes the highlight of our picnic later.

With each stop comes another highlight: Lysekil has a stunning pink granite nature reserve. Grebbestad has the friendliest locals. Fjällbacka has awesome boulders you can climb. And my final stop, the Weather Islands, a collection of 365 deserted volcanic islands, has a coral reef and its own microclimate. It almost becomes frustrating, just how much Bohuslän has and just how little I want to leave. But with one final plate of mussels, unmerited rage is washed away. They really are just so damn tasty. westsweden.com **TAMSIN WRESSELL**