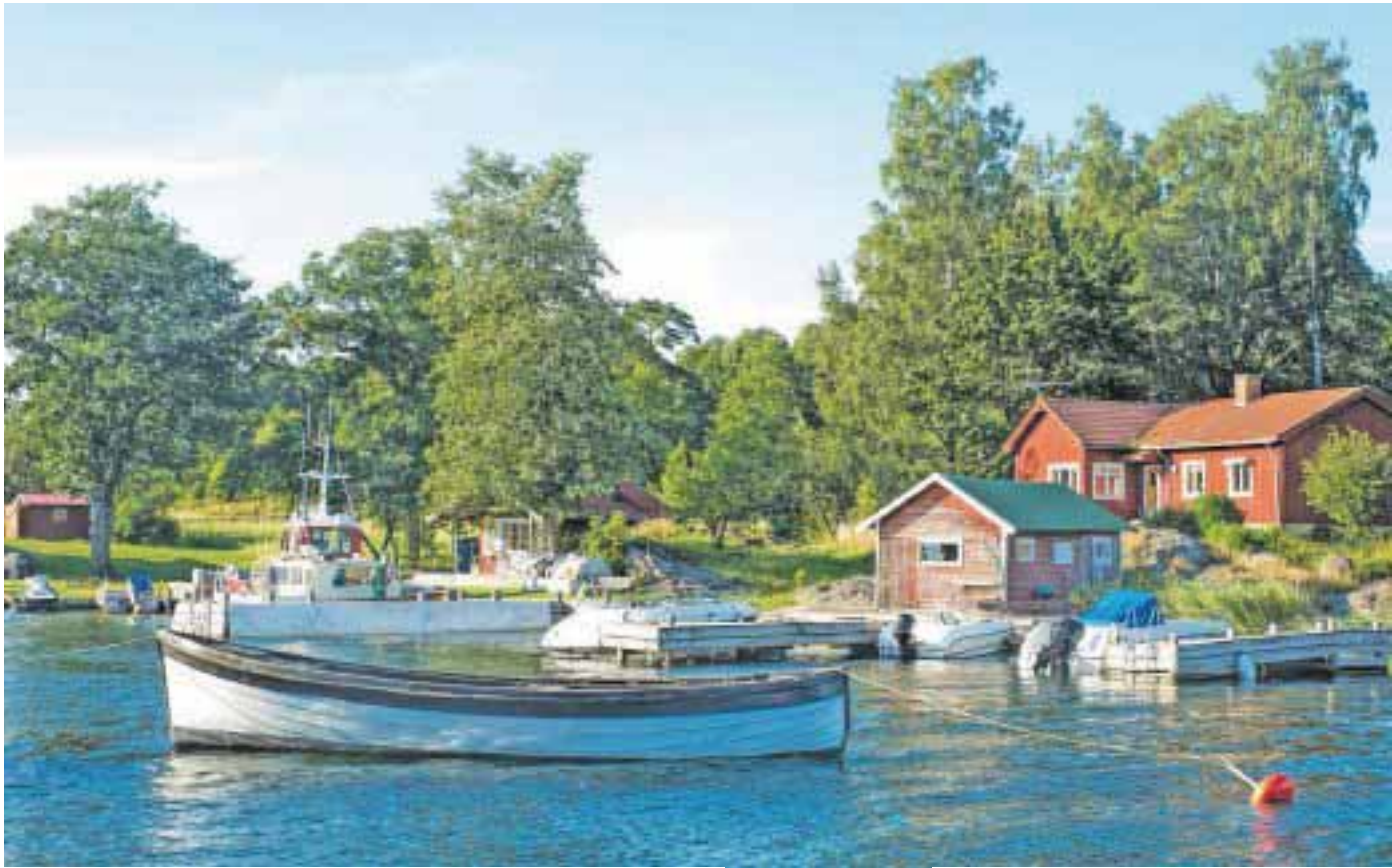


‘Sandhamn is a party island, with live music thumping out of the upmarket Seglarhotellet’

Sweden’s new trail links islands and old Viking routes, writes Denise Cullen



Launched late last year, the Stockholm Archipelago Trail is a 270km hiking route spanning 20 (out of an estimated 30,000) islands lying east of the Swedish capital. These car-free islands are accessible by public ferry and come to life during summer. Each island has its own unique flavour. A handful are rich in military history; some offer quirky galleries and museums; still others support working farms. Uniting them is their stark natural beauty – from forests filled with birch, spruce and pine through to remote rocky outcrops and windswept stretches of sand.

DAY ONE

Morning

My husband and I wake up early in Barnvik, less than an hour from central Stockholm. From there, we take a bus to Sollenkroka Brygga (pier), a popular jumping-off point for the archipelago, and catch a ferry to the island of Möja.

After disembarking, we set off on a 13.8km section of the Stockholm Archipelago Trail that mostly hugs the coastline, passing fishing villages dotted with traditional red cottages. Beside the road, bees and butterflies flit from clover to meadowsweet to heather. Though the official trail on Möja follows a rough gravel road, we wander onto unmarked forest paths where carpets of wild blueberries grow in dappled shade. Our fingers take on a purplish hue as we forage.

We reach the village of Berg where we break for *fika* – the Swedish version of smoko. Pulling up seats at one of the bakery’s outdoor tables, we sip coffee and snack on *kardemummabulle* (cardamom buns) with their sweet, gritty, glazed crowns.

From here, it’s a short stroll to Möja Church. A map from 1630 shows a small wooden chapel standing on the site of the current church. This chapel was the only building left standing when Russian soldiers razed the island in 1719.

stockholmarchipelagotrail.com; visitmoja.se

Afternoon

Seafood platters are the biggest seller at Berg’s lively alfresco restaurant Les Poissonniers de Möja. But between blueberries and buns, we’ve left insufficient room. Instead, we eat fish and chips paired with glasses of white wine.



Clockwise from above: Möja, an island in the Stockholm Archipelago; the ferry to Möja leaves from Sollenkroka; the popular Les Poissonniers de Möja restaurant.



The local history museum, Möja Hembygds museum, overlooks the sea. Kerstin Malmer, who traced her ancestry on Möja back to 1595, says she and other volunteers seek to preserve memories of a vanishing way of life. Among the museum’s objects is a wooden butter dish from circa 1683.

“It’s almost as old as the *Vasa*,” she says, referring to the Swedish warship that famously sank on its maiden voyage in 1628 and is now displayed in Stockholm’s Vasa Museum. **mojafisk.se; hembygd.se/moja**

Evening

We stock up on provisions at the Berg grocery store and take the return ferry. The sun sets around 9.30pm in the summer months, so we savour the long, slow descent of dusk.

DAY TWO

Morning

We catch a bus to the port of Stavsån and join a long queue of holiday-making Swedes snaking across the jetty for a ticket to Sandhamn. When the giant ferry (used as an icebreaker during winter) docks an hour later, it becomes apparent that Sandhamn

is a party island, with live music thumping out of the upmarket Seglarhotellet.

We set off on the day’s 8.1km hike, climbing a hill and pausing for breath at a sculpture of Neptune’s trident.

The trail then turns towards the forest, offering ocean glimpses through the pines. The music fades as we put distance between ourselves and the pier.

When the trail hits the beaches, our feet crunch on dried kelp. We scabble over smooth stones coloured pale pink, white and grey, as though selected by a Nordic designer.

At Trouville Beach, a protected sandy cove, we strip down to togs and join the throng already frolicking in the water. Even in summer, the water temperature is a bracing 15C-18C. We dry off (and warm up) on sun-baked rocks before completing the day’s hike.

sandhamn.se

Afternoon

Tables at Sandhamns Vårdshus are such hot property that it’s an hour before our names are called. It’s worth the wait. I have *stekt strömming* (fried herrings) served with mashed potato, lingonberries, and browned butter – Swedish comfort food at its finest. We forgo dessert in favour

of *fika* – today, *toscabulle* (cardamom buns filled with almond paste).

I indulge a shopping itch in the boutiques beside the pier. One sells resort wear, alongside stylish Chimi sunglasses, designed in Stockholm.

I also browse a bookstore that has everything from coffee-table books (most in Swedish) to translations of the best-selling *Sandhamn Murders* series by Sweden’s Viveca Sten. **sandhamns-vardshus.se; sandhamnsbageriet.com; maxstrom.se**

Evening

The crowded ferry journey back from Sandhamn recalls the *Voyage of the Damned*, with crying children, two passengers for every seat, and a yelping dog or two. After reaching our cottage, we dump our daypacks, tread the rickety wooden boardwalk at the bottom of the hill and plunge into the Baltic Sea.

DAY THREE

Morning

We bus it back to Stavsån and then catch the ferry to Nämndö, disembarking at the village of Solvik. Our first stop is at the bakery to fuel

Photography: Denise Cullentuer (ferry, butterfly, pine forest)



From top: Sandhamn in the Stockholm Archipelago; butterflies are ever-present on the Nämddö path; hiking through a pine forest on Sandhamn.

up with *fika* – choosing *kanelbulle* (cinnamon buns), which are so beloved that Swedes celebrate Cinnamon Bun Day on October 4 every year. We also stash sandwiches to eat along the way.

The 13.1km trail on Nämddö offers more varied terrain and a notch more challenge than the previous two days. We spot fruiting cherry and apple trees dotted amid the birch and pine, step carefully through cattle pastures, wander through meadows scattered with wildflowers, and pause to listen to the susurrrus of winds through open grasslands. [namdosolvik.com](#)

Afternoon
Tucked away amid the trees, on the edge of a

harbour at Långvik, is an unstaffed public sauna housed in a rustic timber hut. Maintained by The Archipelago Foundation, the sauna is stocked with everything from matches to wood. We gather kindling and some of the pre-cut logs beneath the hut to start a fire in the sauna's metal stove.

Steam erupts with a hiss as I use the supplied saucepan to tip fresh water over hot stones. Underneath a single smoke-encrusted window, we stretch out on towels on the well-worn wooden benches, enveloped in heat and sweating profusely, just as Swedish people have done for a thousand years before us. [explorearchipelago.com](#)

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