

A WEEK AFLOAT

STOCKHOLM ARCHIPELAGO

All within a day's sail of mainland Sweden, these islands offer stunning scenery and the chance to escape the crowds, as Nigel Wollen discovers

Words Nigel Wollen





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ABOVE: Most charter companies are based in or around Saltsjöbaden

LEFT: Bullerö, like many of the islands in the outer Skärgård has a more exposed and rugged feel, although there are plenty of protected anchorages

DO YOU ONLY HAVE A WEEK TO SPARE?

For those of us who are time poor but who want to seize the moment, either on our own boat or on a charter, it is reassuring to know that there are plenty of cruising hubs from where we can enjoy some of the best of the region in only a few days. This series, *A Week Afloat*, commissioned by *Yachting Monthly* and Imray, visits some ideal destinations and suggests a one-week itinerary. Each article, complete with expanded information about cruising each area, will be available as a PDF download via Imray's website or Google Play Books.



Nigel Wollen has owned his Bowman 40 *Wish Hound* since 1990 and has cruised extensively from the Azores to Iceland. He is a past Commodore of the Royal Cruising Club and is the chairman of the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation.

The Stockholm archipelago or Skärgård (pronounced shair-gord) is a fabulous cruising ground. It consists of no fewer than 30,000 islands scattered along nearly 100 miles of coastline, and all within a day's sail of the mainland. The inner islands are heavily wooded and are dotted with many small gästhamnen, 'guest harbours', ideal for visitors, as well as numerous sheltered 'nature harbours' where you can swing to your anchor or moor to the rocks. The outer islands offer a bit more of a pilotage challenge but have their own wild beauty.

The great luxuries of the Baltic are the absence of any appreciable tide and long daylight hours in summer. Summer winds don't normally exceed Force 5, and within the archipelago the water is flat and there is always somewhere to find a sheltered spot. The summer weather is surprisingly warm, with swimming and barbecues very much the order of the day. Everywhere you go you will find a sauna, some just a little hut on the edge of the water.

The area is well charted, and navigation is relatively straightforward, but you do need to keep a constant track of your position as you will often be sailing much closer to rocks than you are used to. You also need to keep a close eye open for the huge ferries, which can appear very unexpectedly around an island and always have right of way!

Several charter companies are dotted around the outskirts of Stockholm, but most are based in ➔

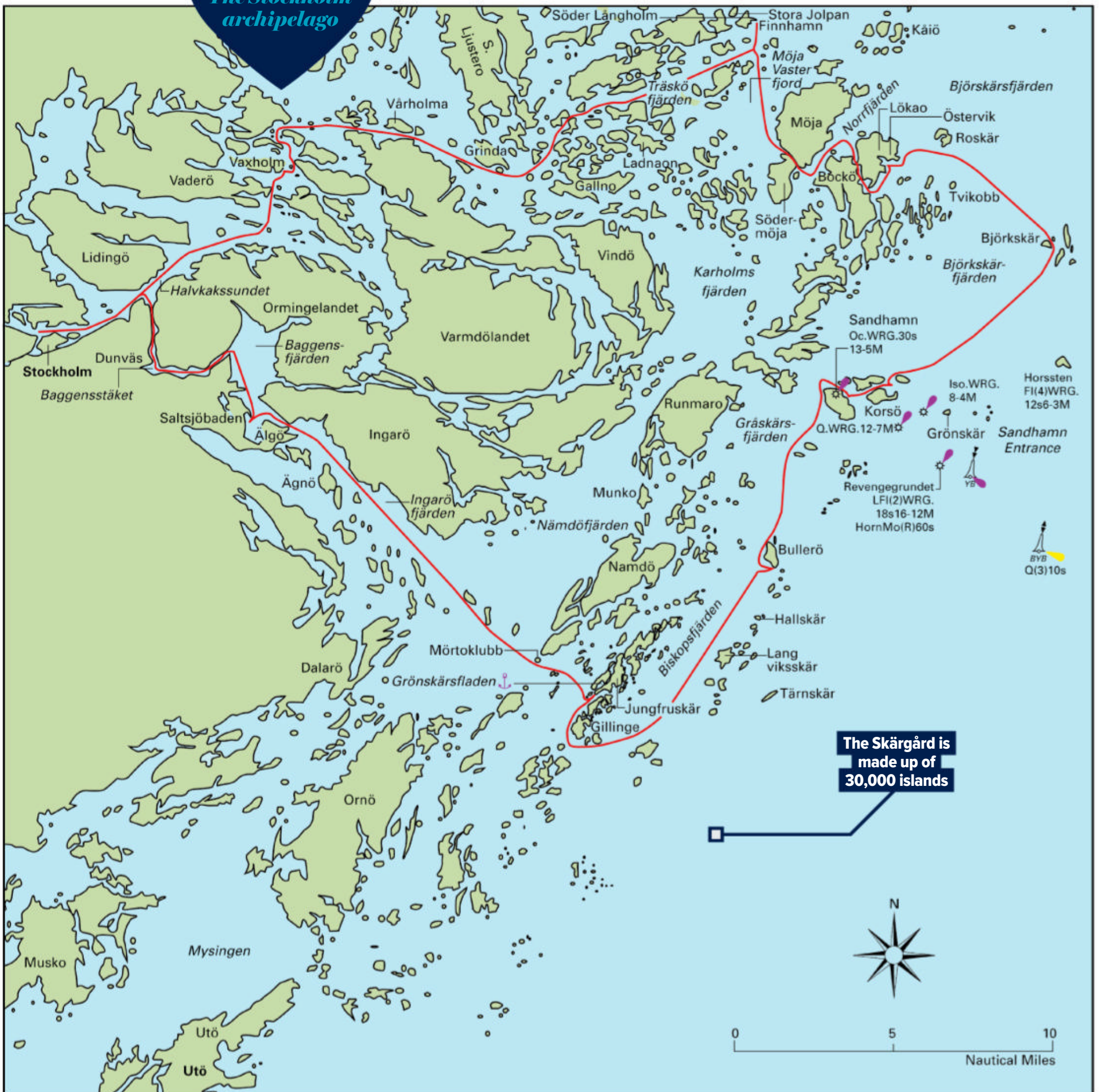
RIGHT: Cruisers here need a bag of *bergskills*, iron pegs that you can hammer into crevices to create mooring points when mooring to the rocks
BELOW: Björkskär offers many picturesque anchorages

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Yachting Monthly

THE LOCAL PILOT
The Stockholm archipelago



Imray

Summer weather is surprisingly warm, with swimming and barbecues very much the order of the day

or near to Saltsjöbaden, about half an hour's train ride from the city centre. Saltsjöbaden has long been an elegant spa and summer resort and the harbour is dominated by the palatial Grand Hotel.

DAY 1:

SALTSJÖBADEN TO GRÖNSKÄRSFLADEN, JUNGFRUSKÄR (15 MILES)

It is an easy day's sail from the relative bustle of Saltsjöbaden to one of the beautiful 'nature harbours' in the heart of the Skärgård - first recommended to us by a local sailor and now a firm favourite.

Sail southeast down the Baggensfjärden, one of several 'fjärdens', or channels, which are often named after the adjoining islands. The channel will take you north of the islands of Älgö and Ägnö and into the Ingaröfjärden. The steep wooded shores are dotted with fine summerhouses, complete with private docks and saunas.

Continue across the main channel, the Nämöfjärden, towards the conspicuous islet of Mörtöklubb, and then head towards the anchorage of Grönskärsladen which is an almost landlocked lagoon between the islands of Grönskär and Jungfruskär. The narrow dog-legged entrance takes you very close to the rocks, but all will be well if you take it slowly and stick to the well-marked transits. There is good holding, or you can tie up to the rocks. There are no facilities except two self-composting toilets ashore, but the surroundings are stunning.

DAY 2:

GRÖNSKÄRSFLADEN TO SANDHAMN (16 MILES)

Another day of contrasts. Leave the anchorage and head southwest for 1.5 miles, then through the narrow passage south of Gillinge, before turning into the Biskopsfjärden. Careful pilotage is called for as you head northeast, leaving Långviksskär and Hallskär to starboard. Stop for lunch and perhaps a swim at one of the anchorages on the beautiful island of Bullerö. If time allows, enjoy a walk across the island with its wonderful views, or maybe try your first authentic sauna.

A seven-mile sail north takes you to the island of Sandön and, on its north coast, Sandhamn, the 'Cowes of Sweden', which has around 200 visitors' berths, with all facilities, run by the Royal Swedish Yacht Club (KSSS). It is very picturesque, with clapboard houses set along sandy roads, and there are good beaches around the island. The famous Sandhamns Vårdshus restaurant, dating from 1672, is a must for an evening drink or meal. The helpful harbour staff will always try to find you a berth, but if it is too busy head for the additional KSSS visitors' berths just to the north, on Löckholmen.

DAY 3:

SANDHAMN TO LÖKAÖ ÖSTERVIK (14 MILES)

Leaving Sandhamn via the narrow but well

BELOW INSET: The red clapboard houses on Grönskär are typical of this region

BELOW LEFT: Sandhamn is the main yachting centre in the archipelago



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The islands are dotted with many small 'guest harbours', ideal for visitors

If you moor at Vaxholm be aware of the wash from the ferries

buoyed passage north of Korsö, head up the Björkskärsfjärden which is relatively clear of hazards. The attractive island group of Björkskär is only about eight miles away and provides several possible anchorages for a lunch stop. There is a good public sauna on the Kråkvilan peninsula, which you pay for via an honesty box. From Björskär, turn northwestwards and head between the islands of Tvikobb and Roskär. Give a wide berth to the rocks north of Tvikobb and Vidbusken before turning southwestwards for the entrance to the Östervik anchorage on Lökaö. This is another classic nature harbour, well sheltered except in strong easterlies (in which case head for the Kåksna-Lökaholmarna anchorage just a mile south).



DAY 4:

LÖKAÖ TO FINNHAMN (12 MILES)

You are likely to need the engine as you head north in quick succession through two narrow, spectacular passages. After the Bockösundet between Lökaö and Bockö, you then turn southwestwards down the Norrfjärden for little more than a mile before turning to starboard into the even narrower Möjaström between Möja and Södermöja. Both provide close-up views of the delightful clapboard boathouses and bothies which stand out along the shore in their matching rust red livery.

From the north end of the Möjaström, head north across the main channel, the Möja Västerfjärd, and into the well buoyed channel which leads into the Finnhamn island group. Here you can choose between the guest harbour at Söder Långholm and the beautiful Paradiset anchorage on the west side of Stora Jolpan. They are both very popular, so if you prefer a quieter spot head to the nearby islands of Kälö or Storskäret.

DAY 5:

FINNHAMN TO VAXHOLM (18 MILES)

No visit would be complete without a visit to historic Vaxholm, often called the 'Capital of the Skärgård'. From

LEFT: Close to Stora Jolpan is the nature reserve of Finnhamn

BELOW: Vasa Museet in Stockholm is built around the salvaged shipwreck of the 17th century warship, Vasa, which sank in Stockholm in 1628



RIGHT: The weather needs to be settled to cruise the remote outer island anchorages of the Stora Nassa mini archipelago



Chad Ehlers / Alamy Stock Photo

any of the Finnhamn anchorages, head southwest down the main Träsköfjärden channel, and then west along the Grindafjärden. Keep south of Vårholma and then follow the channels through a cluster of smaller islands. The entrance to Vaxholm is guarded by a formidable island citadel. Pass east of this to avoid the numerous ferries and then head to the guest harbour. Wander around the lively old town and enjoy some of the many cafés and restaurants or take the chain ferry across to visit the 16th-century citadel and museum.

DAY 6:

VAXHOLM TO SALTSJÖBADEN VIA THE BAGGENSSTÄKET (14 MILES)

Take the well buoyed channel south from Vaxholm and into the Halvkakssundet, the main shipping channel into Stockholm. Here you will be joined by huge ferries from all corners of the Baltic. Some are the size of cruise liners. They can sneak up behind you, so be aware! Opposite the island of Lidingö, turn off into the Baggensstäket – a narrow, winding and very scenic gorge, studded with yet more summerhouses with luxury price tags. It forms a spectacular five-mile back doorway into and out of Stockholm. The narrowest sections are controlled by sound signals shown on boards. You will eventually

be disgorged into the Baggensfjärden, just a few miles north of Saltsjöbaden. Before you head home, try to leave some time to visit Stockholm, with its beautiful water fronts and the incomparable Vasa Museet maritime museum. (www.stockholmtown.com)

GOT A BIT LONGER?

If the weather is settled and you are feeling a bit more adventurous, head for the beautiful and remote outer island anchorages of the Stora Nassa mini archipelago which is just a few miles northeast of Björskär (Day 3). If the weather is less kind, try Gällnö Hemfladen (just south of your route on Day 5), where there is excellent shelter and plenty of room to enjoy lovely walks ashore.

COMING UP NEXT...

In the next couple of issues we will be exploring Greece's Northern Sporades and La Rochelle in France

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NEED TO KNOW

The Stockholm archipelago

SEASONS

The main sailing season runs from May to September. The gästhamnen and main anchorages get very busy during the Swedish holidays from early July to the end of the first week in August, but it is usually possible to find a quiet spot for the night.

WEATHER

The weather is influenced by both the Azores High and by high pressure over Russia and the eastern Baltic. There is a 25% chance of winds reaching Force 5, but you are nearly always in flat water and in the lee of islands. Summer temperatures can reach the high 20s Celsius, and water temperatures rise quickly to become swimmable.

TIDES AND SWELL

There is no appreciable tide

but prolonged winds in one direction and changes in atmospheric pressure can cause a variation in depth, usually of no more than one metre. Wind driven currents are rarely significant within the archipelago.

EXPERIENCE

Most companies require RYA Day Skipper Practical or RYA ICC, but requirements vary, so do check with the charter company.

GETTING THERE

By air from the UK to Stockholm Arlanda airport. This is some way north of the city, but there is a high-speed train, the Arlanda Express, which takes 18 minutes to Stockholm Central, as well as regular trains and buses. From Stockholm Central, take the

Tunnelbana metro to Slussen. Here, there are frequent trains and buses to Saltsjöbaden. Ryan Air has flights from the UK to Stockholm Skavsta airport near Nyköping, which is about an hour and a half's train journey south of Stockholm.

BOOKS AND CHARTS

The Baltic Sea and Approaches by RCCPF, 4th edition (Imray, £42.50). *Båtsportkort chart pack for Stockholm Mellersta* (see www.sjofartsverket.se) *The Cruising Association* (www.theca.org.uk) publishes useful guides to Sweden. *The Swedish Cruising Club (Svenska Kryssarklubben)* sells a wide range of Swedish charts and guides. www.sxk.se. If relying on a chartplotter, make sure you keep well zoomed in to avoid losing detail.

CHARTERING

Most of the charter companies are listed in www.yachtcharterguide.com/location/sweden/stockholmarchipelago

Main operators include:



MARINAS

There is a useful list of marinas and guest harbours on www.stockholmarchipelago.se and at www.marina-guide.se/harbours-sweden

The Kungl Svenska Segel Sällskapet or Royal Swedish Yacht Club (KSSS for short) is responsible for running several marinas and gästhamnen. Visit www.ksss.se for more details.

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