

Text 1. Log in – a family adventure at a Swedish lake cabin

Adapted from: <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2011/sep/02/sweden-lake-cabin-stockholm-gothenburg>



In summer, half of Sweden decamps to the log cabins that fringe the country's 100,000 deserted lakes. Our writer and family joined them, and caught a relaxing dose of cabin fever.

"This is heaven," comes a call from a few feet away. I turn from where I am sitting on a jetty reading a Camilla Läckberg thriller, to see my nine-year-old daughter Eve, standing waist deep in the Swedish lake she has all to herself, running her hands dreamily through lily pads, sun in her hair. As Eve's current pre-teen rejoinder about most things is "This is rubbish", followed by a spectacular eye-roll, this is a special moment for me.

It has to be said that our family has not arrived in Sweden in the best of moods. A recent house move complete with last-minute lost cat, followed by the realisation, three days before our carefully booked budget flights to Gothenburg, that seven-year-old Ruby's passport has expired, has led to a week-long, group, family panic attack. We arrive a day late, hundreds of pounds poorer on not-so-cheap, re-booked flights, badly packed, with a mobile that doesn't work, and, for me, an overdue writing deadline to finish in a Gothenburg hotel with no Wi-Fi.

So when, on Day Two, I wake feeling inexplicably relaxed, it is perhaps not unreasonable to accuse my husband of slipping tranquillisers in my tea. Then I realise it's just Gothenburg.

I've never been to Sweden before, and only booked it because of my devotion to Scandi-crime. It was while watching Wallander that I developed a fantasy of staying in a cabin like his: cosy, quiet, with views over a meditative expanse of water under a moody sky, where, like the melancholic Swedish detective, I could wander out, and contemplate my latest murder (I am a thriller writer myself, I should explain).

What I'm not expecting, is to find that kind of peace and quiet in a Swedish city. Perhaps everyone else has cleared off to their summer cabins already, but the wide, handsome streets feel half-empty. Ruby and Eve share the dedicated play area of the Gothenburg City Museum with one well-behaved toddler, while we collapse gratefully on a big squashy sofa. At the Nordens Största Science Centre, each room is three-quarters empty, allowing the girls, for the first time in their lives, to see monkeys and sharks close-up without elbowing someone in the face. In the evening, in the old harbour, we sit outside chilled-out bars wrapped in provided blankets, the four of us chatting late into the light summer evenings. Everywhere we want to stop, there's a thoughtful seat: a bench, a free café seat, a comfy windowsill. It's all just so unexpectedly, well ... relaxing. Without warning, the four of us start being much nicer to each other.

Detoxed from our stressful month in a remarkable three days, we pick up our rental car and head to our cabin. Although myriad summer cabins dot Sweden's 100,000 inland lakes and 7,000km of coastline, I discovered back in May that I needed investigative skills on par with Wallander to book one from the UK. We struggled to find more than one cabin rental website in English (sweden-holidays.com). And although there were some around the £400-500 a week mark, most were already booked. Panicking, we have therefore shelled out for a more expensive house, called Vängsö Sjögård, convincing ourselves that it's worth it to celebrate our 20th anniversary, and because my mum, who'll be joining us later, is celebrating a "special"

birthday (if I say more, I myself will be murdered). You'd struggle to call it a cabin. More a house. Or an estate.

Which explains the reason we are now driving the 300 miles across Sweden in the cheapest rental car possible, and one apparently built for four mice, the girls' faces squeezed against the suitcase that sits between them, me with my feet on the dashboard to avoid deep-vein thrombosis. Sweden is certainly more affordable than it used to be – now on a par with France – but with steak and frites already spotted on a restaurant menu for £30, corners have had to be cut to make this three-week family holiday affordable.

Our house is an hour west of Stockholm, on Lake Nyckelsjön among gentle yellow fields and red barns, a few houses in the distance. The owners hand over the keys telling us not to worry too much about locking the doors. Although it is grander than a normal cabin, its setting is typical. Down at the lake, we find a jetty with two boats. We wade out into the murky but clean water, the girls shrieking at the odd sensation of cool, fresh water and silky mud on our feet. The water comes up to Ruby's chest. By the middle of the lake, it's still at her chest. Relieved, my husband and I realise we can lie on the jetty all day, and read books as the girls play safely in the shallow water. "Can we stay here all day?" they cry, leaping off the jetty with exuberant splashes.

My mum and step-dad arrive for two nights, and we celebrate both birthday and anniversary with a barbecue and a midnight row across the lake, under a deep-pink sky. I watch Eve and Ruby's faces sparkling with excitement as we take long strokes across the silent water under swirls of purple and scarlet cloud, a family of geese spread in black across the sky. To their delight, we then strip off, and dive into the night-time lake. It is wonderful. Magical. I'm not surprised the Swedes want to keep this to themselves.

There's time at the end of our trip to spend a few days in Stockholm. With its swathes of tourists, it seems a little frenetic in comparison, but a sunny boat tour around the islands of the Stockholm archipelago to the royal summer palace of Drottningholm makes us love it here even more, as we watch the relaxed Swedes canoe, and swim, and water-ski past us, skyscrapers in the background.

We drive back to Gothenburg for our flight home the next day, and stay up late in our hotel, enjoying a last night of Swedish tranquillity, overlooking the quiet streets below. Unexpectedly, I find myself a bit tearful at the thought of going home. Next year, we're booking early.

Questions:

1. True or false?

The writer got ill in the cabin.

True

False

2. Why is the family poor?

1. True or false?

The daughter Eve does not enjoy being in Sweden.

True

False

2. What is Scandi-crime?

3. Choose the correct answer

The writer wanted to go to Sweden because...

Her brother lives there.

She enjoys reading and writing detective stories.

Sweden is a cheap country.

3. True or false?

The family have a fight about money.

True

False

4. True or false?

There are many cabins in Sweden and it was easy to book one from the UK

True

False

1. True or false?

Their cabin is very spacious.

True

False

5. True or false?

The writer's husband got a panic attack and had to be taken to hospital.

True

False

10. Choose the correct answer

The rental car is...

Cheap and small

Small and expensive

Old and cheap

11. Choose the correct answer

They wade out into the water which is...

Clean and salty

Clean and deep

Clean and dark

12. Choose the most appropriate ending to the sentence

Sweden is an affordable country, but...

Food is expensive

Rental cars are expensive

Daycare is expensive

6. 13. True or false?

At midnight they swim into the lake.

True

False

7. 14. True or false?

Before they leave Sweden, they go to Stockholm to visit Eve's cousin.

True

False

Text 2: Beautiful pearls of southeast Sweden

Adapted from: <http://www.thelocal.se/20140410/smaland-vimmerby-glasriket-vastervik-kalmar-oland>

Ask a Swede, and they are likely to say that their favourite holiday spot is in the southeast of Sweden. Eastern Småland and Öland are like a smörgåsbord of all the things dearest to the country's natives, mixing the beloved children's book author Astrid Lindgren with deep forests, long sandy beaches, endless perfect spots for that all-important 'fika', and a surprising amount of space, peace and quiet.

Many come to Sweden for its nature, and no one can blame them. Eastern Småland and Öland boast more than their fair share of stunning scenery, from Öland's Alvar landscape full of orchids to long coastlines with fishing and sailing opportunities and forests rich in moose and roe deer.

This is also where Astrid Lindgren grew up, and the area is full of little red cabins and cobbled streets, all right next to well-preserved castles, a rich cultural life, and a glass blower's district known as the Kingdom of Crystal. Get to the heart of Sweden with these picks from the Swedes' favourite gems.

Vimmerby: for the child in you

The town where Astrid Lindgren grew up is a popular destination for families with children, not only for attractions such as Astrid Lindgren's World, where you can explore Pippi Longstocking's Villa Villekulla and meet the people of Lönneberga, but also for the moose park, Virum älgpark, and Nils Holgersson's World.

Top up on youthfulness, fantasy and adventure, and take a break by going for a swim in a nearby lake before returning to pop by Astrid Lindgren's Näs, the writer's childhood home with a museum about her and her work.

Vimmerby town is also a destination in its own right, making a great example of a genuine Swedish small town with shopping opportunities, historical sites, and great cafés and restaurants. This year, a new addition to the list of must-see attractions opens its doors: MX World Collection, a motocross museum with over 100 bikes from six decades on display.

Öland: marrying nature and culture

If you love the sea, go to Öland. The island is long but thin, so wherever you are on the island, you are only a short bike ride away from the coast. Nature has been generous here: the Alvar landscape offers fields full of orchids, there is a rich bird life, and the sunsets are simply magical.

A total of 25 camping sites, all right by the sea, help you make the most of it. But Öland is not just for the summer. The cycling and walking routes are enjoyable all year round, and who said that spa experiences, museums, Renaissance castles, locally-sourced food and whisky tastings are for hot summer's days? It has been described as a little part of paradise, so prepare to feel seduced.

Glasriket: a kingdom of crystal

Take 12 glassworks and put them all in one place, and it is bound to be referred to as some sort of kingdom. Glasriket, or the Kingdom of Crystal, is home to renowned Swedish crystal brands such as Orrefors and Kosta Boda, and visitors can take guided tours and have a go at blowing glass.

Stay at Kosta Boda Art Hotel, where you can also grab a bite to eat, and do not miss the new exhibition that opens this year.

Västervik: the archipelago town

Take shopping, great food, picturesque 14th century streets and charming hotels, and bring the mall right out into the heart of an archipelago. This is what gives Västervik its own special character: whatever you do, when you go to a gig or grab a drink, even when you go to bed at night, the sea is always right there.

Naturally, the water and the 5,000 islands are themselves worth exploring, and indeed there are boats and beaches to help you do so – but why choose? Enjoy the waterfront promenade, the old castle spa in a nature reserve area, and the cosy cobbled streets.

Shop until you drop, and end the night in style with an ‘archipelago box’, a special meal with fresh seafood, and a glass of something refreshing while watching the sun set over the water.

Kalmar: come alive in the city

What first meets the eye is a beautiful old castle and an old ring wall, topped up with cobbled streets and green areas. And Kalmar is pretty – there are no two ways about it. But this small city has a buzz and a pulse that will satisfy both sports fanatics and culture vultures.

Between the Ironman Kalmar, the brand new Guld Agility, and countless other races and sporting events, there is plenty to keep both legs and heart going. Add museums, a theatre, and regular live gigs at the central square, and you have got yourself a lively and exciting few days.

If nature and charm are Eastern Småland and Öland’s buzz words, Kalmar sure is a good place to wrap up your trip. Now, who is up for a swim in the canal?

For more information, please visit:

- vimmerbyturistbyra.se
- oland.se
- glasriket.se
- vastervik.com
- kalmar.com

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Questions:

1. Choose the most appropriate ending to the sentence:

Öland is located in...

- ...northern Småland.
- ...Vimmerby.
- ...the southeast of Sweden.

2. True or false?

Moose and roedeer are very common in Öland's Alvar landscape

True

False

3. What is “the Kingdom of Crystals”?

A glass blower's district.

A castle.

The name of the area where Astrid Lindgren grew up.

1. What new attraction opens in Vimmerby this year?

A museum about Astrid Lindgren.

A moose park.

A museum about motor sports.

5. Underline the two nouns in the following sentence:

If you love the sea, go to Öland.

6. True or false?

You should not visit Öland during the winter.

True

False

7. Underline the three adjectives the following sentence:

The island is long but thin, so wherever you are on the island, you are only a short bike ride away from the coast.

8. True or false?

To make the most of your visit to Öland, you should stay at a hotel.

True

False

9. What are Orrefors and Kosta Boda examples of?

10. Which of the following is most typical for Västervik?

The numerous shops and restaurants.

The closeness to the water.

The old, charming streets.

11. What is an “archipelago box”?

A sunset.

A drink.

A meal.

12. True or false?

The Guld Agility in Kalmar is a must for anyone interested in culture.

True

False