



## ROYAL ANNIVERSARY VOYAGE

THE 50th anniversary of the revered Cunard liner QE2 is to be marked next month by a special voyage of her near namesake, Queen Elizabeth, pictured.

During five specially themed days during a 17-night cruise to Venice, guests will be treated to gala menus inspired by the liner, and talks from special guests who each have personal connections with QE2.



Celebrations culminate on QE2 Day - September 20 - exactly 50 years since the ship was launched by Queen Elizabeth.

Events will include a QE2 ball, and a historical retrospective of the ship - which retired in 2008 - hosted in Queen Elizabeth's 850-seat Royal Court Theatre. The voyage departs from Southampton on September 8.

## THE ONLY WAY IS TRAVELODGE

TRAVELODGE officially opened its second hotel in Romford town centre this week, where hit reality TV show *The Only Way Is Essex* is filming its 21st series.

To celebrate the launch, Travelodge has released 15,000 rooms from an opening rate of £45. Go to [travelodge.co.uk](http://travelodge.co.uk)



ABBA

**CELEBRATE MUSIC'S SUPER TROUPERS** SAY thank you for the music at a major new immersive pop exhibition in London this winter.

ABBA: Super Troupers will take visitors into the world of the hit-making Swedish sensation.

In association with ABBA The Museum in Stockholm, exhibits will include previously unseen material such as original costumes and album artwork.

The exhibition opens at the Southbank Centre (aptly, not far from Waterloo) on December 14 and runs to April 29. Admission will be £15-£25 and tickets are on sale now. [southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)

## Packing plenty of cake and coffee, JULIAN WELLEN paddles out on a Scandi adventure

THE Scandinavians seem to have special words for everything and we love adopting them - from that old Swedish favourite, smörgåsbord, to newcomers, such as the Danish hygge.

The one that will soon be on everyone's lips has to be "fika" - coffee and cakes to be taken any time, anywhere.

A well-known Swedish home store has a cafe called Fika, in which customers can take a break from negotiating its labyrinthine layout.

But visiting Gothenburg and West Sweden, I learned that the best place for fika is in a sea kayak.

I set out to experience the region's coastal lifestyle and cuisine and the view from the plane, approaching Gothenburg, revealed a stunning coastline, dotted with islands and bays.

Just over an hour-and-a-half's drive up the coast is Fiskebäckskil, in Bohuslän province, a pretty former fishing village - now mostly holiday homes - where we were staying in Slipens, a new hotel with cool Scandi décor in a 100-year-old shipyard.

(A handy tip on pronunciation that I picked up is "k" and "sk" are sometimes pronounced as "sh"... and sometimes not.)

Slipens also runs the excellent Brygghuset seafood restaurant, featuring the Swedish staple, herring, in numerous tasty guises. After a delicious buffet lunch we headed out to Grundsund, a couple of miles along the coast where we were booked in for our kayak trip.

Christina Ingemarsdotter of Kajak i Grundsund has been paddling kayaks for 40 years and clearly loves it just as much now as when she first picked up a paddle.

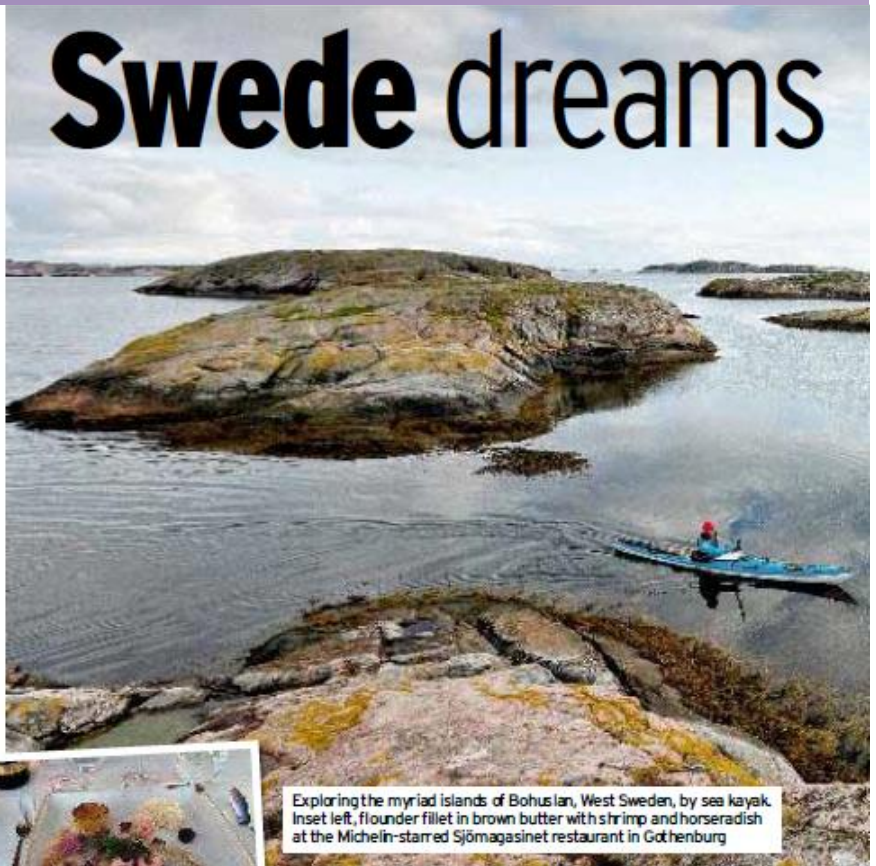
After a land-based lesson and a practice paddle around the harbour using muscles we didn't even know we had, we headed out to sea. The wind had got up and we paddled hard to get into the lee of the numerous small islands of smooth, pink granite, rising from the water like great hippos' backs.

Once in the calmer water we could enjoy the peace and beauty of the area, the sea-level opening up a completely different perspective on life and the landscape.

We finally pulled over to the rocks for fika, looking for a likely picnic spot - or even a cafe - until Christina threw open the hatch on her kayak to reveal a flask of coffee and a bowl of cinnamon buns.

What better way to enjoy fika than floating gently on the water with sea and rocks around us and starfish visible in the clear water beneath?

Once back at Fiskebäckskil, another feast of fish lay ahead in Brygghuset, which also has a whisky bar with 1,500 malts - another



# Swede dreams

Exploring the myriad islands of Bohuslän, West Sweden, by sea kayak. Inset left, flounder fillet in brown butter with shrimp and horseradish at the Michelin-starred Sjömagasinet restaurant in Gothenburg



reason, if you needed one - to stay.

My otherwise perfect sleep was broken by a dramatic light at 4.30am and a stunning sunrise - prelude to a clear, sunny day.

From Fiskebäckskil it's a short ferry hop to Lysekil, where Lars Marstone and Adriaan Von Plasser run mussel safaris on their 67-year-old boat. We sailed, happily soaked by the waves, until we reached Lars's idyllic island, where his wife, Majvor, was waiting.

While Adriaan cooked up mussels in wine, cream and chopped veg, Lars opened some oysters - which

divers harvest by hand - as fresh as they come. Of course the meal was finished with a fika.

Lysekil is also home to the Havets Hus aquarium, where you can see and touch some of the local species of sealife and learn about the valuable efforts to preserve their habitats and restock the waters.

Back at Fiskebäckskil, we checked in at the Gullmarsstrand spa hotel with its waterside yoga studio and a hot tub on the jetty, where you can relax before plunging into the sea for an invigorating swim before returning to the tub to enjoy the all-over tingle of the hot water. Finish off with a sauna and shower and you're ready for anything.

Sitting and watching the sun set over the water as children fished from the jetty was the perfect end to an excellent meal at the hotel restaurant and to our all-too short stay on the coast.

We were heading to the city, and Gothenburg proved the perfect place for a city break, with its old "long streets", just west of Linnégatan, that have gone from being a rough, edgy part of town to a hub of stylish shops, hipster bars, courtyard cafes and designer shops for anyone seeking some Scandi chic.

Also reinvented, the excellent

Comfort Hotel looks out over the harbour and ferry terminal and has a deservedly popular rooftop bar with the best views in town.

Like some of our own large ports, Gothenburg has had to reinvent itself after the loss of its shipbuilding industry, becoming a cultural and hi-tech hub - a far cry from its early days as a fortified trading colony with walls to keep out the marauding Danes.

The 17th century moats are now peaceful canals, where boats will take you on a sightseeing tour around the old city and out into the river Gota. You could even paddle round in a kayak - fika not provided, although the local Hagabullen (a Frisbee-sized cinnamon bun) would be ideal. The city's

beautiful botanic gardens offer a space to recharge your batteries with a spectacular rose garden and the palm house - built in 1878 and inspired by Crystal Palace - filled with exotic plants and cacti.

Back on the seafood theme, the Michelin-starred Sjömagasinet, a short ferry ride down the river, provided an unforgettable waterfront meal - as unforgettable as the rest of this beautiful part of the world.



The Feskekörka (fish church) Gothenburg

## NEED TO KNOW

■ JULIAN WELLEN stayed in Sweden as a guest of bmi regional, West Sweden Tourist Board and Göteborg & Co. Details of attractions and hotels at [www.westsweden.com](http://www.westsweden.com) and [www.goteborg.com](http://www.goteborg.com)

■ Fly with bmi regional from Birmingham to Gothenburg from £88 one way - inclusive of 23kg hold luggage, drinks and snacks on board, allocated seating and speedy 30-minute check-ins. See [www.flybmi.com](http://www.flybmi.com)

# are made of this



Fika - cinnamon buns and coffee - on board a sea kayak



Pink granite rocks overlook the sea in Lysekil, above, and Haga Nygata street, Gothenburg, below, a hipster hotspot



#### VISIT ORLANDO

ENJOY a seven-night holiday staying at the 3\* Blue Tree Resort Lake Buena Vista, Orlando. Price from £536 includes return flights from Manchester on September 12 and seven nights' accommodation in a one-bedroom Executive Villa on a self-catering basis. Book online at [www.traveltrolley.co.uk](http://www.traveltrolley.co.uk) or call on 0208 843 4400.

#### SPANISH BREAK

STAY a week in Salou, from £295, at the 4\* Hotel Mercure Atenea Aventura. Price includes return flights from Birmingham on September 13 and seven nights accommodation on a half-board basis. Book at [www.onthebeach.co.uk](http://www.onthebeach.co.uk) or call 0871 474 3000.