

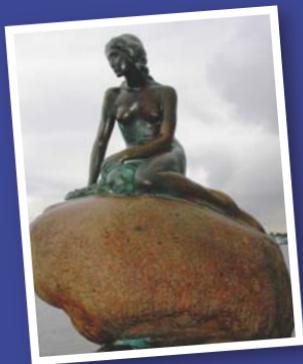
GOING PLACES #1

IAN DUNWOODIE



WONDERFUL WONDERFUL

COPENHAGEN



Are you feeling all up the Skagerrak? Then take a generous dose of Scandinavia! Today we're going to the Baltic Sea, so listen carefully. To enter it, first you sail up the Skagerrak, then you sail down the Kattegat, through the harbour and up to the quay...

Aha, you remember the old song then? *Wonderful, wonderful, Copenhagen, Friendly old girl of a town* ... Danny Kaye used to sing it. The Skagerrak and the Kattegat are two sections of a very narrow strait which leads from the North Sea (just across from Scotland) past Norway, between Sweden and Denmark, and finally into the Baltic Sea (near Copenhagen, needless to say).

Okay, so now you know where you are? Then ... BE CAREFUL!

As you enter the Baltic (♪ *sailing down the Kattegat*...) know that you are being closely watched. By ghosts. At the point where Denmark and Sweden all but hold hands across the strait you must pass the Danish castle of Elsinore, where (as I don't need to remind you) the ghost of Hamlet's father walks by night.

In fact, it's very likely that Hamlet's own ghost plods around there too, given his sad fate.



But as it happens one of the Baltic's ghostliest and best moments is a little further on. It's the sea approach to Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. Last time I did it – at dawn – a spectral mist cloaked thousands of rocky, wooded islands.

I'm not exaggerating the number. There

are actually some 24,000 of them crowding the surrounds of Stockholm harbour ... and it takes four or five hours to make your way through them. The sight is matchless – like some empty wooded Arctic expanse nearly devoid of humans. And yet in the heart of this galaxy of islands lurks one of Europe's lovely cities.

Sure enough, as you pass the thousandth deserted island, it slowly dawns on you that a cityscape is nudging into view. Somehow it has made itself at home in the midst of all this scenic purity.

Scandinavia is a part of Europe that has a touch of New Zealand about it. Great tracts of the countryside are still wild and free. A bit of the clean and the green and the mountain stream.

But the truth is: these nations rather leave us for dead. It's not just their countryside that's spotlessly clean, so are their cities. Take Stockholm. First that unsullied island vista. Then a city built round an immaculate harbour and lake. And streets that are spotless.

Cities have personalities. Scandinavian cities are solid and dignified ... as befits a region that has to hunker down for tough winters. But always they are elegant. Mind you, every now and then they take a break from being stiff and correct. Stockholmians do it – tastefully – when they change the guard in their historic old city. Lots of horses and trumpets and multi-coloured uniforms.

The imposing Town Hall, where Nobel prizes are awarded, is famously modern. But Sweden has a venerable history. To get a taste of it, go see the *Vasa Ship*, surely the largest wooden sailing vessel in the world. Certainly the only one that survives from the 1600s.



And the reason it survived is that it sank in Stockholm harbour minutes after setting out on its maiden voyage. You'll see why, when you visit it in all its glory. A grander, more carved and painted – and less seaworthy – ship you may never see again!

You're still hyperventilating over Stockholm's 24,000 islands, right? Well, take a deep breath and read on. Finland beckons from across an arm of the Baltic, an overnight cruise away. And it has ... 95,000 islands! (Yes, most are very, very, very small.) It also has more than 56,000 lakes. Needless to say, Finns have a love affair with the waters and the wild.

And with their composer, Sibelius. You can feel those lakes bubbling up through his music – in pieces like *Finlandia* and the *Karelia Suite*. When you visit Helsinki, drop in to his memorial park. The 'sculpture' is modern, and brilliant – in my eyes anyway. And in your ears, if you care to try. The sculptor has created a complex of cylinders that call to mind a pipe organ. You can put your head inside a 'pipe' (they encourage you to do it) and yell.

Though this is one of those things you do only once ...

As you'd expect, the capital Helsinki is dignified and imposing with its solid grey

buildings. But it's not wholly a Scandinavian-sober, Scandinavian-serious town. Walk around and you'll find some bold experiments. The Church in the Rock is one. Built inside a huge rock formation, and covered by a bronze dome, it is one of those rare modern structures which breathe a sense of spiritual awe.

Among the Scandinavian capitals, Denmark's Copenhagen comes nearest to being light-hearted and playful. (They've even taken an Australian as their princess, for goodness' sake!) It's popular, too, with the backpacking set. These young people gather in huge numbers at the mooring called *Nyhavn* (Newhaven), where they spend time at the coffee houses and on the canal boats.

After you've visited the historic buildings, and the palace where the Australian





princess is installed, then do what the Danes do. Young and old, they go for a night-out at the curious Tivoli Gardens – where the screams from one of those fear-fall things mingle with gentle music from the concert stage.

But no-one may leave lovely Copenhagen without seeing the Little Mermaid. Such a sad story. Your heart goes out to her as she crouches on that lonely rock. (And her poor little statue has suffered even worse indignities than our Pania of the Reef!)

Wonderful Copenhagen is by the Kattegat. So you're back where you started, soon to leave the Baltic and the neat and tidy world of Scandinavia. But, like Danny Kaye, one day you'll come back.

Once I sailed away

But I'm home today

*Singing Copenhagen, wonderful,
wonderful Copenhagen for me!*



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