

TRAVEL

BY KAY RICHARDSON

For crisp fresh air, rolling green country fields and sparkling waters, Sörmland is really hard to beat

Most people who want a romantic European break with their partner opt for Paris or Venice. But we decided to take our holiday for two in the little-known Södermanland region of Sweden.

It's just a 45-minute drive south of Stockholm, but only the locals – who call it Sörmland – seem to know about this place, where they spend endless sunny days in summer houses perched on the thousands of archipelagos between Lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea.

We arrived in Trosa, a charming and picturesque town on the banks of the Baltic, to a warm welcome at Trosa Stadshotell & Spa. We dined al fresco in the hotel's sunny courtyard, tucking into the summer barbecue. It's perfectly placed to explore the town, which is lined with 17th century wooden houses where the river cuts through the centre.

Russell and I wandered hand in hand, strolling down Lover's Lane and over the Bridge of Sighs (named after the sighs of parting lovers as men boarded their ships at the end of summer).

All roads lead to the pretty marina filled with restaurants and bars. Inspired, we took a boat tour around the stunning 10,000-year-old islands beneath an intensely blue sky while the sea shimmered in the heat.

Boats flit around the lush green islands which are dotted around the glittering waters. Many of the 2,800 islands around Trosa are populated by artistic communities – it's where the locals have their summer cabins.

We stopped at Krämö – great beaches and a popular spot for fishing – and Askö, an important island for marine research due to its unexploited stretch of coastline.

Back at the hotel we headed to the spa for some serious relaxation. There are plunge pools, aromatherapy rooms and, of course, saunas. Just be aware most of your fellow guests are Swedes, who aren't shy when it comes to nudity. But you can stay British in your robe if you feel coy.

We drove to Stendörren nature reserve, an area of outstanding natural beauty. Taking a picnic, we followed a trail through a pine forest, past grazing sheep and cows to find a coastal meadow where strawberry-headed clover grew.

The emerald waters of the Baltic Sea were inviting so we took a dip with arctic terns and oyster catchers as company – it was one of the most breathtaking places I have ever swum.

We moved on to route 223 to Runnviken Pensionat, a charming boutique B&B. Showjumping horses are stabled on the driveway leading to the grand 17th century family manor house and farm that overlook Lake Runnviken.

Owner Clara has recently opened this chic guest house where her style and the family's rich history are in strong evidence.

Breakfast here, like in all of Sweden, is a lavish affair: eggs from the farm, freshly baked bread, a smorgasbord of hams, cheeses, sausages, meats, fresh fruit, yoghurts, cracker bread and homemade jams all washed down with lashings of coffee

PADDLE Kayak around the lakes



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT
Trosa is a lovely coastal town



ISLAND HOPPING
Russell and Kay sail around archipelago



and fresh juices. Swedish forests are not where you expect to find camels, alpacas and llamas, yet when Clara arranged a day trip this was what we found on her neighbour Nadine's farm.

After petting the animal collection, we were led through cow fields to the water's edge and hopped in canoes.

We paddled off like great adventurers, across Lake Runnviken. It was challenging

NAKED AMBITION
Relax in the hotel spa

