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More than the sunny

climate, it is the vivid colours of Bornholm that call to mind southern shores



A view over the rooftops of Gudhjem from the terrace of Restaurant Bokulhus. Top, buying ice creams from Boisenøkologisk in the coastal village of Snogeback

the ascent of the lighthouse's 197 steps a kindly Danish woman swaddled in a calf-length tunic of boiled wool, is coming down and warns my daughter, 'When you step out on the platform, hold on to your spectacles.' And then she looks at me and says, sternly, 'And you should hold onto her'. It is sound advice.

Bornholm is prey to winds. A plug of magma so small that no point on it is further than 30 miles from any other, it sits in the middle of the southern Baltic more or less equidistant from Sweden and Germany. Though the island is nearer to Poland than Copenhagen, it belongs to Denmark. Once an important naval base, it was regularly subject to attack from the sea. Nowadays it is merely bombarded with nicknames: 'Scandinavia in a nutshell', 'the Pearl of the Baltic', 'Nightingale Island', 'The Mediterranean in Scandinavia' and 'Denmark's Sunrise Island'.

Bornholm is the sunniest and driest place in the Baltic. It has a commercial vineyard, figs and almonds grow in sheltered gardens and nightingales do indeed sing from the trees. More than the climate, though, it is the island's vivid colours that call to mind southern shores. In the little fishing port of Svaneke, half-timbered houses are painted in shades of ochre that mimic the colour of the faience pottery that was once the local speciality. The church is a rich red, and a



WE REACH THE BEACH at Dueodde, on the island of Bornholm, through a pine wood.

A boardwalk stretches across reed beds where swallows skim between pale-blond rushes, and we are welcomed with a fanfare of gassy croaking from the local frogs. The beach is as white as the six mute swans that glide slowly past on a sea so calm it glistens like a sheet of cerulean silk.

The sand at Dueodde is said to be the finest on the planet. When my daughter runs towards the clear water it squeaks beneath her bare feet like a pack of yipping puppies. The beach sweeps along for several miles, ending at a hook of land topped by larches. It looks as if Robinson Crusoe might have graced it, although ideas of a tropical paradise end when I step into the sea. The icy ache that shoots up through my legs is a reminder that if the fishing boat chugging by – a flock of seagulls bouncing noisily behind it like the tin cans tied to a newly-weds' car – carried on in a

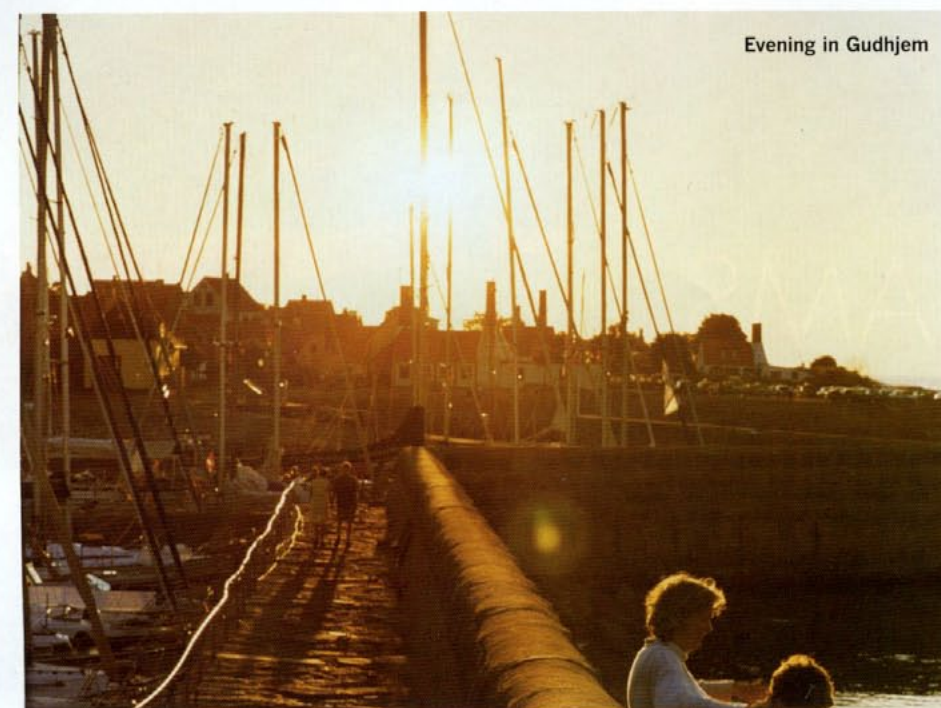
straight line, the first landfall it would make would be Kaliningrad in Russia.

In July it can get crowded with holidaying Swedes and Germans, but on a warm summer morning in May we share this great and beautiful expanse with half a dozen perambulating Danes and an Airedale terrier. When the dog barks excitedly, the swans rouse themselves and take off. Their long necks undulating, they head into the northerly breeze, passing so slowly you can see the reflection of the Baltic glinting in their dark, orange-ringed eyes.

Later we get a bird's-eye view of the beach by climbing to the top of its 47-metre-tall lighthouse. By now the wind has picked up and is whipping in from the general direction of the Curonian Spit (a bow-like stretch of sand strung between the coasts of Russia and Lithuania) and whistling over the tops of the pine trees. Planted in the 19th century they helped put a stop to the shifting sands' irritating habit of burying coastal farms and villages. As we begin

DAYS LIKE THIS

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Evening in Gudhjem

with yellow-brown lichen and spotted with the purple flowers of ground ivy. From the ramparts you can see the southern coast of Sweden, the province of Skåne. That area once belonged to Denmark, too, but between 1630 and 1710 the two great warrior kings of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus and Karl XII, took it all (and much of northern Germany as well). Bornholm also fell into Swedish hands until, in 1658, rebels led by Jens Kofoed assassinated the island's commandant and expelled the Swedish garrison. It has remained Danish ever since, but only just.

'For eleven months we were all Russians,' a retired engineer we meet on the ferry from Ystad tells us. At the end of World War II Bornholm found itself in the Russian zone. The German garrison, however, were perhaps understandably reluctant to surrender to the Red Army. They refused to give up the island. So it was that while the rest of Europe was celebrating VE Day the citizens of Rønne (the island's capital) and Nexø were hiding in the hills as the Russian air force bombed their little towns flat. The Germans held out for a week, then gave up. The Red Army stayed for nearly a year, but the population made life so uncomfortable for them with a campaign of passive resistance that eventually they withdrew. The citizens of

➤ or with potato salad or chips. Fiskergade 12, Svaneke (00 45 5649 6324). There are other notable smokehouses at Hasle, Allinge and Gudhjem.

Hummer Hytten
A small converted smokery on the harbourside in a tiny fishing village between Gudhjem and Svaneke. All but two of the tables are outside, so it's a good idea to visit on a sunny day. As its name (meaning 'the lobster hut') implies, lobster – grilled or served in a vol au vent with scampi – is the speciality here. Open from lunchtime to around 5pm. Strandstien 10. Listed (00 45 2022 5305)

Strand Hytten
Newly opened café-restaurant at the end of a winding road through the pine woods that leads to the white sands of Dueodde beach. A café during the day, the Strand

serves full meals such as linguine with lobster and asparagus on its attractive terrace. Baunevej 18, Vester Somarken, Pedersker (00 45 5697 8250)

Bryghus Svaneke
Bornholm's own micro-brewery makes a variety of beers, including an excellent unfiltered, unpasteurised pilsner, a hop-rich golden ale, a sweet stout and beers made using seasonal ingredients. The relaxed atmosphere of the bar and restaurant (which make a feature of the copper brewing kettles) and the Scandinavian prices (about £4 for a half pint) encourage you to linger over your drink. Torvet 5, Svaneke (00 45 5649 7321)

Boisenskologisk
An ice-cream parlour in a quiet coastal village. Serves home-made ices, including excellent elderflower sorbet, plus very good coffee. Hovedgaden 4, Snogebaek (00 45 5648 8089)

Bornholm can thus claim to be one of the few peoples to get the better of Stalin.

Since then, things have been relatively quiet. The island has continued to do what it does: mainly fishing, art and crafts. There are more potters here than bakers, more glass-blowers than butchers. The Bornholm Kunstmuseum carries work by the best of the Bornholm artists. It stands above the high cliffs of Helligdomsklipperne, a masterpiece of modern Danish design by the architects Fogh & Følner. Intimately proportioned galleries lead off from an airy central aisle of polished granite, dove-grey brick and raw steel. A thin stream of water runs in a narrow channel along the edge of the main corridor, a reminder that this is the site of a sacred spring. There is a calm, aesthetic assurance about the place, which mirrors that of the island itself. The paintings are nice, too, although in truth you hardly need them, since every window you look through on Bornholm seems to frame a beautifully composed and executed scene.

In Svaneke, as in all small Scandinavian towns, there is one roaring drunk treading the pavement warily as if expecting it to be suddenly tugged from beneath his feet. But even he is weaving his way unsteadily home at sundown, pausing occasionally to hurl a guttural oath at the circling gulls, and by dusk the harbour at Svaneke is quiet save for the friendly put-put of the last returning fishing boat. Lining the quay are bottle-green sails, pale-blue hulls and the tawny orange-and-black marker pennons of the cast nets. The breeze carries the scent of jasmine and the sea. The light at the harbour mouth is winking green, and over on the promontory to the south the beam of the lighthouse flashes yellow streaks across the petrol-blue Baltic.

Weather to go: Bornholm

The island's biggest attractions – its colourful towns and villages, powder-sand beaches and pretty restaurant terraces – are at their best in the sunshine, so take a Baltic break in summer.

Best month: August

Sunshine	Temperature	Rainfall	Humidity
8hrs	13°C min, 20°C max	76mm	Low