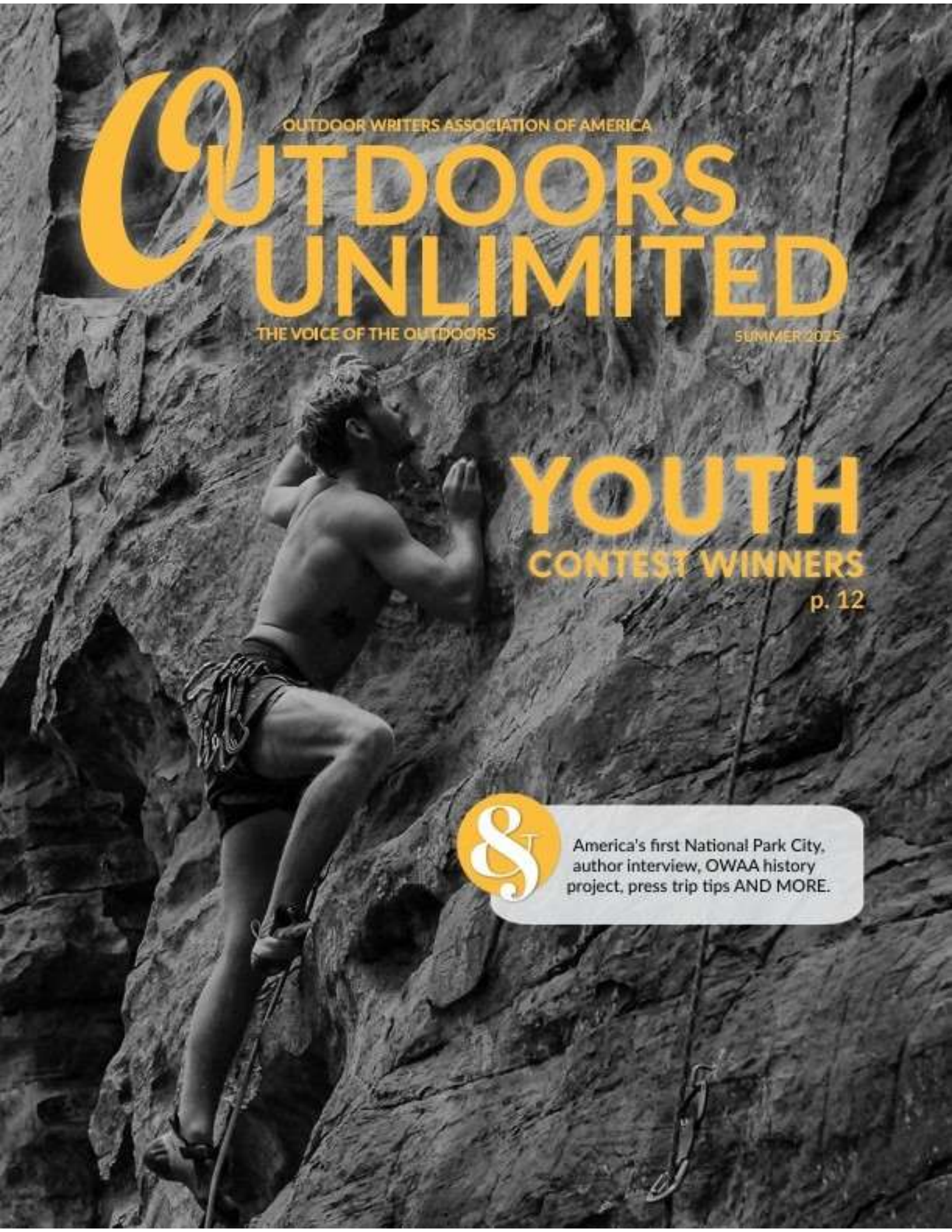




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BACKPACKING BESIDE THE BALTIC SEA

BY ROB ROGERS | WINTER GARDEN, FLORIDA. PHOTOS BY ROB ROGERS.

Sweden is known for the archipelago near Stockholm that most visitors tour only by boat, and although many guidebooks also list nearby day-hiking destinations, precious few describe places in the Stockholm Archipelago to backpack. But a gem of a backpacking destination that can be reached easily without a rental car lies less than an hour from Stockholm—and it is free to camp there.

If you're looking for a great place to backpack in the Stockholm Archipelago during a short trip to Stockholm, there may be nowhere better than the Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve. I was lucky enough to do a pair of one-night backpacking trips there during a recent family vacation, and my experiences there were spectacular.

About the Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve

Rarely mentioned in American travel guides, Bogesundlandet Nature Reserve sits on the island of Bogesund only 8.5 miles northeast of Stockholm, across a short causeway from Vaxholm, a popular stop on most boat tours of the Stockholm Archipelago.

Covering more than 7,000 acres of forest and 3,000 more acres of fjords and lakes, Bogesundlandet surrounds the 17th-century Bogesund Castle and has been used as farmland since the late Iron Age. The island was eventually converted to recreational use, and the nature reserve was founded in 2015. It is now managed by the Statens fastighetsverket (SFV, Sweden's National Property Board).

The island is an outdoor playground full of attractions for outdoor enthusiasts, including campgrounds, equestrian trails and a golf course. It also contains 10 hiking trails ranging in length from 2 to 7 miles, many of which intersect and can be combined for longer hikes.

Although several trails surround the castle, many dive deep into rocky forests or hug the boulder-strewn coasts, offering the same beautiful views of the Baltic that most tourists only get to see from the water.

Greatest of all, trailside primitive campsites are sprinkled throughout Bogesundlandet, many with camp shelters. Most campsites are equipped with fire pits thoughtfully stocked with firewood by the SFV. All are free and need not be reserved.

Many of these campsites, like the Varmora campsite where I camped, lie beside the Baltic Sea; some are even accessible by kayak.

The nature reserve's ideal proximity to Vaxholm

Bogesundlandet is also tantalizingly close to Vaxholm, considered the gateway to the Stockholm Archipelago. Tourists exploring other islands typically take larger ferries to Vaxholm to connect to boats that stop at smaller islands.

Steps from Vaxholm's harbor on the island of Vaxo is a bus stop that connects to destinations around the island, and the



nature reserve can be affordably reached by downloading the app for the bus system and paying when you board.

If you prefer to hike there instead, the Blue Trail that begins at the harbor in Vaxholm crosses through the island, then over a causeway to the nature reserve, before meandering through many of the most beautiful sites in the reserve.

My one-night adventures

When my family and I spent several nights in Vaxholm, I improvised a one-night hiking adventure by taking a bus from the Vaxholm harbor to the Frosvikshagen bus stop in the middle of the nature reserve, then backpacked 3.5 miles along the Blue Trail to the seaside Varmora campsite. After spending the night there, I hiked the remaining 5 miles back to our rental apartment near the harbor in Vaxholm the next morning.

I enjoyed the experience so much that when our flight home the following week was canceled, I returned to Bogesundlandet and hiked the hilly 5-mile Nasseldalsrundan loop and connected back to the Blue Trail for 2.5 more miles to spend the night again at the Varmora campsite before hiking out again the next morning.

My experiences backpacking at Bogesundlandet left me awestruck.

Miles of well-blazed trails meander through pine and oak forests, over glacier-carved hilltops and along the shores of tranquil fjords and lakes. Even though trailheads are easy to find and

maps with English translations are simple to use, many trails feel as wild as scenic trails where I live in North America.

Even more breathtaking are the seaside campsites. Although I might comfortably have opted for the shelter, I could not pass on the opportunity to set my tent beside the sea.

Facing north, the Varmora campsite afforded the unique opportunity in late June to face both the rising and setting sun. With the summer solstice approaching, I enjoyed a campfire in fading sun after 11 p.m., as ducks serenaded me while diving for morsels in the bladder kelp. I was even treated to swans and a rainbow.

Don't overlook Vaxholm

Known mainly for its nearby fortress that for centuries guarded the main waterway to Stockholm, Vaxholm itself is a quaint seaside town that caters to the summer sailing set. It is also a great place to spend several days and is approximately one hour's drive from Arlanda International Airport.

Vaxholm sits on the island of Vaxön, which lies across a short one-lane causeway from the island of Bogesund containing the nature reserve. Vaxholm's harbor lies just 1.5 miles south of the causeway on the Blue Trail, a popular hiking and biking trail that runs through both islands.

A popular summer stay for Swedes, Vaxholm's quaint downtown has ample dining options, as well as colorful shops and galleries and even plenty of playgrounds for families. Its well-appointed grocery store has all you need if you prefer to dine at home or picnic by the harbor, and the north side of the island even sports a seaside boardwalk leading to a swimming spot for those prepared for chilly dips in the Baltic.

There are also plenty of other outdoor activities near Bogesundslandet Nature Reserve for those who prefer to sleep indoors. While I was backpacking, my wife and daughter enjoyed the beach and the Sky Park ropes courses at Erikso, another natural area on the island of Vaxön that is also a short bus ride from Vaxholm's harbor.

Other hiking options near Vaxholm

Bogesundslandet is not the only place in the Stockholm Archipelago to hike and camp.

My family and I also hiked on Grinda, a forested island that has camping areas and a historic hotel. Later the same day, we also hiked through surprisingly secluded woodlands on Sandhamn, an island known more for the party scene at its harbor.

Both can be easily reached on ferries that stop multiple times daily at Vaxholm; Sandhamn is also a popular endpoint for longer ferries departing from Stockholm. But those islands are small and better suited for shorter family hikes — I hiked on both the morning before my second backpacking adventure in Bogesundslandet.

Bogesundslandet is perfect if you're looking for a little adventure with enough convenience to avoid having to adjust vacation plans. More information about Bogesundslandet Nature Reserve (in English and other languages) can be found on bogesundslandet.se.

If you go...

Because Vaxholm is a small island without a backpacking store, you should bring tents, sleeping bags and backpacks from home (I packed mine in my oversized checked luggage). But some essential supplies, including food and cooking fuel, can be found in downtown Vaxholm.

The Coop grocery store on Hamngatan two blocks from the harbor has all the food you may need. I was also pleased to find canisters of isobutane/propane fuel for my camp stove at Vaxholms sport och fritid (Vaxholm Sports and Leisure) on Hamngatan across from Coop.

If you plan to reach the nature reserve by bus, you'll take the 681 bus, which leaves several times per day from Vaxholm's harbor. I recommend downloading the SL public transportation app and purchasing tickets in advance if you plan for a single person to pay for multiple riders. More information about the SL app can be found at sl.se/en/getting-around/how-to-travel-with-sl.

Free maps and brochures for Bogesundslandet Nature Reserve are available at most hotels and many stores (including Vaxholms sport och fritid), as well as at the tourist office in Vaxholm's Town Hall, which also provides bus schedules. A map of the nature reserve's trails can also be found at karta-med-vandring-sleder-i-bogesundslandet.pdf.

— Rob Rogers is an attorney and author of *Finding My Way Home: Fighting Depression Backpacking in Central Florida*. He also writes a blog, the "Central Florida Backpacking Desk Jockey" (backpacking-deskjokey.blog), and his articles have been featured on floridahikes.com. Rob and his family have also traveled to more than 15 European countries. Links to Rob's essays and other articles he has written about backpacking can be found on his website, robrogerswriter.com.

