



FARE PLAY
A traditional Swedish cardamom bun at Café Gula Huset in Visby on the island of Gotland. Opposite: Swedish clapboard houses outside Stockholm.

EYE ON THE BALTICS

A voyage around the Baltic Sea delivers fairytale vistas, charming medieval towns, free-range foraging and deep-dives into regional cuisine off and on board luxe cruise ship *Silver Moon*.

WORDS BY LINDY ALEXANDER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN BAMFORD





the olive-green ocean, the icy water prickles my skin. I duck under, instantly invigorated by the Baltic Sea.

Baltic. It's the kind of word you say and expect your breath to freeze in mid-air. But on this midsummer cruise, we don't encounter inclement weather. We relish calm waters, warm days and idyllic scenery. "The Baltic is a very shallow sea," Captain Chavdar Georgiev tells me. "High waves are exceedingly rare." Cruising sceptics would have their misgivings punctured in a second here, especially aboard Silversea's luxurious *Silver Moon*. My Deluxe Veranda Suite has a deep bathtub, walk-in closet and an inviting lounge area. A two-person team attends to my every need, from a twice-daily room spruce and restocking the minibar with my favoured drinks to arranging dinner reservations. The covered balcony constantly draws me out, not only for the Champagne and canapés that regularly appear there, but also the meditative experience of gliding over the water.

Each morning I pull back the curtains to a fetching new vista. In Estonia's fairytale capital city, Tallinn, I join local chef Tarmo Griffel for a half-day Sea and Land Taste (SALT) excursion. Fostering an appreciation of regional

As we skip like a stone across the water, a wondrous new freeze-frame flashes before me each time I blink. Tiny islets bristling with pine and fir trees, red clapboard cottages by the sea and eagles wheeling lazily overhead. Nudging the shoreline are homespun saunas, and long jetties on tiptoe over the gelid water.

We're in a rigid inflatable boat ping-ponging through the Finnish archipelago, a scattering of more than 50,000 islands in the Baltic Sea. It's my first shore excursion after boarding a Silversea cruise in Stockholm the previous day. Ending in Denmark, the week-long voyage will see us dock in Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Sweden and Poland. Today, while many passengers have headed to Helsinki to wander in the old town of Porvoo or enjoy a performance of celebrated Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, I've plumped for adventure.

The rugged island of Norrkullalandet where we disembark is a forager's dream. A tapestry of wild blueberries and lingonberries blanket the ground, rippling around smooth boulders. Picking handfuls of tart berries, guide Olli Leimio tells us about *jokamiehenoikeus* – the right in Finland to roam and forage in the wilderness. "It's almost as fundamental as having a sauna," he says. Minutes later, we do just that. My skin is dripping as a cruise mate flings scoops of water onto the scalding stones, flooding the small room with steam. Protestations from fellow passengers elicit an insouciant shrug from the heat-seeking rogue. Leimio warns against casting ourselves too hastily into the frigid sea. Instead, a walk to the nearby sheltered bay gives our uninitiated bodies time to adjust to the temperature change. Wading into

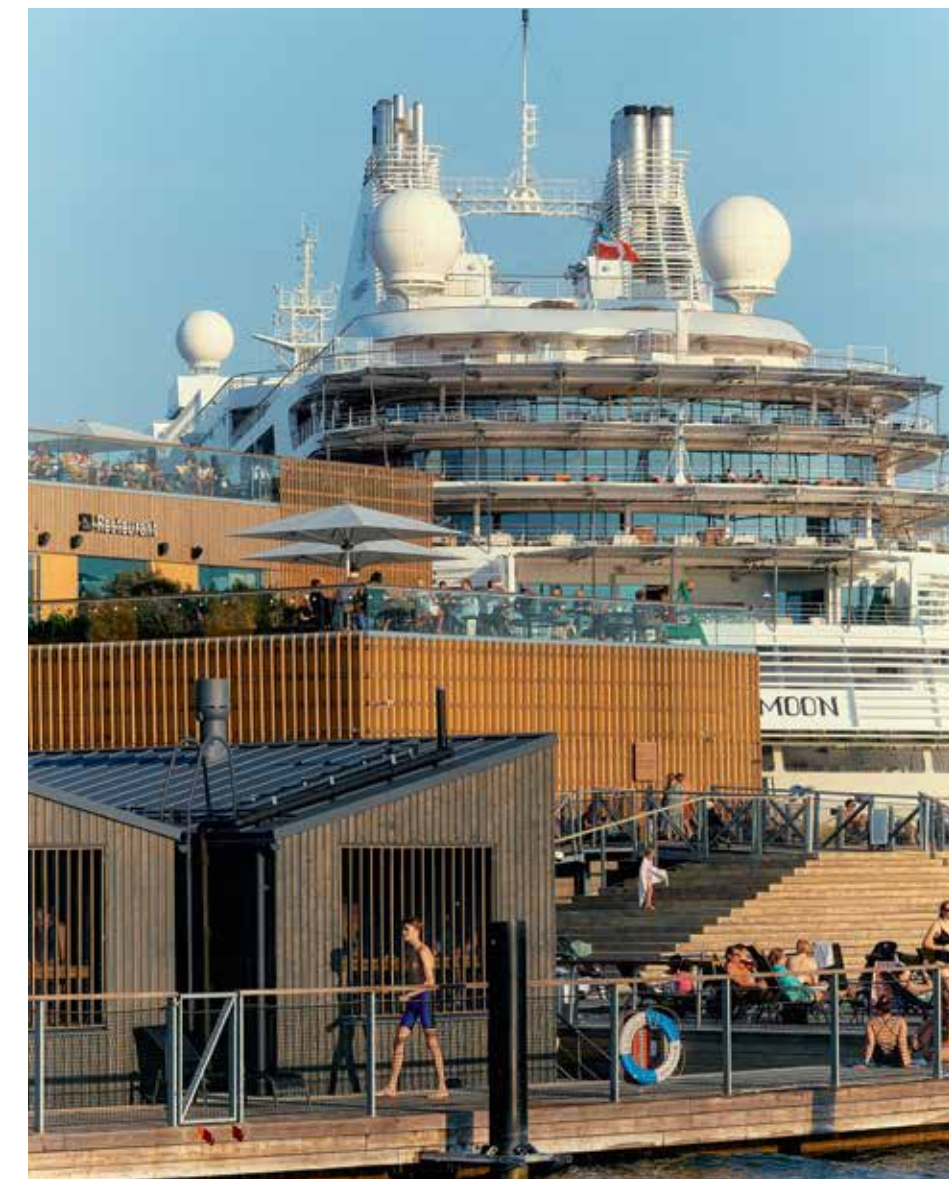
FINNISH LINE
Above: Allas Sea Pool in Helsinki, Finland. Below: The owner's suite on Silversea's *Silver Moon*.

cuisine is at the heart of Silversea's renowned culinary program, conceived by Adam Sachs, former editor-in-chief of *Savour* magazine. On each epicurean jaunt, local chefs take passengers into city streets, markets and kitchen gardens before creating traditional dishes together.

We begin at Balti Jaam market, loading our bags with Estonian produce such as crimson rhubarb, dark rye bread, fresh pikeperch known as zander, plump raspberries and wild sorrel. Then it's a short drive to Eesti Vabaõhuseumi, an open-air museum and reconstruction of a rural village, to prepare lunch. In a large tent, Griffel puts us to work, aided by glasses of local sparkling wine, filleting pilchards, cutting potatoes into thick discs and chopping fragrant herbs. Our three-course meal is cooked over a central fire, and the flame-licked dishes



BERRY TREASURE
Collecting wild berries on the island of Norrkullalandet, Finland. From above: Fabrique Stenugnsbageri café-bakery in Stockholm, Sweden; on-board dining at SALT Kitchen; Allas Sea Pool in Helsinki with *Silver Moon* in the background.



HIT THE DECK
Wind turbines seen from
the deck of *Silver Moon*.
Opposite: Estonia's fairytale
capital, Tallinn.





are delicious. We feast on crisp herring with potato and luminescent jewels of fish roe, tender lamb rack with juniper berries, zander with sorrel pesto and fresh fruit flambéed in a generous slug of Vana Tallinn liqueur.

Back on the ship, in a dining room swathed in oceanic blue and earthy ecru, is SALT Kitchen. The “voyage” menu highlights traditional Baltic and Nordic fare like cured meats, rye bread, salty cheese, cloudberry and smoked fish. The “terrain” menu changes daily, according to the port of call, spanning the likes of golden crescents of Polish pierogi, Swedish beer-braised beef short ribs with klimp, or dumplings, and Estonian smoked eel and sour cream mousse.

As tempting as it is to eat and drink in any of the eight venues on *Silver Moon*, each day brings a new city to explore. In Latvia I take a walking tour of the charming streets of Riga. Known for their decorative extravagance, the Art Nouveau buildings by architect Mikhail Eisenstein from the early 20th-century are striking. Among the mint-green, coral-pink and pale-blue façades, Eisenstein’s penchant for symbolist motifs is seen in the screaming heads of Medusa, entrances flanked by lions, and intricate sculptures of flowers and leaves sweeping past windows. Riga’s pedestrian-only old town is as beautiful as any I’ve seen, while an afternoon performance of folk dancing given by the Dzintarins children’s ensemble is a swirl of jaunty red dresses as smaller and smaller dancers appear from the wings like Russian nesting dolls.

The Swedish island of Gotland is home to one of the best-preserved medieval cities in Scandinavia. Encircled by a city wall, Visby is an enchanting example of a Hanseatic League trading town, with more than



OVER THE MOON Above: Selene, a cocktail inspired by the Greek goddess of the moon served at SALT Bar on *Silver Moon*. Below: Lobster tail with truffled leeks and green-pea jus at La Dame restaurant on-board *Silver Moon*.

200 warehouses and merchants’ houses tucked within its 13-century ramparts. Clusters of hollyhocks bloom in front of medieval stone houses, pushing up through infinitesimal gaps in the cobblestones. Raspberry brambles grow wild and apple trees heavy with fruit drape over garden walls. In the courtyard of a café, I order a provincial delicacy, saffranspannkaka, a saffron pancake. An oven-baked mix of rice, cream, sugar, eggs and saffron, it’s thick, golden and studded with almonds and topped with berries and cream. With savoury and sweet notes, it’s unlike anything I’ve ever tasted.

Known for its artisans, Visby has creatives dotted throughout its narrow streets. At Visby Glasbläseri, glassblower Christer Mattsson collects broken glasses from nearby venues, melts them down and creates stunning vessels. In the heat of the workshop, Mattsson spins and blows giant orbs of glass, his speed and precision mesmerising to behold. When I ask for a recommendation of a local tavern, he points me down the road to Gotlands Bryggeri, one of 16 microbreweries on the island and a supplier of broken glass bottles for Mattsson’s creations.

There, brewery ambassador and food historian Hanna Tunberg pours glasses of crisp Summer Bulldog pale ale, a sunny brew with fresh notes of grapefruit and lychee. Women, Tunberg tells me, were historically the brewers in Swedish society, but in the 1880s brewing beer became considered an unladylike pastime. Almost overnight, hundreds of years of brewing tradition was lost as women were forced to step away from the barrels. “But now there’s a resurgence of female brewers,” Tunberg says. “It’s time for the revolution.”

It’s a heartening reminder of human endeavour and spirit – one I hold onto as I visit Poland’s Stutthof concentration camp the next day. The horror and scale are unfathomable, but it’s the small details that move me most – the pile of brittle shoes taken from prisoners, a handmade toy rabbit cobbled together with stolen scraps of fabric and the smooth stones placed at the base of a blue Star of David. Back on the bus, our guide thanks us for coming. “Some people say this never happened,” she says with a shake of her head.



HERITAGE SIGHTS The city wall of Visby on Gotland. From above: Folk dancing by Dzintarins dance ensemble in Riga, Latvia; Art Nouveau architecture in Riga; fresh produce at Balti Jaam market in Tallinn.





SCANDI DESIGNS
Right: Saffron pancake with cream and mixed berries at Rosas café in Visby. Below: The central hall at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. Opposite: A street in the Danish capital.

delight from the neighbouring Tivoli Gardens theme park drift into the museum, crossing the divide between ancient and modern forms of amusement.

On this balmy evening the city is bustling with pedestrians and cyclists as I stroll to Nyhavn, a 17th-century waterfront district that was once a port known for its drunken sailors and brothels. The brightly coloured townhouses lining the canal have been transformed into a charming promenade of cafés, restaurants and bars. Locals stretch out like cats on benches, soaking up the last of the day's golden glow, tourists dive into plates of pickled herring, and timber sailing ships gently sway on the canal.

Making my way back to *Silver Moon* for my final evening on board, I pass the famed bronze statue of *The Little Mermaid*, commissioned by Carl Jacobsen as a gift to the city. Impervious to the throng of people taking photos of her, the twin-tailed water nymph gazes out towards the Baltic Sea as though she's on the lookout for the next coterie of voyagers, and after tonight I'm saddened to think I'm no longer one of them. **T**

The writer travelled as a guest of Silversea Cruises.

As the light on the shimmering sea deepens, SALT Bar beckons. In the moody space "floating mixologist" Afzal Hussain theatrically presents unique cocktails, such as Selene, made with Moonshot gin (whose botanicals were sent into near space) and topped with a tremulous dome. The piercing of the cupola releases smoky tendrils and it never fails to elicit gasps of joy from the passengers. Silversea guests tend to be food lovers who appreciate discovering regional cuisines, chef Eva Mulligan tells me. Ottawa-born Mulligan is the host at SALT Lab, a culinary workshop ringed by shelves of spices and recipe books. Under Mulligan's careful tutelage over the course of an hour, we make knotted Swedish cardamom buns and tebirkes – flaky Danish pastries filled with marzipan and scattered with poppy seeds. It's a convivial atmosphere, made even more so with spiced coffee laced with rum.

Off the coast of Copenhagen, a cluster of wind turbines turn rhythmically like clock hands, an otherworldly reminder that my time on board is nearly up. On my last day I explore the Danish capital, beginning with Glyptotek, a grand museum founded in 1882 by Carl Jacobsen, the owner of Carlsberg Breweries. Convinced of the power of art to fortify and enrich the lives of all, Jacobsen created a soaring masterpiece. The dome-roofed Winter Garden is filled with towering date palms and lush greenery, effortlessly evoking the Mediterranean. The dramatic exhibitions of French and Danish sculpture with their grandiose depictions of humankind are equally as rousing, and the ancient marble colonnade in the Central Hall punctuated by statues of emperors and citizens recalls an open Roman forum. Shrieks of

