



### ASTRAIA'S BALTIC ADVENTURE

*Astraia* is a Nauticat 42 Sailing Yacht which we have spent this summer sailing to Stockholm on the Baltic Sea. Well, not actually sailing all the way as we traversed both Holland and Sweden through canals.

We set off at the end of April, sailed and motored east along the English coast—with the wind against us almost the whole time—then sailed across the Channel from Dover to Dunkirk, and along the French and Belgian coasts to Vlissingen in The Netherlands, where we entered the Dutch canal system.

We spent three weeks travelling the entire length of Holland from the south west corner to the north east tip following the 'Standing Mast' route whereby we could keep our mast up. This necessitated negotiating many road and rail bridges which had to be opened for us, sometimes stopping the traffic on major motorways! The canal route through Holland takes you through the heart of the country, past industrial areas, towns, cities and villages, farms and bulb fields and people's back gardens!



We had then reached the German border, sailed out to the Frisian Islands and spent a few days on Nordeney, famous from the book 'The Riddle of the Sands' by Erskine Childers. We enjoyed the wild, unspoilt countryside and the famous sea-water spa baths, but it was too windy to leave for several days and the sea was still quite rough even when it was safe to go.

The Kiel Canal by comparison was very calm and we spent a relaxing couple of days passing through it, then headed North to Sønderborg in Denmark. We spent several weeks cruising in Denmark, visiting some attractive small towns, as well as Copenhagen, but getting rather stuck again with too much wind in Grenaa. We also had a pleasant stay on the island of Anholt, again beautiful and unspoilt, on our way to Sweden.

After a stay in Gothenburg on the west coast, we entered the Trollhattan and Göta Canals, and spent two or three weeks traversing Sweden via canals and lakes. It is an awesome experience, as the canals go through some quite hilly countryside (unlike the Dutch canals), so there are many very steep flights of locks to be negotiated. Often the change in level is many metres and the water within the locks very turbulent when the sluices are opened. The canal route also takes in some huge lakes, in particular Lakes Vanern and Vattern, which provide an opportunity for some sailing. There are many interesting sights to visit on the way—castles and fortresses, museums, beaches and nature reserves. All in all there are 65 locks between Gothenburg and Stockholm, and the Göta Canal is nicknamed the 'Divorce Ditch' as negotiating all these locks causes such disagreements between couples. I'm pleased to say, however, that we survived it!

Finally we arrived on the east coast of Sweden and spent an idyllic few weeks enjoying the Swedish 'Indian Summer' in the Stockholm archipelago, which consists of 30,000 islands, mainly uninhabited and completely wild and unspoilt. Plenty of places to swim, sunbathe, walk and just enjoy the peace and solitude. A few small towns with a restaurant, shop and bakery. Just a very relaxing place to be.

We have left *Astraia* in a Swedish boatyard just outside Stockholm for the winter, and plan to return next Spring to continue to Finland, St Petersburg and the Baltic States.

We have been writing a blog as we go. If anyone is interested in reading more about our trip and seeing the pictures, please contact me via [di@charleskeiller.co.uk](mailto:di@charleskeiller.co.uk) and I will send you the link.

**Diana Keiller**



### ASTRAIA'S BALTIC JOURNEY 2014

Astraia is our Nauticat 42 Sailing Yacht, which we sailed during the summer of 2013 to Stockholm where she spent the Scandinavian winter cocooned in 'shrink wrap'. This spring we returned to continue our exploration of the Baltic.



*Napoleonviken Bay*

We had quite a bit of work to do to get Astraia ready for sea again and had several lovely trips to islands in the Stockholm archipelago, as well as right into the centre of the city, to make sure that everything was working before we set off for the season. Napoleonviken—so called because Napoleon's grandson once stopped there for a swim—is one of our favourite places.

We made our way south of Stockholm through a myriad islands, then had a fair wind on a beautiful day for the sail to the lovely, unspoilt island of Gotland and its well-preserved medieval walled city of Visby.

A rather lumpy sea passage to Latvia, with a brief visit to Riga, then we were off again to Estonia, where we spent a week in Kuressaare on the island of Saaremaa at a Cruising Association rally. We had time to explore the island thoroughly, including a visit to a fascinating meteorite crater and the former missile base from which Gary Powers' plane was shot down by the USSR in 1960. We also enjoyed the midsummer celebrations there with country dancing displays and a massive bonfire. On our last night we had a superb banquet in the beautiful medieval castle.

By contrast our next sea passage was absolutely flat calm—like a millpond! It was a very pleasant passage but we had to motor and could see our wake for miles behind us.



*Tallinn, the capital of Estonia*

We had a fascinating few days visiting Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, another almost perfectly-preserved walled city.

We set off towards Finland on a windy day and had a very lively, but enjoyable, sail to Helsinki. We moored at the famous guest harbour of Nyländska Jaktklubben (NJK), the oldest yacht club in Finland, which was founded in 1861 when Finland was still part of the Russian Empire. They have a beautiful old clubhouse in the middle of the harbour.

We then headed to the unspoilt and uncrowded islands of the Eastern Finnish archipelago—there were plenty of places to enjoy swimming in the clear, clean Baltic Sea.



*NJK Clubhouse, Helsinki*

One of our favourite places was Risholmen, which belongs to Helsingfors Segelklubb (HSK) and has a wood-fired sauna for members' use—after the sauna, you can jump straight into the sea to cool off.

In the middle of July, we reached our goal for this summer's cruise—St Petersburg in Russia. We had to deal with quite a lot of paperwork and bureaucracy to get the visa in the first place, assisted by our friendly representative in Russia, Vladimir, and we had to inform the Russian authorities of every port of call, but our experience of Russia once we got

there was wonderful and surprisingly free-and-easy. St Petersburg felt like a modern European city, but with a huge amount of Russian history, glittering, elaborate palaces and gardens, and amazing museums and art galleries. It was a complete contrast from the idyllic peace and quiet of the Finnish islands, but enthralling to see it all for the first time. One of our favourite places was Peterhof, with its terrace of fountains leading down to the sea, which was commissioned by Peter the Great following a visit to Versailles.

One of the surprises of St Petersburg was the Metro system, built by Stalin and intended to be 'palaces for the people'—wide platforms with marble columns, mosaics, chandeliers and classical sculptures.

We visited two more ports in Russia, Dubkovaya and Vyborg, which were less glamorous and the buildings not as well renovated, but still felt like friendly places to visit. We then headed west again, back to Helsinki and beyond—to the islands of western Finland, the old wooden town of Tammisaari, the second city of Finland, Turku, and finally to the Åland islands, where the official language is Swedish although it is part of Finland. Again we were able to anchor from the stern and tie our mooring ropes to trees on some beautiful islands, where often we were the only boat!

Astrai is now back in Stockholm and all wrapped up again for another Swedish winter. Next year, we plan to visit Poland and eastern Germany before returning to Bosham.

I have been writing a blog about our Baltic voyage. You can find it at [astraiacontinued.blogspot.co.uk](http://astraiacontinued.blogspot.co.uk). If you would like to catch up on last year's journey, the blog is on [astraibaltic.blogspot.co.uk](http://astraibaltic.blogspot.co.uk).



*The fountains at Peterhof, St Petersburg*

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