

## LGBT games float my boat



Jive dancing at an Olympics? Patrick Welch visits Stockholm, host city for the EuroGames

THE idea of the EuroGames – our version of San Francisco's Gay Games – has always made me smirk. Do the water polo tickets really sell out in 30 seconds? Why would anyone want to watch bowling? And is it a good idea for LGBT people to have their own sports event? Shouldn't we be trying to raise our practically invisible profile in mainstream sports instead?

I'm at Mälarpaviljongen, a floating bar on Kungshölmén that looks out at Långholmen, another one of the 14 islands that make up Stockholm, with Jakob Jansson, president of the EuroGames. Around us, couples and gangs of mates, straight and gay, young and old, are drinking rosé while watching the sun set across the water.

It's a typically civilised, progressive picture of Scandi living and, while we enjoy a Swedish classic – meatballs with lingonberry sauce – Jansson explains the ethos of the games. Much in the same way as gay Pride is more than transvestites being outrageous, the EuroGames – with its eclectic programme that includes dance, bridge and pétanque alongside mainstream Olympic sports such as swimming, cycling and running – is about more than ogling dudes in Speedos: it's about having a conversation about gay people in sport.

'We did a survey and found that between 60 and 80 per cent of LGBT people in sports have experienced some sort of physical violence, abuse or discrimination,' he tells me, before explaining it's not just about rights and health – it's also a participation issue. 'The fact is many young LGBT people quit or never even begin with organised sport.'

That Stockholm has been chosen for the event isn't surprising. Sweden has long been ahead of the curve



Forward-looking: Enlightened Stockholm is the ideal setting for the LGBT Olympics

PICTURE: CORBIS



Bright city: Enjoy a night with the boys at King Kong (inset); live wildly at Wonk (left) or visit the Vasa Museum



when it comes to sexuality – gay people have been able to marry since 2009. This is also the country that has kitted out every understatedly stylish cutie from Peckham to Park Slope in top style lines, including Acne, Nudie and Cheap Monday, and then got them dancing to The Knife, Robyn and, of course, Abba. There's no escaping them here. Quite literally.

I'm staying at the Rival, the hotel owned by Benny

Andersson, one of the supergroup, and pay a visit to Abba: The Museum, where visitors supposedly 'walk in and dance out' – or, in my case, walk in, murder SOS in the recording booth, and walk out.

Afterwards, in one of those bizarre twists of fate, I see Björn walking down the street. He's apparently here putting the finishing touches to his Mamma Mia-themed Greek taverna restaurant, set to open around the corner next year, a gift to the world's gays if ever there was one.

Later that night, after a more studious trip to the Vasa Museum, a beautifully restored 15th-century warship, and lunch with the cool kids at Urban Deli in hipster neighbourhood SoFo, I hit two of the capital's most popular gay nights: Wonk in the centre and King Kong in Södermalm.

Here I learn that when it comes to camp Scandi music, Abba has nothing on

the phenomenon that is schlager, aka Eurovision-esque pop set to a techno beat. If it sounds appalling, that's because it is. Not that the Swedes agree – the only tune that gets more of a cheer is Icona Pop's I Love It.

There's yet more schlager the next night at Patricia, a steamboat-turned-club that's been rocking (literally) in Slussen harbour on Sunday nights since 1986.

That all-aboard-sailor vibe is a far cry from the urban-sophistication back at Mälarpaviljongen. 'It's a loving place,' Jakob tells me as the light fades over the city's skyline. Just as I think he's finally made a mistake with his English and means lovely, not loving, he tells me the bar runs a refugee integration programme and gives jobs to LGBT asylum seekers from countries such as Iraq and Ghana. I stand corrected: It is a loving place.

Doubles at the Rival from £120 (rival.se) and returns from Heathrow to Stockholm from £85 with ryanair.com. eurogamesstockholm.com (Aug 5-9); gaylesbian.visitstockholm.com

## TAKING A DIP IN STOCKHOLM

■ Smedsuddsbadet beach (below), on Kungshölmén island, attracts a family crowd because it's got changing rooms, loos, a big sunbathing lawn and a café that is perfect for that quintessential Swedish institution, fika (a coffee and pastry break).

■ The cliffs at Fredhällsbadet, on the south-western tip of Kungshölmén, are popular with groups of twentysomethings chilling, swimming and drinking beers in the sun.

■ Långholmen is one of the city's three beaches that are popular with gay folk.

■ Nudists will like Frescati Beach in Haga, just north of the city.

■ Further out, Stockholm's archipelago comprises 30,000 islands – get the ferry to Vaxholm (it's 50mins and costs £6; waxholmsbolaget.com). It's a great day trip, or even a weekend base, to explore the rest of the islands' swimming options.



Take the plunge: Many LGBT quit sport because of abuse, says Jakob Jansson (right)