

Light refreshment:
hanging out at
Kafe Magasinet.
Opposite, the
floating sauna at
Anfasteröd Gårdsvik



Scandi crush

Sexy-chic style in the cities, rugged good looks in the country — **Liz Edwards** has always harboured two separate Swedish fantasies. Would combining both in one break be too much of what she fancied?



Canal plus:
Gothenburg's heart
is zigzagged by
canals. Opposite,
ordering drinks
at Familjen, which
lists beers by
distance to brewery;
rural Bohuslän



Picture Sweden and what do you see? An ice-cool, design-forward place of chic interiors shops, progressive attitudes towards cyclists and coffee shops filled with paternity-leave 'latte papas'? Or endless miles of pine-spiked wilderness, interrupted only by sparkling stretches of water, cutesy wooden cabins and wholesome types in hiking boots and Fair Isle jumpers? Unhelpfully for holiday-booking purposes, my mind's eye was split-screen, with both versions playing out side by side (plus a few clips of Abba and Alexander Skarsgård thrown in for good measure). Torn between the two, and with my husband short on annual leave, I made an executive decision – using the August bank holiday, we'd try to squeeze in both. OK, more like an executive indecision. But over the course of a long weekend, could I have my cinnamon bun and eat it?

I settled on west-coast Gothenburg as our city start before we headed off into the wilds. A bit of a Scandiphile, I'd long had my eye on Stockholm's little sister, with its reputation for excellent food. Swedish friends had promised an edgier feel than I'd found in the sophisticated, clean-cut capital. I was expecting beards.

What was great, in theory, about my plan was that it meant two holidays in one. What was terrible was the

packing. Desk-to-forest fashion may be a thing in Sweden, but not in my wardrobe. So the 'wear your bulkiest items on the plane' rule saw us making our entrance at the glossy Clarion Hotel Post in scuffed walking boots, clumping in among the beautiful, city-chic Scandis.

Of course they didn't care, and nor did we once we'd re-urbanised slightly and landed back out on the streets. Gothenburg began as a 17th-century trading settlement, fortified and surrounded with zigzag canals that were later adorned with handsome bridges and Neo-Classical houses built by East India Trading Company merchants. And it was modern-day merchants that we were after now – there's no quicker route to a Scandi state of mind than a drift round its effortlessly, ineffably cool shops. (My husband might have preferred shortcutting via the cinnamon-bun route, but there was time for that, too...)

The area around Magasinsgatan has been the trendy part of town for the past few years, I'd heard, and sure enough we found plenty of the sort of store that allows you to daydream yourself Swedish: there was the homegrown Nudie Jeans shop; Granit's simple-functional interiors; and fashion and accessories in Miksajo, whose owner also runs a local project promoting female street artists (you wouldn't get *that* in graffiti-free Stockholm).

In one single square just off Magasinsgatan, we hit peak gorgeousness: lifestyle store Grandpa with its designer toothbrushes, retro dartboards and minimal fashion; >

TIMING TIP

Swedish kids go back to school mid-August, so the very end of the month is a cheaper, quieter time to visit Sweden

want-want-want interiors shop Artilleriet; and groovy cafe Da Matteo, sharing a sparrow-hopping backyard with florist Floramor & Krukatos. As we sat there over home-roast coffee with cardamom *and* cinnamon buns (husband now happy), I realised this was, officially, *fika*: Swedish snacking is only *fika* when it's sociable. The scene was an uncanny match for one half of my split screen.

Before you eye-roll at the relentless perfection of it all, it's worth pointing out that from some angles, the skyline is dominated not by spirey churches, but by the red-and-white Lego-ish 'Lipstick' tower, generally accepted to be one of Sweden's ugliest buildings. Gothenburg is also the home of Volvo, and – don't yawn! – the Volvo Museum. A city break's not a city break without a culture fix, but even in our walking boots, we'd have felt too cool for that.

So, the next morning, we set our sights on Vasastan, the boulevard museum-and-gallery district. Alas Röhsska, the museum of design and craft, was still under wraps after a two-year renovation (it's open again now), but standing at the top of Kungspartavenyen, surrounded by concert hall, state theatre, library, two cinemas and two art centres, I reckoned we'd cope.

And the Gothenburg Museum of Art, an industrial-looking yellow-brick edifice, was a treat: a pleasing mix of international styles – Picasso, Monet, Braque, Degas – alongside a good collection of Scandinavian artists. Not all moody Munchs, either – Carl Larsson's cheeky 19th-century family portraits were a revelation. It was in Gothenburg that, at the turn of the century, the

Artists' Union formed in opposition to the stuffier Stockholm Academy, and playfulness is still in evidence. The most striking piece of all was by local woman Cajsa von Zeipel: a giant sculpture of a scrawny, stony-faced dancer, revolving slowly upside-down round a pole.

Lately, it's been in the culinary arts that Gothenburg's been making a name for itself. The city's six Michelin stars might sound modest, but that pips London to the post for stars per inhabitant. Dinner the night before had been at Familjen, the casual sibling to Koka, one of those six. Excellent sourdough came with sour cream and smoked cod roe; craft beers were listed by DTB (distance to brewery); a delicate, umami-laced arctic char with pickled shitake and mushroom vinaigrette was like Scandi summer in a dish. It couldn't have been more Swedish had it been made by the Muppets' chef.

And our post-art lunch was similarly on-message. Over in Långgatan, the new up-and-coming district west of the city centre, we sat in Kafe Magasinet's magazine-shoot-ready glass-roofed courtyard among macramé pots, bamboo furniture and industrial bulbs. On the menu were vegan salads, generously filled bagels and the best avocado and egg on sourdough I think I've ever had. Honestly, it felt like Gothenburg could do no wrong. Even the uncool bits were charming and quaint: our wander back to the hotel through Haga, the picturesque old district of cobbles and timbered houses, took in an artisan clog shop, a higgledy-piggledy Aladdin's cave-ish vintage store, and a bakery selling >

Take a hike:
walking in Bohuslän.
Opposite, cinnamon
buns are a key
ingredient of *fika*

WHAT TO
DRINK WHERE
In Långgatan, aim for
Tredje Långgatan
street for cocktails;
parallel Andra
Långgatan for beer
(though local craft
brews aren't cheap
— maybe £7.50 for
400ml; try 9:ans bar)

The umami-laced char with pickled shitake couldn't have been more Swedish had it been made by the Muppets' chef



cinnamon rolls the size of cinema reels. (Volvo museum, I reminded myself.)

Time for the other Sweden. You don't have to go far out of Gothenburg to find an outdoorsy escape. West of the city, ferries from Saltholmen will deliver you to islands such as Styrso, with its golf buggies and holiday-vibe cafes, in 40 minutes. But my internet quest for waterside cabins had led me towards a village in the Bohuslan region north of Gothenburg, Lyckorna – in some translations, that's a place called Happiness.

Driving north of the city, we were quickly out among birches and pines, spotting red-roofed farmhouses and squadrons of geese. And 45 minutes after waving the Lipstick building goodbye, we were pulling up just outside Lyckorna – actually beyond Happiness – at Anfasteröd Gårdsvik. It's a seaside campsite, but not really what you might expect if British seaside campsites are your benchmark. Yes, there were plots for tents and caravans and motorhomes, and no, it wasn't in the depths of wilderness among moose and wolves. But it was instantly beguiling. A white clapboard reception-and-restaurant building sat facing the sheltering islands that keep the sea lake-calm. Little jetties reached out into the water; fields and beech trees ran along the shore either side; clouds like whipped cream hung in the blue, skimming distant hilltops. And besides the temporary

plots, there were a handful of simple cabins with kitchenettes. Ours stood on the edge of the site; from its veranda, our view was basically of sea and forest, and the occasional rainbow.

The loudest sound we heard was the ping of acorns dropping onto the deck. So we could play at splendid isolation, then wander over to the main building for knockout breakfasts, boat and bike hire, and local intel from owners Hanna and Magnus (H&M! So Swedish).

That first afternoon, Hanna showed us one of the walking trails through the woods above the site, pointing out edible mushrooms and berries beneath the spruces, ferns and oaks. 'The forest is so good for kids,' she enthused. 'It's like a museum where you can touch everything!' Even without a Fair Isle jumper, she basically completed the picture in the other half of my split-screen. Then improved on it when she broke out the flask of coffee and home-baked cinnamon buns. *Fika* in the forest with sea-island views would take some beating.

But beaten it was, by Anfasteröd Gårdsvik's floating sauna. I told you this was no normal campsite; I thought I might keel over in delight when I saw it. Fired up for us after our walk, the wooden cabin was tethered to one of the jetties, so we bobbed gently, soaking up scenery and piney heat for as long as we could bear, before dashing outside to plunge into the sea, swim a few strokes,

FILL THE FRIDGE
To stock up with drink en route to your cabin, you need a Systembolaget, not a supermarket. In Sweden, anything stronger than 3.5% ABV can only be bought at this government-owned chain of booze stores

What a dive: taking a dip in the lake in Bohuslan; Gothenburg's Museum of Art; strolling through the cobbled streets of Haga

clamber back up the steps and start again. It was tingly, invigorating, therapeutic. It was wonderful.

And so our 36 hours on the coast passed in a whoosh of fresh air, rosy cheeks and adventures in nature, as if we were characters in a children's book (somewhere between *Pippi Longstocking* and *Swallows & Amazons*). We cycled along the coast to some excellent restaurants (their proximity another reason to choose campsite over wilderness). We tried crabbing off the jetty: aquavit-clear water gave the crabs a disadvantage, our lack of skill levelled the playing field.

And we hired a little blue-and-white motorboat from Magnus. He kitted us out with wooden fishing reels, pots of bait, a map showing sea depth and nearest islands, and a weighty picnic basket. Beyond the mussel farms, where cormorants perched to hang their wings out to dry, we killed the engine and followed Magnus's instructions as best we could on the bait and lines. And eventually had to accept that our 'fishing' was really just an elaborately slow way of feeding the local mackerel.

So we picked one of the dozens of castaway islands for our picnic. A shell-crunchy sand bar between boulders, heather and trees gave us easy mooring on, I think, Birch Island – Björkholmen. Sure enough, it was oh so quiet; Sunday yachts drifted past, but we had the place to ourselves. We sat on lichen-gilded rocks and unpacked lunch: moose sandwiches, homemade rock buns, lashings of (low-alcohol) beer. Sweden had worked its magic: Gothenburg seemed aeons ago, London even more distant. And maybe this was where the beauty of my indecision lay. By taking two holidays in one, it felt like we'd left everyday life twice as far behind. ■



My quest for a waterside cabin took me to Lyckorna – in some translations, that's a place called Happiness



Get Me There

map: Scott Jessop

Go packaged

Best Served Scandinavia (best-served.co.uk) has a four-night trip to Gothenburg and Villa Sjötorp in Lyckorna from £795pp, B&B, including Gatwick flights, car hire and two dinners. **Inntravel** (inntravel.co.uk) has a seven-night West Coast trip to Gothenburg, Fjällbacka and Fiskebäckskil from £1,245pp, B&B, including car hire and five dinners, excluding flights.

Go independent

BA has daily Heathrow flights to Gothenburg, from £36, one-way. **Norwegian** flies to Gothenburg from Gatwick, from £31, one-way. **Ryanair** flies direct from Edinburgh and Stansted, from £10, one-way. **Zest** (zestcarrental.com) has four days' car hire from Gothenburg Landvetter airport from £137. Or try **hertz.co.uk**.

Where to stay

In Gothenburg, you want the **Clarion Hotel Post** for its location (between canal and train station), looks like the

'20s Post Office has scrubbed up well), glam bars and rooftop pool. And yes, it's heated (nordicchoicehotels.se; doubles from £103, B&B). At Lyckorna, **Anfasteröd Gårdsvik Bathers Cottages** start at £99, B&B (anfasterod.se).

Where to eat

Gothenburg: Try **Familjen** (restaurangfamiljen.se; mains about £24); and **Kafe Magasinet** (kafemagasinet.se; mains about £11). Also try **Kungssportshuset Matbar** (kungssportshusetmatbar.se; mains about £18), more trad than trendy. **Bohuslan:** A 10-minute bike ride from Anfasteröd Gårdsvik, the excellent **Musselbaren**, in Ljungskile's converted clocktower, specialises in the shellfish farmed just offshore (musselbaren.se; mains about £15). **Villa Sjötorp** is a hotel in Lyckorna, in a handsome 19th-century house built for visiting bathers. In the charming restaurant, Scandi ingredients are handled with a delicate, deft touch (villasjotorp.se; five-course menu £50).

Further information

See vastsverige.com and goteborg.com.