

# Travel

Page

29

**'Ravello is stunning — blessed with glorious food, history and wonderful hotels'**

Hilary Rose enjoys a weekend on Italy's Amalfi coast



Bridget Harrison and sons at Isaberg Mountain Resort. Below: Granna

## Get back to nature in Sweden

Lakes, forests and nights under the stars in a camper van. **Bridget Harrison** tours the great outdoors Scandi-style

**T**he four of us are crowded around my husband's iPhone watching a demonstration video on how to turn a banquette into a double bed. It looks easy, but our bits of seat don't seem to piece together and the table has taken a chunk out of my husband's shin. We've already exploded anoraks and trainers everywhere

and my sons have proved unable to aim into the chemical toilet. It's all getting a bit claustrophobic and I am beginning to wonder if my family are cut out for life on the road.

Later, my eight-year-old looks up at me sleepily from the bed we do eventually assemble. "Today was so cool," he says, and I instantly forgive our close-quarters living and the pee on the bathroom floor. I have a flashback to the sight of him in a harness,

heroically tackling a sequence of rope ladders and zip-wires suspended between fir trees. Then to the four of us in a canoe, paddling across a glassy lake, beaching on a small island and sharing salami and cheese.

Will there be wi-fi? How will we watch Euro 2016? Are you bringing the iPad? That was the predictable response from my sons when I announced we were going to stay in a motorhome in Sweden. City life might have me fantasising about going off-grid in a country of lakes and forests, but not them. "I want to stay with my friends," said my eldest son. "I'm not going either," piped up his younger brother.

I reassured them that our portable



home would have plenty of electricity to support their *Minecraft* addiction, then planned a trip jammed with enough action to keep them from it. Indeed, part of the appeal of the motorhome was having the flexibility to drive to outdoorsy activities that would occupy the boys. It also meant we could do the trip fairly cheaply in what we'd heard was a notoriously expensive destination. We planned mainly to eat picnics and have barbecues from provisions bought in the supermarket. We also pledged to drive for no more than 90 minutes each day and to try "wild camping". The right to park up anywhere and make camp is treated as a God-given right in Sweden. The only ▶



hotel we booked was our first night because we were catching a late flight from London.

Our four-day trip began in Jonkoping, a small city on Lake Vattern, Sweden's second-largest lake (it's 730 square miles). It was here, looking out from our room in the newly opened Vox Hotel, that we had our first taste of Sweden in summer. The 11pm sky was streaked with pink and gold. There was light, space and water as far as the eye could see. I felt us all exhale.

The next morning a 25ft Swift motor-home awaited us outside the hotel. "There's no away I am driving that thing," I said to my husband. Magnus, a rep from Swift Norden, talked us through our new digs: double bed at the back; a tiny loo and shower; a galley with a fridge, microwave and cooker; a table and banquette with seatbelts that converted (allegedly) into another double bed. We had a stocked fridge, enough electricity in our battery and water in the tank to wild-camp for several days. Or we could plug in at a campsite. The toilet could be emptied by pulling out its plastic waste box and pouring away the contents. "That's your job," said my husband.

Our first stop was Isaberg Mountain Resort, a lakeside centre surrounded by forest that offers everything from bike hire and trails to assault courses suspended in the trees. And sure enough, Euro 2016 was soon forgotten. Down at the lake we watched a group of teenagers doing backflips from a floating pontoon before we hauled a large metal canoe into the water. As we struck out across the lake, I actually felt quite tearful. Here we were in our own version of *Swallows and Amazons*. Of course my sons cared only about splashing each other with their oars, but I hoped that subconsciously they might appreciate all this nature.

Isaberg has cabins and a camping area, but we had a packed itinerary, so at teatime it was a cry of "back in the van!" We felt too novice to wild camp on our first night so we drove to a small campsite called Bauer-



Garden, in Bunn, a village of red clapboard houses scattered around green fields, by another breathtakingly beautiful lake. But it was raining when we arrived and tempers were fraying. We were discovering that life in a motorhome requires you to pack lightly, put everything away at all times, and remember where you've put it. Not my strong points. We escaped the chaos to the campsite restaurant, which turned out to be the local gourmet spot. We paid London prices, but an excellent meal that included blinis and poached salmon did wonders for our mood.

Our next destination was Granna, a historic town on Vattern's eastern shore, where the Swedish candy *polkagris* was invented. Here you can still watch great lumps of sugary dough being kneaded and hand-rolled into sticks of rock. Deliberating between 25 flavours was a high point for my six-year-old. We eventually dragged him away to catch a 30-minute ferry to the island of Visingso — 8½ miles

long, 2 miles across and first colonised by Sweden's kings in the 12th century.

Magnus had told us we could wild-camp anywhere unless there was a sign saying it was private property. But how to find a good spot? Consulting the map took us south to what I reckoned was a beach. What we found was a lovely grassy area where a wooden pontoon stretched out into the water. There was a picnic table, a barbecue drum and even a well-maintained toilet shed. The boys disembarked. "Look! Natural goal posts!" they shouted on spotting two clumps of daisies in the grass. Out came the football and our wild-camp had begun.

Only 700 people live on Visingso. In the summer the population doubles because it is a popular location for lake houses. Sea kayaking is a serious pastime and that evening Hakan Wettero, a local adventure guide, arrived with his family and a trailer full of kayaks. It was 8pm when we paddled out on to the lake, scudding quietly across

Visingso Island on Lake Vattern. Below: the Harrisons wild camping with their motorhome



the mirror-flat water, so clear we could see 65ft down. We took a break in a rocky cove and Hakan produced a kettle, brewed some coffee and handed out cinnamon buns. This was our first taste of Swedish *fika* — coffee and a pause for gossip and sweet cake.

Next day we hired bikes and rode through a dappled oak forest and past red houses where tiny robot lawnmowers kept every lawn pristine. The cycling was ideal for kids: flat, empty, safe. Everyone we came across was unfailingly friendly and spoke English.

That evening — our last — we returned to the mainland for another wild camp. It's not hard to find somewhere; Sweden has a population of only 10 million, but 55 million acres of forest and 97,000 lakes. We were beginning to realise that you can drive off practically any main road and find yourself next to a glittering expanse of water. No one will move you on, or tell you not to make a fire, or tut if you go skinny dipping.

ISAC WETTERO/PHOTOWE.SE

## Lodges, treehouses and cabins: top Swedish escapes

### Kolarbyn Eco-lodge, Skinnskatteberg

You'll be chopping your own wood and picking your own berries at Kolarbyn's charcoal huts, which sit deep in woodland 30 miles from the city of Vasteras (00 46 7 0400 7053, kolarbyn.se). The little huts, which sleep two, have turf roofs, inflatable mattresses and sheepskin rugs. Drinking water comes from a spring and guided activities include fishing and an overnight elk safari. A hut for two is from £90 a night; activities are extra.

### Treehotel, Harads

How about staying in a cabin in the treetops? Jutting out — seemingly unsupported — over the hillside, Treehotel is a super-stylish collection of treehouses about an hour's drive from Lulea airport. Hidden in the Lapland forest, the five individually designed cabins range from a futuristic UFO-style bolt hole to a room hovering in the canopy. Other accommodation includes the "Bird's Nest" — constructed out of branches — and a reflective glass structure named "Mirrorcube". They come with splendid forest views and underfloor heating. There is also a restaurant, hot tub and sauna. Hotels Combined (hotelscombined.co.uk) has two nights' B&B in the Mirrorcube from £408.50pp in August.

### Sorbyn Lodge, Sorbyn

Dotted among pine trees by Lake Vittrasket, these eight spacious timber cabins scream rustic charm. Inside, the decor is pared back, with two comfortable bedrooms and a kitchenette. There is a main building with a restaurant serving locally sourced food, such as wild mushrooms, cloudberries and reindeer. Summer activities include guided hikes, kayak and mountain-bike tours, and whitewater rafting. Soothe aching muscles in the lakeside sauna. Best Served Scandinavia (020 7664 2235, best-served.co.uk) has cabins sleeping four from £200 a night on a B&B basis.

### Stenebynas, Lake Ivag

Sitting happily beside Lake Ivag in Dalsland, 100 miles from Gothenburg, these four traditional wooden summerhouses feel wonderfully remote. While away your day paddling, rowing, fishing, barbecue-stoking and finding a quiet spot in the 200-acre estate for an afternoon snooze. Overlooking the lake and hills beyond, the cabins are spread out enough to ensure privacy, but close enough to walk between — ideal for groups of friends. The largest house, Svalan, sleeps nine, while the others sleep from four to six people, with facilities including open fireplaces and sun terraces. There is a tennis court and numerous activities such as elk safaris and visiting a railway museum. A week in a cabin for a family of four starts from £857, including boats and canoes (00 46 5313 3168, www.stenebynas.se).

### Where to stay

Vox Hotel (voxhotel.se) in Jonkoping has doubles from £60 a night and BauerGarden holiday park (bauergarden.se) has motorhome pitches for £17.

### What to do

Kayaking can be booked through kajakpaddla.nu, or Smalands Turism (visitsmaland.se). Isaberg Mountain Centre (isaberg.se) has mountain bike hire for £24 a day and guides for £30 an hour. Gold panning is £10 a day (guldvaskning.se).

### The cabin at Fjallnas Hotel

Close to the border with Norway is Fjallnas, Sweden's oldest mountain hotel



Treehotel, Harads

(built in 1882). There are 41 rooms clad in contemporary textiles and deerskin bedding, but for a truly remote experience, head to the hotel's cabin, which is about four miles away on the other side of the mountain ridge and can be accessed only on foot. Surrounded by rugged hills and close to the water's edge, it is open-plan, has a sauna and sleeps eight. Ideal for those looking to switch off from the modern world, there is no electricity or phone signal, and your pre-cooked dinner and breakfast are delivered from the main hotel. Guests must spend at least one night in the hotel to be able to book the cabin. Two sharing, two nights' B&B, including one night in the cabin, costs from £861 (fjallnas.se).

### Island Lodge, Stockholm archipelago

This sumptuous campsite has a relaxed and remote feel. Located 40 minutes by boat from central Stockholm, the small uninhabited island of Bergholmen was used as a mine and torpedo depot by the Swedish military. Now its beautiful pine forest is dotted with seven spacious, geodesic dome tents, furnished with wooden floors, reindeer skins, wood-burning stoves and proper beds.

Guests have exclusive access to the island with its two sandy beaches, and gourmet dinners are served under canvas. Only one group of guests can book at a time, and you need a minimum of six people per group in high season and four people in low season. Rates start from £424pp a day for an all-inclusive stay (islandlodge.se).

### Chalet Konstverk, Are-Bjornen

One for larger groups (with very deep pockets), this wooden chalet resting on the slopes of Mount Forberget has its own spa, sports room and even a helicopter pad. The eight bedrooms,

including one in an adjacent apartment, ooze relaxation with four-poster beds, fur throws, and contemporary furniture. There are seven bathrooms, and the dining room comes with leather seats and chandeliers. Sleeping 16, the chalet is available from £5,157 a night, or £322pp per night (lecollectionist.com).

### Bear watching in Ockelbo

Get in touch with your wild side on a week-long trip with the Scandinavian specialist Simply Sweden (01427 700115, simplysweden.co.uk), which has introduced bear-watching safaris. In the lake-studded wilderness of Ockelbo, you'll join an expert guide to track brown bears. On the "Escape — Swedish Style" trip, you stay in a cabin in the heart of the animals' environment, as well as a stylish B&B and a red cottage on a secret island. The price is from £1,250pp (£525 per child), including flights, transfers and full-board.

### Summer adventure in Swedish Lapland

Immerse yourself in nature as you hike, fish and forage beneath the midnight sun. Discover the World (01737 214291, discover-the-world.co.uk) has a seven-night trip, staying in Pinetree Lodge, a ten-bedroom property close to the village of Kangas, a two-hour drive from Kiruna airport. A two-bedroom flat and cabins sleeping four are also available. The trip includes a river tour with a night in a wilderness cabin, as well as an evening beaver hike and a day collecting berries and mushrooms. The price is from £1,111pp (£721 per child), including flights from Heathrow to Kiruna via Stockholm, transfers and full-board.

### Bushcraft survival course in Husa

Brush up on your survival skills with a three-day bushcraft course with Vidados (020 3750 2455, vidados.com). Choose from a little cabin in a secluded spot (sleeping two), which has an outdoor sauna, or a Hobbit Hut (sleeping two adults and two children). The price of £360pp includes accommodation and most meals but excludes flights (nearest airports are Trondheim and Osterson). **Ellie Ross**

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