

35 AMAZING DEALS FROM COSTA RICA TO CALIFORNIA

# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

## HOTELS SPECIAL

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# pure sweden

In a country that reveres nature as much as design,  
**HEATHER SMITH MACISAAC** checks  
in to four new hotels that elevate both equally.

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARTHA CAMARILLO





**GOING GREEN** A foliage-roofed cabin at Urnatur Skogsermitage, a nature lodge in southern Sweden. Opposite: A guest at Fabriken Furillen, a hotel off the island of Gotland that's equal parts photo shoot location and offbeat getaway.

SINCE I HAVE VISITED SWEDEN MORE IN WINTER THAN IN ANY OTHER SEASON, I AM WELL-versed in daytime candlelight and soothing saunas and “Jansson’s temptation,” a hearty potato casserole. But for my latest trip, I wanted to follow the Swedes following their midnight-sun bliss, to sample their various notions of perfect summer, and to fantasize about endless time, which the Swedes, given their generous vacations, seem to have. And I wanted to stay briefly in four new or recently reimagined hotels—in wildly different places, from Stockholm and the island of Gotland, in the Baltic, to the woods and mountains—that would allow me to breathe deeply and eat purely, from land and lake. On uniformly good beds under clouds of goose down, I slept »





peacefully in spite of the near ceaseless daylight. In each place, I felt distant from regular life, yet never removed from civilization. Because if there's one thing the Swedes do as well as summer, it's put design on a pedestal as high as nature. Through textures and light, materials and craft, they demonstrate a sensitivity to the environment that, far from being one-note, is a many splendored thing.

### FABRIKEN FURILLEN Gotland

Though I didn't know it at the time, my arrival on the island of Gotland set me up for the moody, monochromatic experience I was to have at Fabriken Furillen, a small hotel that opened in 2000 and expanded for the better part of the next decade. The brief flight from Stockholm descended into fog at little Visby Airport. Then the rain began in earnest, falling so hard and fast that the quick walk to the rental car was a soaker, the 45 minute drive to Furillen a wiper-whipping swim along narrow roads until it slowly lightened to a mist. The gray immersion had begun.

Furillen is itself an islet in the Baltic Sea off the northeastern coast of Gotland. Unlike Fårö, the island just to the north that Ingmar Bergman long called home, a ferry ride isn't required to get there. Still, the sense of crossing to a wholly different place was profound. Craggy limestone formations loomed to the side of the road like tipsy sentries. Just before dipping to sea level and reaching the causeway to Furillen, the road traversed odd, empty, unnatural pools—as if a giant had taken an ice cream scoop to the earth, the flavor of the day being cement.





Everything about Fabriken Furillen is unlikely. What kind of person would look at an old cement factory (*fabriken*) operating out of a limestone quarry, dormant for some 30 years, and see the bones of a hotel? It would have to be someone as visionary as a photographer used to conceptualizing and improvising while on assignment in exotic locations. Tired of being on the road much of the year, away from family, Johan Hellström moved permanently to Furillen in 1999, first renovating the factory with his wife, Anna-Karin, as a studio before expanding it into a hotel. The idea was to promote the factory as much as a location for photo shoots as an unusual escape.

At Fabriken, the visual trumps all else. There is beauty: in a coat tree draped with gray wool throws and the silvery curly pelts of Gotland sheep; in the rough and smooth textures of raw and polished concrete; in the delicate sprig of green leaves laid atop white napkins at the dinner table; and then in the plate of tuna tartare followed by tender slices of reindeer with lingonberry coulis (the food is all the more delectable for its isolated genesis). And there is drama—in spades. Heavy chains still hang from the ceiling of the former workers' canteen; they're no longer used, except as a super-scale necklace-like adornment. Large single-pane windows in the dining room frame a Charles Sheeleresque image of a hulking concrete tower next to a gargantuan heap of slag. There is a rugged, surreal, even romantic allure to the setting that the overcast sky only abetted, allowing all the subtle shades of gray to emerge. Like sound carrying across water, a woman in a bright orange jacket could be seen in the fog, sharp as a spark, way down the beach. One can only

**WOOD WORKS** Clockwise from top left: The restaurant at Stockholm's Hotel Skeppsholmen; a light installation by David Trubridge at the hotel; the outdoor plunge pool at Fjällnäs, a resort in Härjedalen province; Fjällnäs's chapel. Opposite: Chilling at Fabriken Furillen, located in a former cement factory.





imagine the scenes Bergman, were he still filming, could have produced here.

But along with cinematic effects there is a degree of discomfort that comes from a slavishness to style: a small, handsome bar but no cozy lounge; poorly arranged, bare bones bathrooms; no bedside reading lamps but instead an industrial fixture casting a hostile glare over the pillows. I felt at times like an interloper on a fashion shoot, moving amid a stylish young crew who are hospitable and earnest if not so experienced. Yet even interlopers have a fascination with the scene before them. Fabriken Furillen is so unusual a place, one of such brutal beauty, that despite its faults, it stayed with me far longer than I stayed with it.

## HOTEL SKEPPSHOLMEN Stockholm

Was I dreaming? Was it the lingering effects of jet lag? Faintly, but as steadily as waves reaching shore, a chorus of shrieks lapped the window of my room at Hotel Skeppsholmen. The cries, it turned out, were of false terror, erupting from the roller coaster at Gröna Lund—Stockholm's version of Copenhagen's Tivoli—a slingshot's distance across the water. Of all the sounds I had expected to hear at what is perhaps Stockholm's most central hotel, this had not been among them. The next morning, the breakfast terrace provided a more restful sound track: birds scuffling for crumbs; lanyards slapping against metal masts; the clink of cup finding saucer.

Like the still eye of a swirling storm, the island of Skeppsholmen is a calm oasis in the center of Sweden's largest city. Yet it is not a hub. It is convenient enough that every section of the city is a mere walk, bike ride, or ferry trip away, but it is apart. The hotel itself is one of the few commercial enterprises on the island, the others being a restaurant, a hostel aboard a fully rigged 19th-century sailing ship, and two museums. None of them were going to contribute to disturbing the peace. Nor was traffic. Roads on the park-like island are few, cars even fewer. My taxi scarcely found the hotel in the dark, its signage was so minimal.

The discretion is fitting. Built in 1699 to house royal marines—the architect, Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, also designed the Royal Castle—the two 328-foot-long buildings are now protected as significant historic structures. Alteration is so restricted that when the hotel was created in 2009, any modifications needed to be reversible. I could as easily have been a midshipman returning to the barracks in the 18th century as a guest checking in, so little changed is the classic exterior—butter-yellow stucco walls; orderly rows of windows trimmed in gray; chimneys in strict formation atop dormered metal roofs, all in severest black.

Inside, in spite of the restrictions, Hotel Skeppsholmen steps fully into Scandi-modern mode. Sweden's architecture firm of the moment, Claesson Koivisto Rune, turned constraints into assets, emphasizing timeless materials such as wood and stone and adding dimension by playing with light and bursts of color. Punctuating the long corridors and stairwells like guiding beacons are outsize light installations by David Trubridge, Carola Lindh-Hormia, and Jameelah El-Gashigari. In the 81 bedrooms, plain in the manner of a Jil Sander suit, the colors of the Swedish flag turn up in a bright-canary side table and small club chairs upholstered in soft blue. For bathrooms, the designers inserted stand-alone pods, all right angles save for the sensuous porcelain sinks modeled after skipping stones.

Luxury in Scandinavia is never obvious, lest it be mistaken for a French import. At Hotel Skeppsholmen it comes in the form »

Urnatur's owners, Håkan Strotz (left) and Ulrika Krynitz, outside the lodge's Air Castle room, which is suspended over the forest floor, below. Opposite, from top: The breakfast spread at Fjällnäs; inside a room at Hotel Skeppsholmen.





## Sweden

of soaped pine floors smooth to the feet, Duxiana mattresses, duvets sheathed in crisp cotton, and body products from Byredo, an exotic yet made-in-Sweden line with graphics as chic and direct as the hotel's own. Down in the dining room, where the menu is limited but the quality is high, glass walls extend the shimmery effect of light bouncing off water, and a basket of sheepskins sits beside the door to the terrace, ready for use outside as seat cushions, baby blankets, or wraps when the wind picks up. At Hotel Skeppsholmen, in summer, you want to be outside

was still adapting. The brightness of the red and yellow buildings was familiar from the seven-hour drive through the countryside north from Stockholm; the topography was not. Sitting on glacial Lake Malmagen, Fjällnäs is surrounded by raw, rocky, windswept terrain shaped by ice 9,000 years ago. It made me feel both small and at the top of the world.

That a place so rugged, no matter how striking, would be the retreat of choice for well-heeled Stockholmers speaks volumes about Sweden's commitment to nature and appreciation for the fundamental. Guests have come to Fjällnäs since 1882, and the historic lodge is still the centerpiece of the resort, where one

ket at the foot of the bed, there were Missoni towels and bathrobes in rich, narrow stripes. More stripes turned up in upholstered window seats and rag rugs lining a bench in the hall where one can sit down to change out of dirty boots. When it comes to highly refined practicality, Fjällnäs is pitch-perfect. Most bedroom floors are heated, as are towel bars. Each floor comes equipped with a drying closet for wet gear; each building has a vestibule generous enough to accommodate boots, skis, and all-terrain strollers.

Fjällnäs knows its audience: there is very little sitting around. In fact, the place empties out during the day, with



A quiet corner—complete with stuffed mascot—at Fjällnäs, above left. Right: A path at Urnatur Skogseremitage.

as much as in, enjoying its greatest indulgences: the sea at your feet, quiet in your head, and the city all around you.

### FJÄLLNÄS Malmagen

Ski areas in summer have a certain listless, under-landscaped quality. And that was my initial impression of Fjällnäs, a hotel just northwest of the ski town of Tännadalen, on the Norwegian border. The wooden buildings—housing some 45 rooms, plus a hostel, spa, chapel, and main lodge—were unsheltered by vegetation, a bit exposed without their softening blanket of snow. This was my first trip to Härjedalen province—referred to by some as Southern Lapland, even though it's well below the Arctic Circle—and I

sits by the fire, maps out a cross-country-skiing route, and stokes up for the day on salmon, eggs, muesli, and strong coffee. It's also where hikers, cyclists, and families—often three generations' worth—unwind at day's end on the banquettes that line the dining room. Even in the cool daylight that accompanied dinner, everything glowed: the healthy faces and uniformly blond heads, the warm pine walls, the bright brass light fixtures designed by Alvar Aalto in 1939.

Fjällnäs completed a smart renovation and redecoration in 2008. So along with the vintage postcard left on my pillow at night (from a long tucked-away stash found on the property) and the thick wool socks laid atop the blan-

guests taking off in all directions, not to be seen for hours. I joined them, accompanied by my friend Susanne, who had come prepared with caps and rucksacks. We added bottles of water to our picnic lunch, though the manager assured us we could drink straight from any stream. We hiked up a trail through mountain birch; despite its gentle climb, we emerged above the tree line onto a high plain of undulating rock tempered by scruffy vegetation. The scene was so vast, the vista so far and broad, as to be immeasurable. Only a wooden signpost gave any guidance or sense of scale.

Much as I loved my room at Fjällnäs, I could have lived at its Mii Gullo Spa.