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Sörmland, the picturesque region where Swedes head for a country break

Sörmland, with its lush forests and mirror-still lakes, is where Swedes go to get in touch with nature

JOHN GREGORY-SMITH | Friday 9 November 2018 10:41 | 0 comments

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Gripsholm Castle reflected in Lake Malaren, Mariefred, Sweden (Alamy Stock Photo)

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I'm walking through a pretty field next to Lake Malmasjön. Butterflies dart in and out of the grass. The calm water reflects the wonderful old forest that lines the shores. The path that I'm following turns

into the woods, where the tall pine trees sway gently in the morning breeze. Scented with pine cones and wild herbs, the air is invigorating and the stillness is spellbinding.

I'm in **Sörmland**, a province on the south-eastern coast of **Sweden**. It's a vast expanse of fields, stunning lakes and thick forests that tumble down to the blustery Baltic Sea, where the land shatters into an archipelago of nearly 3,000 islands. The region is littered with 17th-century castles that add a glorious grandeur to the scenery. Only 100km from Stockholm, Sörmland is known as the capital's country break: a picturesque playground where city slickers have sensational summerhouses. They come to hike, swim, sail and fish.

I'm staying at Öster Malma hotel, an old castle on the edge of a forest. The main building houses a restaurant and there are several cosy rooms in a nearby barn, but for now, I have worked up quite an appetite, so I polish off a huge plate of freshly baked bread, eggs and bacon, washed down with several cups of strong black coffee.

Located in a quiet corner of Sörmland near the town of Nyköping is my next stop: Lindeborgs Eco Retreat. This little hotel, conceived by Julia Lindeborg and her husband, Carl, has three self-catered rooms built into a wonderfully restored wooden barn and a little cottage for hire.



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Once a corporate power couple, Julia and Carl Lindeborg had a baby and decided to move out of the city for a more holistic lifestyle. They ditched the boardroom for parenthood, bee-keeping, yoga and running an immaculate retreat.

I've been promised an outdoor dinner, but first I sit back with fresh coffee next to a roaring fire in my room. Everything but the Scandi-cool kitchen and slick bathroom is made of wood, and the whole place is framed by a huge glass door that overlooks a cattle-filled meadow that rolls down to Lake Hallbosjön. There's a cute shop where you can buy a few basic provisions — I stock up on local honey and a rather swanky DIY cinnamon bun kit — plus bikes to borrow and a sauna with incredible views of the farm.

Next I'm off to meet Åsa, who is taking me foraging in the local woods and then cooking my dinner. We head into the forest: the floor is a rippling sea of purple and green moss, tall pine trees are covered in soft blue lichen. She points out wild boar tracks and explains how hard it is to catch a glimpse of these nocturnal animals. They're in season right now and on every menu in Sweden (probably why they like to remain anonymous).



(Oster Malma Hotel)

The path winds further into the thick forest, where we spot bright red lingonberries peeping through the moss. These berries are much-loved in this part of the world and are used to pep up many dishes with their tart taste. We're on the hunt for one of autumn's finest ingredients — chanterelle mushrooms. Our search is futile: Åsa tells me that they are usually abundant at this time but the summer heatwave has delayed the season. Luckily she has brought a stash of them with her.



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In a clearing in the woods, Åsa has set up a fire pit, with a metal plate above the flames. She is making viltskavsgryta, wild boar casserole. She throws a few handfuls of nutty chanterelles and sweet red onion onto the metal before pouring thick double cream onto the meat. Next she sears thin slices of wild boar, before pouring thick double cream on to the meat and seasoning it with salt and juniper berries. The sauce bubbles furiously for a few minutes and then she showers the whole dish with fresh lingonberries and wild thyme. It's scrumptious.

Full and happy, I stroll back to my room at Lindeborgs. The fire is just starting to die down and I fall asleep wonderfully content, the default setting for a weekend in Sörmland.

Details: Sörmland

Rooms at Öster Malma Hotel (jagareforbundet.se/en/oster-malma) from £110 per night B&B. Rooms at Lindeborgs (lindeborgs.com) from £115 per night B&B. Wild walking and dinner with Åsa from £114.

Ryanair flies from Stansted to Skavsta from £60 return (ryanair.com).

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