



DESTINATION

Into the twilight

On the doorstep of the Swedish capital, Stockholm, lies a network of islands – some blissfully tranquil, others ready to party.

WORDS **JOHAN AUGUSTIN** | PICTURES **HENRIK TRYGG**

It's late August, after 9pm, and the dark blue light beloved by photographers lingers over the Swedish island of Fejan. Unruffled by any Baltic Sea breeze, the crooked pine trees are perfectly still. If it weren't for the flies swarming around our grill-cooked dinner, all would be at peace.

We eat from a small table, on a wooden patio, on a mountain ledge. And even though the ledge is little more than an hour from downtown Stockholm (by private car and private boat), it feels as though we have been embraced by the vast Lapland forests of northern Sweden.

It's the feeling that appealed to David Kvarn, who has brought "glamping" to the island, through his company, Fejan Outdoor. His canvas tents contain modern beds and linen, hand-woven rugs and blankets. But when he shows the outhouse and alfresco shower to foreign guests, he says they sometimes "look puzzled" at the spartan facilities.

"But nobody has ever complained, and so far the shower hasn't even been used; everyone swims in the sea," says Kvarn, as he joins us for dinner. He describes his typical guests as being "adults over 30 who long for

nature, but haven't been scouts as kids or slept in tents."

Fejan, which measures 600 metres by 1,600 metres and can be strolled around in about two hours, has a permanent population of 10. Other than Kvarn's campsite, the island has a newly renovated restaurant and a hostel, as well as several abandoned buildings that were part of a quarantine station built in the late 1800s during a cholera epidemic. There are no roads, only paths.

"One [potential customer] asked where he could park his car on the island," says Kvarn, and bursts out laughing. He offers glamping during the summer months only, but this could change. "The fall is a beautiful period to spend in the archipelago, and with the stoves in the tents, people can potentially stay towards the winter as well," he says. The hostel, on the other hand, is open all year.

The last beacon of light disappears and the blue slips into semi-darkness, the moon and the stars providing some illumination.

The temperature drops and I feed the stove in my tent with chopped birch wood. The heat spreads slowly. Lying under sheets



Clockwise from far left: David Kvalt of Fejan Outdoor, on the Swedish island of Fejan; glamping at Fejan Outdoor; all set for a swim in the sea around Fejan; the sauna overlooking the marina in Grinda harbour.



and blankets staring into the dancing flames, listening to the crackles, the sense of being one with nature takes hold. Without charging or checking my mobile phone – there is no electricity in the tents, and we are out of range anyway – I drift off to sleep.

The chirping of birds and monotonous pecking of a woodpecker rouse me. Remembering Kvalt's comments about his showers, I follow a trail through the forest to the shore of the motionless Baltic. The water is invitingly clear. I dive in without stopping to consider how cold it might be. A few frantic strokes and I am fully awake.

Consisting of more than 30,000 islands, islets and skerries, the Stockholm archipelago covers 8,000 sq km, running roughly north to south parallel to the coast of mainland Sweden. Hopping on ferries or private craft between the islands, about 200 of which are inhabited, is popular and inexpensive. Among the most frequented islands are Sandhamn, Nättarö and Utö.

In the middle section of the archipelago, Sandhamn is a magnet for party people during the summer, when its bars and

restaurants are crowded with sailors and passengers staying up with the never setting sun. Sandhamn's more tranquil side has sandy beaches but they are bettered by those on Nättarö, in the southern section of the archipelago. Behind those beaches, Nättarö is almost entirely covered in pine and mixed forest, which draws birds and the people who watch them. Utö is one of the biggest islands in the southern archipelago, with flat meadows criss-crossed by gravel roads for bicycles, which can be hired at the marina, rather than cars.

We head, though, for Grinda, in the heart of the archipelago, weaving our small speedboat between many other motor and sailing vessels, and passing islands on which stand grand villas and summer houses. Grinda's proximity to the city centre – an hour's boat ride away – has made it a favourite for many Stockholm residents.

Just behind the harbour, the Grinda trail cuts through coniferous forest studded with moss-covered boulders and runs in a 4.2km loop. To the north, it passes Grinda's highest peak, which rises 35 metres. From the top it is easy to

spot the rocky outcrops on the rugged shoreline that double as sun loungers and diving boards. Rejoining the trail, we startle a roe deer hiding in the foliage.

We pause at an empty beach, with white sand and turquoise water enclosed by a petite bay, and two white sailing boats anchored offshore, passengers sunbathing on deck.

The trail continues to Grinda Wårdshus,



Shrimp skagen.

a yellow art nouveau stone inn that, for more than a century, has catered to those who come for authentic archipelago food. Among the starters is skagen, a dish invented by a Swedish chef but named for a Danish town, which consists of a shrimp mix on Grinda-baked sourdough bread, vendace roe, red onion and lemon. Lamb fillet with potato terrine, chèvre cream and red wine gravy lives up to high expectations, as does the steamed saithe fish with boiled potatoes, beurre noisette and horseradish. Rounding off the feast is elderflower pannacotta with raspberry coulis and rhubarb pie with vanilla ice cream.

Bellies full and with the light once again approaching the blue hour, we descend to Grinda's harbour, a full moon reflected on the water, and enter a new wooden sauna with a huge glass facade overlooking a modern marina that can accommodate about 100 boats.

Birch logs smoulder in the stove as the temperature reaches 80 degrees Celsius. After letting the steam work into my pores, I walk out onto the wooden terrace and dive into the water.

It's still incredibly bracing. ■