

UP NEXT

HOW SWEDEN IS

Sweden's little-known West Coast archipelago is Scandinavia's answer to the luxe summer beach destination, just a remote one.

BY CELINA DINI



Gullmarsstrand Hotel's main building, which sits on the Skagerrak Sea, houses reception and one of Fiskebäckskil's best restaurants.

COURTESY GULLMARSSTRAND HOTEL

Five hours west of bustling Stockholm lies **Fiskebäckskil**, a small fishing village tucked away in the Skagerrak Sea on Skaftö, one of the thousands of islands of Sweden's West Coast archipelago. It's a lush green landscape dotted with small wooden houses, where sun-kissed blond Swedish children run around wearing nothing but floaties on their upper arms, and where my family has spent the summers since I was born.

One of my earliest memories of Fiskebäckskil is being six years old, spending days sitting on the side of the road making a little store, like a lemonade stand. We sold small matchboxes that we'd decorated with seashells, and also mussels that we'd collected and painted. What little money we made, we'd always spend on ice cream.

To get there, one flies into Gothenburg and takes a two-hour bus ride on Västtrafik, the city's public-transportation system. On Skaftö, everyone walks or bikes. People only use cars for coming or going, so they're rarely seen. Between June and September, the weather is perfect—sunny skies, 70-degree temperatures, and the most crisp, clean air.

Our family, which lives most of the year in Manhattan, has a quaint little house on the island, but whenever friends visit, we recommend Fiskebäckskil's 81-room boutique hotel, **Gullmarsstrand** (rooms from \$85; *Strandvägen 2-14*; 46-523/667-788). The location doesn't get any better. We tell people to stay in the sea-view rooms, with floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors that open to private decks. I used the hotel's waterfront coal-burning sauna for the first time last summer, and it was awesome. It sits in a small room atop the water, and there's a door inside that opens to a platform you can jump off into the sea to cool down. The village has two notable places to eat: Gullmarsstrand's 140-seat **Restaurant G**, and weekend-only **Brygghuset** (*Fiskebäckskilsvägen 28*; 46-523/222-22), in the marina, which both serve fresh Scandinavian seafood dishes, such as pan-roasted or breaded cod. We always leave room for dessert because the island is speckled with small, unnamed ice cream stands dishing out fresh waffle cones and straightforward flavors: blueberry, strawberry, melon, and vanilla with chocolate chips.

Sweden is the only place we go as a family where we all sleep in. We wake up to the sound of seagulls and the waves sweeping up against the docks. After a workout and a late lunch, we take our boat to one of the nearby villages—many of which, like Gullholmen and Lysekil, are similar to Fiskebäckskil, with shops, ice cream stands, and restaurants. On our way, we pass fishermen in small wooden boats catching mackerel, a fish traditional in Swedish cooking, and uninhabited islands that are home to dozens of lounging seals. Other days, we'll play on the three European-style red-clay tennis courts at Bökevik—Fiskebäckskil's public beach, which is rarely crowded, always clean, and has no swell—or go on a bike ride on one of the island's four-to-five-mile wooded trails.

But perhaps the most wonderful thing about Fiskebäckskil is what Scandinavian summers are known for: midnight sun. The sky is never really dark. Every single night, around 10:45, we watch from the village windmill as the sunset paints the sky shades of red, orange, blue, and pink. It's a sight that becomes more spectacular each time I witness it. ♦