

# Living clean

Keep it cool with a Scandinavian spa break

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What's the secret behind Scandinavia's success? Every time a new quality-of-life survey finds this chilly, sparsely populated region is home to the happiest people on the planet – Scandinavian countries made up half of the top 10 in the 2015 World Happiness Report, for example – we devote endless column inches to analysing what makes them so much

more satisfied with life than anyone else.

Is it their generous childcare regime, nine-to-five working days, egalitarian society or the ability to make moody, grit-filled dramas that capture the world's attention? Or is it because they prioritise their wellbeing more than most, with spa visits regarded less as an occasional luxury than a weekly necessity?

Whether it's sweating it out in the sauna, leaping from ice baths to steam rooms to get

the blood flowing, or kneading out the knots with a deep-tissue massage, Scandinavians know how to get the most out of the spa – and the rest of the world is only just starting to catch on.

There's nowhere better to experience this than Scandinavia itself, with each country offering a slightly different take on traditional spa techniques. But with hotels around the world starting to cotton on to the benefits of a Scandinavian-inspired spa, it's not the only

place where clients can expect to come home that little bit happier.

## ▶ SUPER SWEDES

"It's definitely a unique experience to go to a spa in the Nordic countries," says Christian Bjork, marketing manager for two of the biggest spa hotels in Sweden, The Retreat Club at Falkenberg Strandbad, and Ystad Saltsjobad.

"The Nordic spa experience is all about different temperatures, so any spa in Scandinavia will





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RIGHT: Ystad  
Saltsjobad

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→ usually have a steam sauna, a dry sauna and a herbal sauna. We don't have hot springs in Sweden, but salt baths are popular because of our closeness to the sea, and we value the light and the heat because it can be quite gloomy and cold here for much of the year.

"Spas in Sweden are traditionally quite medical as well, but we put a bit more effort into the wellness, luxury aspect. Our signature treatment at Ystad

Saltsjobad follows a set path through the three saunas, with a hammam, a rassoul where you cover yourself in mud, then an ice scrub and oil massage.

"It's also weather-proof because it's in the hotel, so if people are anxious about the weather, they're safe to book a retreat in this kind of hotel."

Braver clients can embrace the full Swedish spa experience with a bracing swim in the Baltic Sea at Ystad Saltsjobad or the Kattegatt (fed by the Baltic but closer to the North Sea) at Falkenberg Strandbad,

but there's no shame in the less adventurous sitting back and letting the therapist do the hard work. Both properties are available through Spafinder Wellness 365.

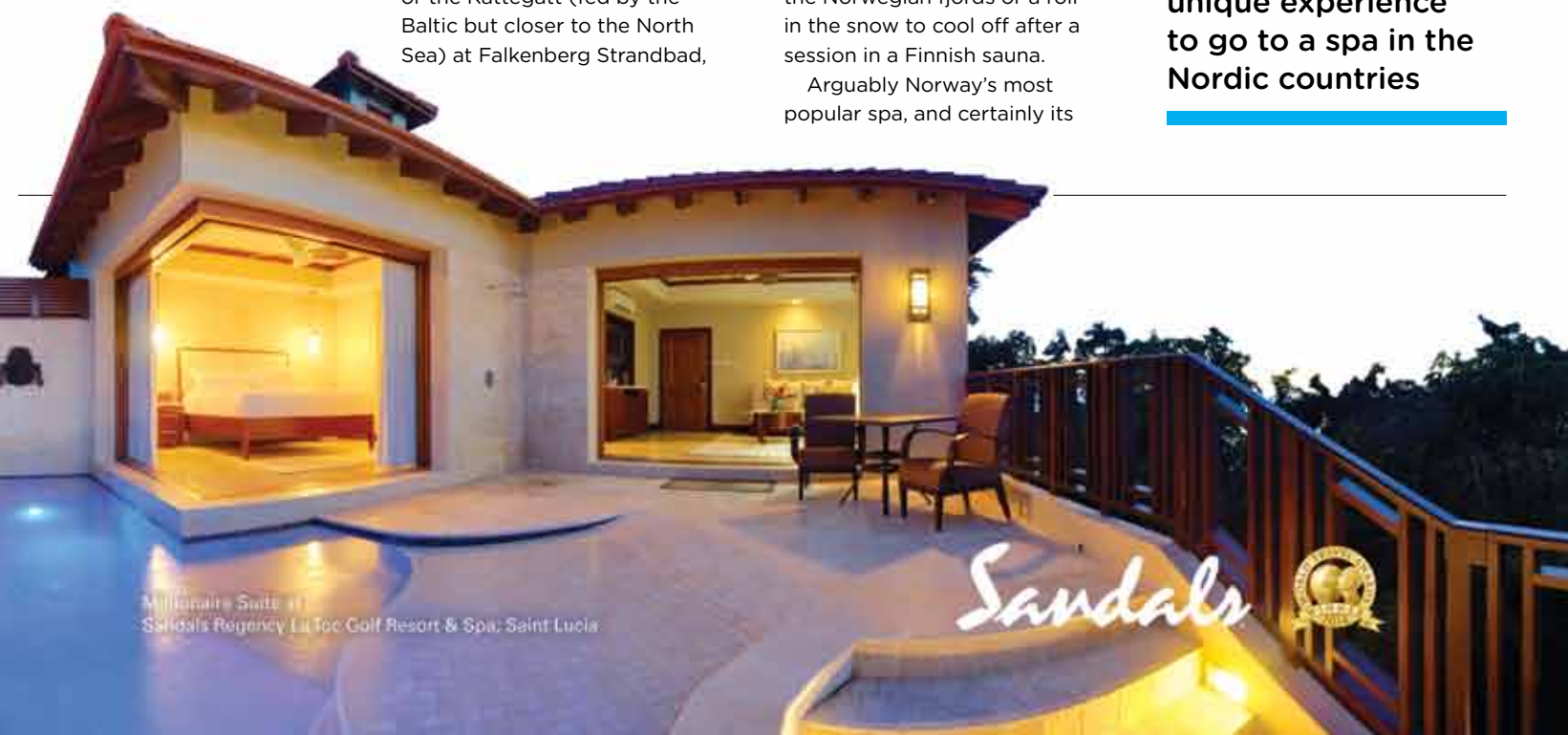
## ► NATURAL HIGH

Getting that at-one-with-nature feel isn't just for the Swedes – it's a central tenet of any Scandinavian spa tradition, whether it's a dip in Iceland's Blue Lagoon, a massage overlooking the Norwegian fjords or a roll in the snow to cool off after a session in a Finnish sauna.

Arguably Norway's most popular spa, and certainly its

largest, Farris Bad is an hour and a half south of Oslo in Larvik, and is one of few in the country to sit on its own natural spring. With waters bubbling up from 55m underground, there has been a public bath on this site since 1843, though these days you're as likely to find spa-goers enjoying the full range of

“It's definitely a unique experience to go to a spa in the Nordic countries”



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→ facials, massages and body scrubs as those coming for the healing powers of the waters.

It's open to non-residents as well as hotel guests, with prices from about £40 for standard entry on weekdays (£24 if booked with a treatment), or from £16 for the Midnight Spa, which runs from 9pm until midnight.

It's not the only unusual spa to grace Norway's shores: between the Solstrand Hotel & Bad offering a Jacuzzi with views across the fjords, the fitness-focused Grand Hotel Oslo providing an impressive city centre spa, and even a wood-fired sauna and hot tub onboard adventure boat *Vulkana*, this is a country that takes its spas seriously.

## ▶ FULL STEAM AHEAD

Northern neighbour Finland is just as deeply rooted in its bathing traditions. Having given us the word 'sauna' in the first place, this ritual is a central characteristic of Finnish culture, with almost every household and workplace boasting a private sauna, including the national parliament.

It's a regular place for Finns to relax and socialise, and if the landscape allows, is often interspersed with a quick dip in a nearby lake or a roll in the snow to get the circulation going.

The etiquette is generally to go without swimwear for 'hygiene reasons'; reticent foreigners can use a towel to protect their modesty but swimsuits or long shorts are best avoided except in international hotels.

Just exploring the four saunas, Turkish hammam and series of heated pools at Naantali Spa, a sizeable resort near Turku on Finland's southwest



### DO

Check the hotel spa etiquette to avoid any swimwear faux pas, as customs vary between countries

### DON'T

Turn down an invitation to a sauna without good reason – it's a mark of honour to be asked

coast, would be enough to occupy most guests for the full duration of their spa visit, without even squeezing in a massage or a facial.

That said, it's worth making time for the hotel's signature clay and peat rituals, from a natural clay body treatment (€66 on weekdays, €72 at weekends) to a whole-body peat therapy stimulating circulation as well as exfoliating the skin (€59/€66).

## ▶ GOING GLOBAL

There's no doubt that heading to the cool shores of Scandinavia is going to result in the most authentic spa experience, but what if clients want a taste of that clean-living culture elsewhere?

The region's spa traditions have developed quite a reputation around the world, with hardly a spa hotel to be found that doesn't at least boast a Finnish sauna or a Swedish massage

somewhere on its treatment menu, though some offer a more traditional take than others.

The Alchemist Grand Hotel and Spa in Prague, Czech Republic, promises to ease muscle aches and tension with its intensive Swedish massage (£59 for 60 minutes/£76 for 90). The five-star hotel is part of Preferred Hotels and Resorts' high-end LVX collection, with rooms starting at £196 a night.

Given its reputation for stellar service, it's hardly surprising that Small Luxury Hotels of the World member CastaDiva Resort & Spa has not just a standard sauna, but a genuine Finnish affair. These wooden slats and wood-burning stove will transport guests from the edge of beautiful Lake Como to the hot and steamy saunas of Finland itself, while those seeking an added element of privacy can even book a spa suite complete with its own sauna and steam bath. TW



**TOP LEFT:**  
Naantali Spa

**TOP RIGHT:**  
Alchemist Grand Hotel & Spa

**LEFT:** CastaDiva Resort & Spa