

Arctic Bath

HARADS

The team behind Sweden’s Treehotel launches a floating spa complex and cabins on the Lule river, which freeze into the ice mass when temperatures cool.

Words: Lisa Kjellsson • Photography: © Daniel Holmgren

The story of how a tiny village in Swedish Lapland inspired some of the quirkiest hotel designs in Scandinavia is really quite remarkable. Located just 50km south of the Arctic Circle, Harads, a community with fewer than 600 residents, has been put firmly on the map over the past decade thanks to Treehotel – a collection of seven uniquely designed treehouses created by Sweden’s Bolle Tham and Martin Videgård, Finnish architect Sami Rintala and the uber-cool Norwegian firm Snøhetta.

The idea, however, was dreamt up by local couple Britta and Kent Lindvall, and came together after Kent casually mentioned it during a fishing trip to Russia with three friends, who just so happened to be Swedish architects Bertil Harström, Thomas Sandell and Mårten Cyrén. Since its launch in 2010, Treehotel has featured on countless hot lists, but what no-one knew was that there was something missing from the concept. Since the very beginning, there had been plans to build a floating sauna on the Lule River to complement the lofty living quarters.

Initially, the vision was for a glass cube on a raft, but Harström, who created Treehotel’s Bird’s Nest suite, had other ideas. Having taken over the project in 2013, he and interior architect Johan Kauppi designed a log-covered circular building likened to a bird’s nest. The project was complex to say the least, but eventually made its debut earlier this year as Arctic Bath.





Split-level, elevated suites hug the tree-lined shore, with all featuring a floor-to-ceiling window that faces out onto the riverscape

Floating or frozen depending on the season, the design concept represents a log jam – a reference to the river’s timber-transporting past. The main building houses a restaurant as well as a spa comprising a steam room, two saunas and a treatment room, and is designed around an open-air plunge pool filled with unheated river water. The Swedes call it a cold bath, something of an understatement in winter, when temperatures can drop to –30c and the water – once a hole has been hacked in the ice – is just a few degrees above freezing.

However popular the concept would prove with hardy wellness seekers, it was decided that the outdoor bath and sauna would work better with accommodation on site, and so six floating cabins – accessed from the shore via a footbridge and outside wooden decks – were added to form the ideal retreat for keeping watch of the Northern Lights. A further six split-level suites designed by Annkathrin Lundqvist also hug the tree-lined shore, all featuring a floor-to-ceiling window that faces the riverscape.

The idea is to appeal to luxury travellers drawn to Lapland by its acres and acres of untouched wilderness, pure air and tranquillity. Eco-conscious guests will no doubt also appreciate the lengths the designers have gone in order to keep the environmental footprint at a minimum. No trees were felled to make space for the development, while the six shoreside cabins are elevated so as not to damage the land, as well as safeguarding against floods. In addition to the focus on sustainable materials – primarily pine, slow-dried the traditional way and treated with eco-friendly tar and oils rather than harsh chemicals – even the lorries and diggers used during the build ran on biofuel.

It’s an ambitious project – especially considering that none of the six original owners, apart from Treehotel’s Kent Lindvall, had any prior experience in the hospitality sector – and until tour operator Nordic stepped in to invest, a lack of funds and technical issues caused major delays. “It’s been a real challenge building a floating hotel in this Arctic climate,” admits





Lundqvist. “The water level fluctuates by as much as two metres, so we have had to factor a lot of flexibility into the build.”

Inside, the locally sourced theme continues with pine-clad walls, Baltic limestone flooring, and Carpe Diem beds draped in grey linen and sheepskin, as well as furniture by Karl Andersson & Söner, Swedese and &Tradition, and lighting by Örsjö, Ifö Electric and Ateljé Lyktan in the cabins. Eco-friendly wood pellet burners add a cosy touch, while the overall effect is Scandi-minimalist. Bathrooms are spacious and stocked with Kerstin Florian products, which can also be found in the spa.

In the main building meanwhile, a 24-cover restaurant is furnished by Swedish brands such as Stolab, Blå Station and Norrgavel. The kitchen is headed up by Sámi chef Kristoffer Åström, who has made a name for himself by introducing indigenous flavours to restaurants across the country, and Maarten De Wilde, whose CV includes a string of Michelin-starred eateries in his native Belgium. Ingredients

are locally sourced and organic, with dishes including delicacies like creamed salsify with smoked marrowbone and moose heart.

Though the lobby lounge and bar are compact – it seems there just wasn’t enough space for a separate quiet nook – chances are guests will prefer to spend their time outside, where an action-packed activities programme ranges from dog sledding, snow-shoe hiking, ice skating and cross-country skiing to bike excursions, bear watching, fishing and wildlife photography. And the beauty of Arctic Bath is how it changes throughout the seasons – international visitors will no doubt be fascinated by the snow-draped winter landscape or the light-filled summer nights, but for Lundqvist, it looks particularly striking in the autumn: “Even each season varies from month to month – we have eight rather than four seasons here, so depending on the time of year guests visit, they’ll have a totally different experience.”



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner / Operator: Arctic Bath

Investor: Nordic

Architecture: Bertil Harström and Johan Kauppi (water cabins and main building), Annkathrin Lundqvist (land cabins and suites)

Interior Design: Annkathrin Lundqvist, Input Interior

Lighting Design: Ateljé Lyktan

Graphic Design: Mera Media

Main Contractor: Vittjärsvhus

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