

Winter adventures in Lapland

Whizzing through a dreamlike winter landscape on a snowmobile to go ice fishing, soaking up the peaceful tranquillity of the snow-covered forests and open expanses on a dog sledge, marvelling at the stunning ice hotel, ride through the glistening powder snow whilst encountering reindeer and elk, and in the evening enjoy a traditional dinner by the fire in the Goathi before gathering at nightfall to keep an eye out for the mesmerising Northern Lights – that sums up an unforgettable winter holiday in Lapland, Sweden.

Even our arrival is an adventure: the plane lands on a runway completely covered in snow – which gives me a bit of a fright at first, until I realise it's no problem for the aircraft. After taking my first steps across the crunching snow, I spot Matti, who welcomes us with a beaming smile. We – three Swiss women, a Frenchwoman and myself – are very excited about the winter adventure ahead and eagerly ask Matti all sorts of questions during our short drive from Kiruna to the farm in Poultsa, a tranquil cluster of several farmsteads. We reach the farm in the dark and are immediately lucky enough to marvel at the Northern Lights in the sky – we're thrilled! After a delicious dinner of spaghetti Bolognese with elk meat, salad and a lovely homemade cake, we're called outside: a female elk is happily nibbling away at the hay rack in the paddock with her twin calves – our first day couldn't have been any more perfect! Finally, filled with joyful anticipation for the next day, we snuggle up in our cosy guesthouse, which also features a parlour and a stove.



The next morning, we discover just how beautifully the farm nestles into the landscape – on one side it is surrounded by high mountains, on the other by fairytale forests. A very special experience awaits us straight away: after a hearty breakfast that leaves nothing to be desired, we put on every item of clothing that promises warmth and set off – in

pairs – on snowmobiles to a lake to go ice fishing. It's great fun to explore the enchanted snowy landscape in a way that's new to us, whilst spotting the occasional moose and reindeer peeking shyly out of the undergrowth, stopping to watch them for a while. The mother moose we've seen before even strolls right past our companions with her calf! After crossing a desert-like, snow-covered area, we reach our destination and set about drilling holes in the thick ice with all our might. We then spend the next hour lying comfortably on a reindeer skin, enjoying the view and waiting for fish. Only one of us is to be successful, however – but a picnic lovingly prepared by Matti, featuring reindeer meatballs cooked over the fire, awaits us all. It's fascinating to watch as the fire gradually eats its way into the ice. After a brisk ride back, our first riding lesson awaits us at the farm following a siesta. Kerstin is very skilled at teaching and instructs us in the 'tölt', the gait typical of Icelandic horses. Another lovely evening passes with even more Northern Lights, which we'll be able to admire almost every evening from now on – sometimes less vivid, sometimes more so.

Over the next few days, we have more riding lessons and go on various rides through the woods and even across the ice! We're set to come across even more reindeer herds, and the little moose family also makes more frequent appearances on the farm – either to help themselves to some hay or to have a siesta. The farm's 20 or so Icelandic horses are all very well-trained and make for loyal, patient companions whom we quickly grow fond of. They also love to romp about in the paddocks right next to the guest house and the stables: it's not uncommon to see them, bursting with energy, testing their strength in duels and chasing each other across the paddocks.



One day, another fantastic experience awaits us: dog sledding. But first, at the dog farm, we get to meet the dogs and their puppies and are showered with

petting. Then things get a bit hectic: it's time to harness them. Each team consists of a sledge carrying two people and five Siberian Huskies, who are simply adorable! However, they're quite restless, fidgety and barking with excitement. So we struggle to put their harnesses on and strap them in a neat line to the sledge. Once each team finally has their dogs under control, we're off: I'm very excited, as I'm the first to stand at the back on the runners of the sledge and have no idea what to expect. But after we've hurtled down the first hill at full speed, the ride becomes relaxed and we cheer – it's simply a unique experience to glide almost silently through the woods and across open fields in glorious sunshine! After a while, we stop for a break at a sort of teepee – once the dogs have been unhitched, we make ourselves comfortable inside by the fire and are served a lovely lunch. We quickly bond with our dogs and re-hitching them goes like clockwork – partly because the dogs aren't quite as full of energy now. I feel a pang of sadness when we arrive back at the dog farm and have to say goodbye to them – an unforgettable adventure!

We spend our final afternoon at the world-famous Ice Hotel in Jukkasjärvi. From the very first glimpse of the hotel, we're captivated by its magic and happily explore the variously designed rooms, the chapel and, of course, the ice bar! We can't stop marvelling at the sheer attention to detail with which ice and snow have been transformed here into a vast work of art – simply fantastic! Afterwards, we round off the evening in a cosy restaurant – what a special holiday it has been, with so many priceless memories!

We spend our final morning in Kiruna, where we visit a few sights, have a bit of a stroll and enjoy a coffee. Then it's already time to say goodbye, which is by no means easy for us.

In any case, over the past few days we've learnt that a snow-covered winter landscape can serve many purposes: whether as a backdrop for a mother moose and her twin calves, as the foundation for the incomparable Ice Hotel, or as the setting for plenty of fun, namely dog sledging, snowmobiling, ice fishing and horse riding.

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Link to the programme: <http://www.equitour.com/retwin.htm>