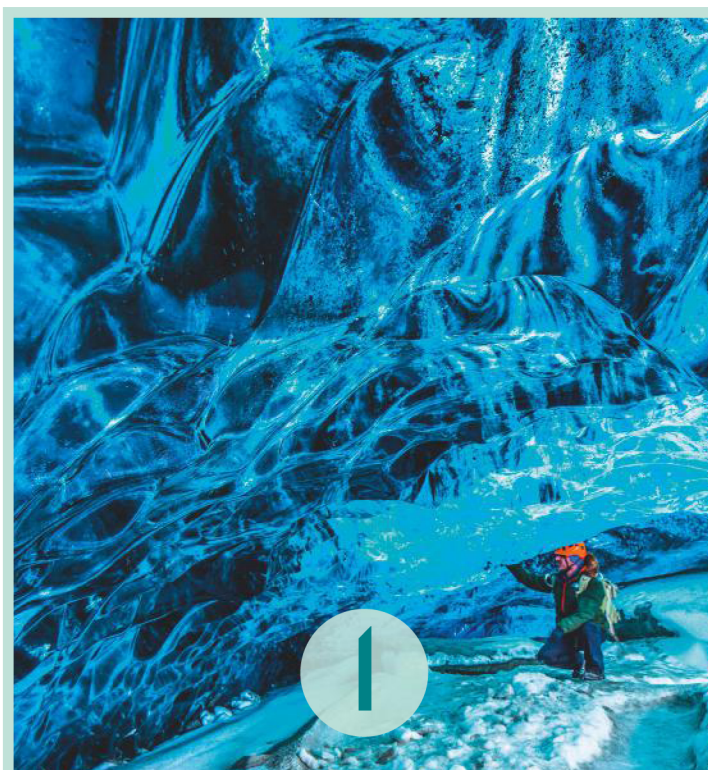


6 of the BEST

WINTER ESCAPES

Sell a winter holiday to Scandinavia with
Laura French's pick of the highlights

1owering pines dusted with freshly-fallen powder, dusky pink skies stretching into infinity and blankets of white snow glittering like a Christmas card – Scandinavia in the winter is nothing short of mesmerising. And it's all the more special when darkness falls, bringing glimpses of the elusive aurora to those in the right place at the right time. Throw in a generous array of winter activities, a smattering of unusual stays and a handful of festive city breaks and it's hard to find a reason not to sell this region for the colder season – especially for those who've missed out on a summer break and want to make up for lost time. So where should you suggest and why? We've put together our pick of the best.



TAKE A ROAD TRIP AROUND ICELAND

Reykjavik and the Golden Circle have become bucket-list staples the world over and for good reason, with their theatrical scenes of exploding geysers, crashing falls and kaleidoscopic lakes. But this extraordinary country has plenty more to offer those willing to dig deeper, not least in the east – where the volcanic peaks and dramatic glaciers of Skaftafell meet lesser-visited geothermal sites like Lake Myvatn – and the north, where quaint fishing towns such as Husavik, known as the whale-watching capital, sit amid swathes of picturesque farmland.

Book it: Regent Holidays combines the highlights of the south, east and north in a 10-day Iceland on the Road self-drive, priced from £1,455 including flights, car hire and accommodation on a B&B basis. regent-holidays.co.uk



SLEEP IN AN ICE PALACE

Fancy sleeping in a room made entirely of ice, with an ice-block bed covered in reindeer skin and with the temperature resting at a nose-tingling -5C? It might sound a little bizarre – and it is – but the iconic Icehotel manages to pull it off, and to spectacular effect. Scandinavia Only pairs it with two nights at Sweden's second-quirkiest spot, the Treehotel, where futuristic abodes designed like UFOs, birds' nests and other whacky creations hover high in the pines, and night photography workshops, hiking trips, culinary tours and Sami experiences offer an alternative take on this diverse, nature-loving country.

Book it: Scandinavia Only's Treehotel and Icehotel trip costs from £2,435 in February. scandinaviaonly.co.uk

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GET ACTIVE IN NORWAY

If your clients like the idea of staying in a secluded fishing cabin with nothing but the sound of rustling leaves and rippling waters to wake up to in the morning, suggest the Malangen Resort in Norway, where quaint fjordside cabins and hotel rooms overlook a mirror-flat stretch of water, easily accessible via a 90-minute transfer from Tromsø. There's plenty to be getting on with for those after adventure, from fat biking through the wilderness to snowshoeing through the forest, cross-country skiing over the hills to indigenous storytelling with Samis, while dogsledding safaris teach guests how to mush huskies as they glide through scenes that belong on a Christmas card.

Book it: Best Served Scandinavia has a four-day trip here starting from £1,085 including return flights to Tromsø, transfers, three nights' half-board and a husky sledding trip. best-served.co.uk



4

SEE SANTA IN LAPLAND

For clients travelling with kids in tow, few experiences are quite as magical as seeing Father Christmas in his legendary habitat, reindeer plodding gently over mounds of glittering snow. For a standout package suggest the aurora break in Finland from Santa's Lapland, which throws in everything from snowmobiling to ice fishing, tobogganing to tandem skiing across four Santa-themed days. Highlights include a visit to an igloo for festive games, a trip to a reindeer farm for a jingling sleigh ride, and a visit to see Santa in a secluded log cabin, reached by an elf-guided snowmobile adventure through the remote Saariselkä forest.

Book it: A three-day Santa's Aurora break costs from £4,326 for a family of four including flights, transfers, thermal clothing, activities and half-board accommodation, departing December 7. santaslapland.com



DESTINATIONS

SCANDINAVIA | WINTER

5



CRUISE THE NORWEGIAN FJORDS

Sailing along Norway's craggy coastline is the stuff of dreams for many, and there's no time like winter to see its glacial waters, snow-dusted peaks and plunging waterfalls from the warmth of a ship. New cruise line Havila Voyages – starting operations in early 2021 with two new-build, emission-free ships – offers exactly that, with a 12-day, 34-port round-trip from Bergen taking passengers up to the Arctic Circle with excursions including king crab fishing, dog sledding and northern lights hunting as they sail up the coast to Kirkenes. Time-poor guests can hop on for a few days, or opt for a six-night Northbound Voyage around the beautiful North Cape Plateau.

Book it: Winter departures for a 12-day sailing start at £964 cruise-only, based on an inside cabin. Bookings will launch later this year. havalavoyages.com

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GET CULTURAL IN COPENHAGEN

It's not only about the Arctic, of course; winter brings Christmas markets and plenty of other festive frolics to Scandinavia's smattering of cities, and it doesn't get much more magical than Copenhagen, where ice rinks illuminated in fairy lights, cosy cafes serving homemade gløgg and an annual parade where decorated kayaks glide down the canal greet anyone looking to truly understand the meaning of *hygge*. At its heart is Tivoli, the 177-year-old amusement park that turns into a winter wonderland come November with festive parades, atmospheric market stalls and Christmas-themed rides bringing families flocking from far and wide, lights and baubles covering its already-enchanting gardens to magical effect.

Book it: Two nights at the four-star Hotel SP34 costs from £199, including flights from Gatwick departing December 11. ospreyholidays.com



PICTURES: iStockphoto/Tommy Alatalo, Mattias Sjöström, Asaf Kilger, Jirka; Havila Voyages/Kaare Johansen; Shutterstock