

Go with the snow

Forget Father Christmas – Finnish Lapland isn't just for families, says **Kelly Ranson**

With a deep breath, I slowly dipped my toes into the frozen hole beneath me. Little by little, I bravely moved down the ice-cold ladder below to my knees, then my waist, then my whole body.

No more than 20 seconds passed before I jumped out, threw my robe around me and ran to the steaming sauna a few metres away. Ice swimming had now been officially ticked off the 'I must be mad, but why not, I'm in Lapland' list.

An hour later and I felt a mix of exhilaration and total relaxation – a feeling that becomes oh-so-familiar when you spend a few days in the ultimate outdoor playground of Finnish Lapland.

During the peak rush of the festive season, you will no doubt have clients eager to book their once-in-a-lifetime family trip to the real winter wonderland, but it's also one of the most magical destinations for adults too – and it needn't be December or have a Santa in sight.

The vast wilderness of Finland's Arctic region offers experiences that are a true feast for all five senses – from thrilling ice swimming to adrenaline-fuelled snowmobile safaris, snowshoeing at ➤

BOOK IT

Best Served Scandinavia offers a four-night stay on a full-board basis at Beana Laponia from £2,070 per person. This includes flights from London to Rovaniemi, transfers, winter clothing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling excursions, plus a five-hour husky safari, a visit to a reindeer farm and complimentary use of toboggans and cross-country skis. best-served.co.uk/agents

night to hunting for the aurora borealis as they dance through the sky.

There are even greater offerings for grown-ups who choose to explore this part of the world without children, with adult-only properties, exquisite spas and cutting-edge dining the main attractions.

Magnetic North Travel's marketing manager, Vanessa Sumpmann, says: "I'd say the beauty of these adult-only lodges lies in the good balance between memory-making wilderness adventures, and romantic relaxation – couples return revived and with a story to tell. This combination makes these adult-only trips attractive to honeymooners seeking an unusual and exclusive travel experience."

ROVANIEMI

Play: While Rovaniemi may be the home of Santa's village, it's certainly not the only reason to land at this city's airport (which is served by easyJet from Gatwick and Manchester, and Norwegian from Gatwick throughout the winter season). Head away from Finnish Lapland's capital to adult-only hotel Beana Laponia, which describes itself as a wilderness boutique with safaris on the side. The name translates to 'dogs of Lapland' and it prides itself on offering small-group husky safaris with some of the most energetic and



CLOCKWISE

FROM LEFT: Huskies; Sámi Museum Siida; Beana Laponia; Aurora eMotion; taking an ice bath

PICTURES: Visit Finland/Huskies_Hetta; Siida/Harri Nurminen; Mihtiander



top tip

Many hotels provide outer winter clothing – think overcoats, waterproof trousers, gloves and snow boots – making it easier for clients to pack lighter



excitable dogs you will have the pleasure of meeting. It's like telling your dog it's time for a walk and then upping the excitement level by 100. Guests experience mushing – dog sledding – through ice and snow and head deep into the forest for yet another bucket-list-worthy day.

Pause: Finland isn't known for its foodie appeal, but with freshly caught and locally sourced fish and meats the order of the day, the Lappish restaurant scene is evolving and it's often one of the biggest surprises for guests. The Arctic Light Restaurant, part of the Arctic Light Hotel, is a small dining venue that gives guests top notch flavours from around Finland.

Staying in town? Try out the world's first electric snowmobiles. Aurora eMotion offers tours on emission-free eSleds – as well as being eco-friendly, they are utterly silent, giving you the chance to get a closer look at reindeer and other local wildlife (prices from €119).

LEVI

Play: If you have clients looking to include classic skiing days on a trip to Lapland, then suggest Levi. Accessible from Kittila airport, Levi's hills offer 43 slopes catering to all abilities (and there are more than 140 miles of cross-country ski tracks, too). Once off-piste, they can combine the skiing adventure with other classic Nordic activities the area has to offer. ➤

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WHERE TO STAY



Save: Glass Igloos in Levi

Who wouldn't want to spend a night under the stars in the comfort of their own (heated) igloo? It's what winter Instagram dream snaps are made for, and waking up to a white landscape is hard to beat.

Book it: Best Served Scandinavia recommends combining a night in an igloo at Levin Iglut with a stay at the Levi Panorama Hotel in town. Rates at the former start at €299 for two sharing a Superior Igloo before October 31, and €429 thereafter. leviniglut.net



Spend: Boutique retreat by Lake Inari

It's hard to believe Wilderness Hotel Nangu is a 20-minute drive from Ivalo airport. This boutique retreat, designed like a traditional lodge, is set in a tranquil location on the edge of Lake Inari and has Arctic adventures on its doorstep, plus a lakeside location that allows for night snowshoeing and northern lights spotting.

Book it: From €249 per night. Magnetic North Travel offers four-day packages to the lodge. nellim.fi/nangu



Splurge: Presidential dwellings in Saariselka

Javri Lodge excels in design and style. Twin this with its history as a former retreat of Finland's longest-serving president, Urho Kekkonen, and it's somewhere to boast about. It doesn't come cheap, but it's worth the splurge.

Book it: Rates from €1,690 for two sharing per night, including all meals, afternoon tea and a daily activity such as a reindeer safari or snowmobiling. javri.fi

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Pause: The Design Hotel Levi is set to open in November, right in the heart of town, promising modern Lappish design in a boutique property. The facilities of the adjacent Levi Spa Hotel are also available to use with multiple indoor and outdoor pools and, of course, a Finnish sauna.

SAARISELKA

Play: In the north of the region sits the village of Saariselka and Lake Inari, which are much easier to reach now thanks to seasonal flights with Finnair from Gatwick to Ivalo (December to March only). Far more remote than the other destinations, you truly know you are miles into the Arctic Circle, and there are so many possibilities for outdoor pursuits. Spend the day exploring with a local guide, try Artisan Travel's three-day husky safari or, if you have brave clients, suggest ice swimming.

Best Served Scandinavia's product and trade sales manager, Kirsi Jokela, also recommends the far north for learning about the indigenous Sami culture. She says: "I would suggest a visit to the Sami

“Dining is at another level, with each meal featuring a decadent tasting menu

Siida Museum to really get a feel for the history, the handcraft studios in Inari, as well as a visit to a local reindeer farm for a thorough insight into the local culture.”

Pause: For pure luxury, Javri Lodge in Saariselka ticks all the boxes. Once a presidential retreat, the current owners have transformed the 13-room property into something even more special, combining the original wooden lodge elements with a clean and contemporary design. Dining is at another level, with each meal featuring a surprising and decadent tasting menu, and all ingredients sourced within 60 miles of the hotel. Add to this a pool, sauna, massage facilities and an outdoor activity included each day, and you won't want to leave. **TV**