

Fall 2014

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Reindeer Herding in **LAPLAND**

I am sitting in a wood-burning sauna in Lapland, the northernmost part of Finland where, although it feels like 150 degrees Fahrenheit inside, outside it's less than 20 degrees Fahrenheit – not surprising, as I am 186 miles north of the Arctic Circle. This most northern part of Europe is home to the Lapps (also known as the Sami) – indigenous people who have lived here since the Ice Age. Once, the Sami made their living by hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding. Now, there are only 700 reindeer herders left, but Lapland is still all about reindeer: as an industry, for food, clothing, and even the names of drinks. Last night I tried “Tear of the Reindeer” (Cointreau and vodka).

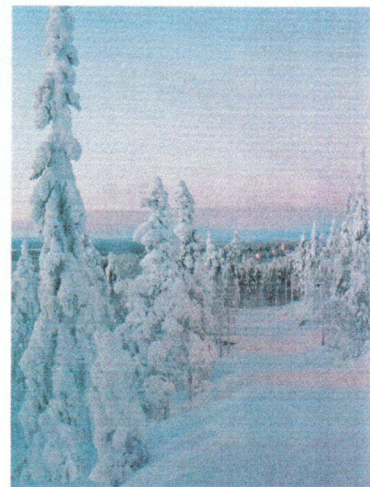
by MARGIE GOLDSMITH*

Our travel agent has arranged for an English-speaking Finnish guide and van to transport our group of six along the snow-covered roads. Yesterday, we went to a reindeer farm and I hopped into a sledge (the Finnish word for sled), pulled by a tame reindeer named Rudolph. Most reindeer are not tame, have no names, and live in the forest in herds. They eat lichen and mushrooms, though reindeer herders deliver hay to supplement their winter diet. Every part of the reindeer has a use: meat for eating, skin for clothing and blankets, head for dog food, hooves for boots, and antlers for handicrafts. The herders also grind the antlers into a powder that the Japanese buy as Viagra, though the Sami reindeer farmer admits it has no powers.

The reindeer sledge ride feels childish and I can't wait for the real deal: to shadow an authentic reindeer herder through the forest. Lucky for me, at my request, the guide and my travel agent have arranged it – something truly special. After breakfast, the group leaves to go snowmobiling and dog sledding. Kirsten Mattus, the reindeer herder's wife,

picks me up and drives me to her house where I meet her husband Petri, a 36-year-old Sami reindeer herder who runs reindeer tours into the forest. He outfits all his clients in an insulated snowsuit, snuggly mittens, and warm boots.

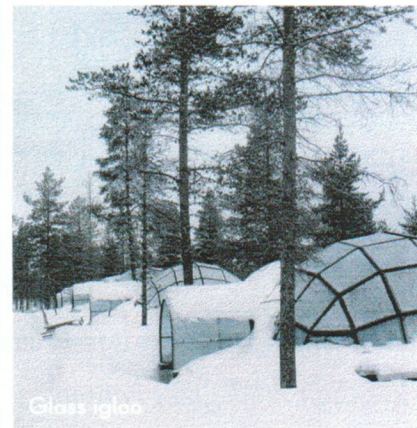
Petri drives out three times a week to feed the reindeer by snowmobile, pulling a sledge for both passengers and a bale of hay. We ride into the silent forest beneath a canopy of snow-blanketed branches, past snowdrifts the size of igloos and fox tracks in the snow.



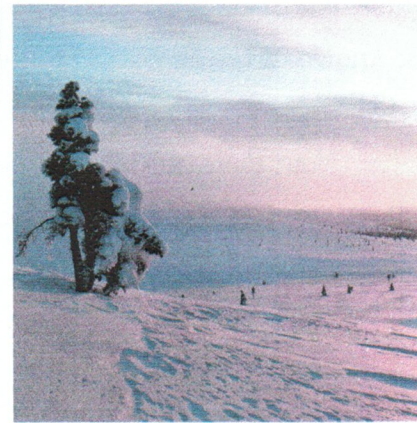
Margie and Petri



Margie and Sami farmer



Glass igloo



His first word was kelka (snowmobile), and he helped his father herd from the age of 10.



After about ten miles, we stop at a clearing. Petri unloads a bale of hay from the sledge, spreads it on the snow-packed ground, and calls out, "Oyyyyyiaiii — oyyyyy — aiii." After a few minutes, there's a clicking sound as small groups of reindeer trickle towards us. Reindeer have two extra bones in their foot that click so they can hear each other in the dark and know it's not a predator.

More reindeer approach. I'd like to ask how many reindeer he owns, but that's considered rude, like asking how much money one has in the bank. I count over 100. Petri splits a log, makes a fire in the snow, slices some fresh reindeer meat from a bag and cooks it in an iron skillet. Lapland food includes freshwater salmon, arctic char, and trout, but reindeer is

the specialty; I've tried it in stew, as a steak, and as sausage. It's succulent, a cross between tenderloin and lamb.

Petri's father was a reindeer hunter and from the time he was little, Petri never thought of anything else. His first word was *kelka* (snowmobile), and he helped his father herd from the age of 10. His favorite moment is when he sees a newborn. "First, they find their mother's milk, then, after a few hours, they learn to walk," he says. "After the first day they can run so fast, you can't keep up with them." Back at his farm, he puts a reindeer skull on the ground and throws the rope into a perfect arc, lassoing the skull. "Now you know how I caught my wife," he laughs, "though it's much harder to catch a running reindeer."

A few hours later, I am outfitted in another warm snowsuit, boots and helmet and follow the snowmobile instructor onto the frozen lake to reunite with my group. Half are dogsledding

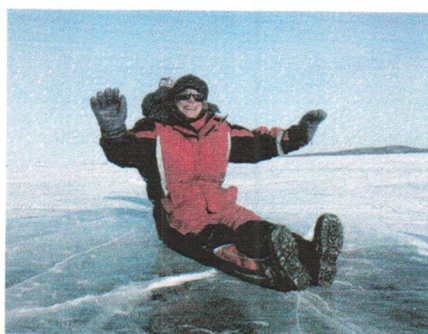
and half are snowmobiling, so I trade my snowmobile for a dogsled and race across the frozen ice, pulled by the joyous dogs. It's almost as good as being out with Petri.

"I am so jealous," says Marco, my traveling companion, as we sit in the steamy sauna and I tell them about my forest adventure. "So now, you pay!" He pulls me out of the sauna down the snowy path to the lake where there's a hole in the frozen ice. "Do it fast," he says. I race down the ladder, submerge myself in the freezing water to my neck, then, climb up and run back into the hot sauna where Marco hands me a beer. "You've earned it," he grins.

Later, we all pile inside our guide's snugly ice igloo and stare up through the glass at the blackness. And then, as if on cue, a colossal green genie dances across the entire expanse of the sky, swirling into exotic patterns and changing into neon colors of violet and orange and yellow — one of the greatest of nature's productions: the northern lights.

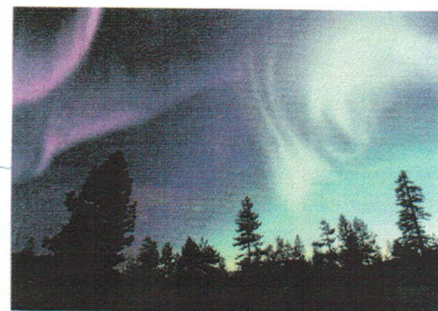


Petri feeding the reindeer



*I trade my snowmobile
for a dogsled and race
across the frozen ice,
pulled by the joyous dogs.
It's almost as good as
being out with Petri.*

To plan your own trip to Finland, please see page 74, or contact your Ensemble Travel® Group consultant.



The Northern Lights

The bright lights that seem to dance across the sky are caused by collisions of electrically charged particles from the sun, which enter the earth's atmosphere. The lights can be seen above the magnetic poles of both the northern and southern hemispheres. In the north they are called the Aurora borealis and in the south, Aurora australis. The lights can appear in many colors such as red, yellow, blue and violet, but the most common are green and pink. The type of gas particles colliding causes the variations in color. The lights appear in many different forms - they can look like a balloon about to explode or streamers dancing in the wind, arcs, rippling waves or shooting rays. Cloud cover will obscure the lights, and there is no guarantee of seeing them. In Finnish Lapland, only three nights out of ten are usually clear. If you plan to view the Northern Lights outdoors (and not in the comfort of a heated all-glass igloo) dress very warmly: hat, gloves, lined boots, long underwear, fleece, down jacket, waterproof layer, and hand and feet warmers for those who get cold quickly.

To Get There: Your travel agent can arrange your flight from the USA to Helsinki and then a short flight to Ivalo in the north.

When To Go: March is a good time to view the Northern Lights, with bright blue skies and snow. Spring is muddy and early summer brings mosquitoes. August is ideal, as is autumn for the foliage.