



Kota-Husky dogs pull a sled in Riisitunturi National Park.

RIISITUNTURI, RUKA AND REINDEER

For visitors looking to add a faster-paced element to their Finland vacation, nearby Riisitunturi National Park offers options. The Kota-Husky experience allows you to pilot a two-person sled, pulled by a team of very eager dogs, on a 10-kilometre thrill ride through the snow. There is a mechanism that allows you to make minor steering adjustments along the trail, but mostly I relied on my trust in the dogs and an effective foot brake. Afterwards, we were served a generous portion of hearty stew while sitting around the fire in a traditional *lávvu* (a teepee-like structure used by the region's Indigenous population, the Sámi). We also met some of the farm's retired sled dogs, who prefer lounging on sofas in the main barn and like being scratched behind the ears or under their chins.

A day trip to the ski town of Ruka is also included in the Exodus itinerary. While the town's main attractions are the slopes and après-ski spots, you can also visit a family-run reindeer farm or book a snowmobiling safari. Take the Ruka gondola to the top of the slopes and enjoy marshmallow-topped hot chocolate (or a beer) at the Heineken Polar Bar, an outdoor ice café. Then, ride down on the far side and hike around the mountain on the well-maintained footpaths leading back to the centre of the village.

By March, the region surrounding Oulanka averages 60 to 90 centimetres of snow, and the many pine trees are bent under its weight. Snow in such abundance is perfect for building a *lumikammi*, a temporary shelter resembling the Canadian quinzhee, which is made by piling snow into a heap and hollowing the centre. Building a *lumikammi* is a popular activity for Basecamp Oulanka guests, with the option of spending the entire night there or, as I did, just snapping a quick photo before heading back to the sauna and a warm bed. Yes, Finland helped me learn to love winter, but even love has its limits. **CAA**

“
Finns
have made
embracing
the cold an
art form.”

AN ARCTIC EXPEDITION TO ROVANIEMI

Just six kilometres south of the Arctic Circle is Rovaniemi, home base for Father Christmas, or Joulupukki, as locals call him. In winter, many tourists travel more than 700 km from Helsinki by train or plane to meet the Big Man himself at the local Santa Claus Village (although he does keep office hours year-round).

Rovaniemi is the capital of Finland's northern region, and the surrounding area is where Sámi communities live — the Indigenous peoples of northern Scandinavia and Kola peninsulas. Many Sámi call this region Sápmi. Here, you can visit a local Sámi reindeer farm to learn about traditional herding practices and for a chance to feed these gentle animals their favourite mossy snack.

With only about three hours of daylight per day in December, Sápmi is also the perfect place to view the magnificent aurora borealis. Sightings of the northern lights here average 150 per year, which is much more often than in the southern regions of Finland.



They call him Joulupukki at Rovaniemi's Santa Claus Village.



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