

Swedish spectacular: the King's Trail

ULTIMATE
trails

Bryn Davies transports us to Lapland for a festive long-distance trail (although unless you've got skis it's best done in summer). You won't see many people, but you might be joined by reindeer...

Well, like it or not it's almost Christmas. Santa's going to be popping in with his sack full of prezies and you'll be inviting the family round for dinner and the Xmas episode of *Doctor Who*. But if you get five minutes' peace to enjoy your favourite mag we thought we'd show you a festive trail (well, it's in Lapland) – Sweden's King's Trail.

Unfortunately the trail isn't way-marked by lit-up Christmas trees and you don't get a gift for completing it, but it does take you through the heart of Swedish Lapland where, if you're lucky, you'll see Santa. OK maybe not, but you'll almost certainly see reindeer. And apart from passing through Santa's 'hood, the 275-mile King's Trail (also called the Royal Trail) takes you through some of the most spectacular scenery Sweden has to offer, directing you through Western Europe's last remaining wilderness, Lapland, and across the feet of Sweden's largest mountain, Kebnekaise (2,111m).

Starting in Abisko in the very north of Sweden and running to Hemavan, which is also still fairly far north, the trail takes you through four national parks and one nature reserve. In the summer months, when it's best to hike it, you'll have the pleasure of walking in the mid-night sun and it's not uncommon to be accompanied by reindeer or elk. Although it's the warmest time of the year, temperatures hover around freezing and rarely top 10°C, so make sure you pack some warm clothing. In winter deep snow covers the path and hikers make way for cross-country skiers and snowmobilers.

The King's Trail was created in the early 1900s by the Swedish Tourist Association, who opened



the path with the aim of making the far north of Sweden more accessible, allowing people to experience the special wilderness of Lapland. Originally the trail was only half its current length but the opening of Sweden's northern railway meant the path could be extended to the very north of the country. Which is lucky, because it's said that the northern section between Abisko and Nikkaluokta is the most spectacular and enjoyable part of the hike. Here you're above

the Arctic Circle and you'll be hiking in Sami territory (the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia), where they make their living from herding reindeer.

Huts

It's possible to hike the King's Trail without taking camping equipment as there are huts situated at roughly 10km-20km intervals along the trail. These offer provisions, a place to sleep and, in some occasions, saunas. The huts vary from basic to luxurious and the Kebnekaise mountain station even has restaurants and bars. Huts cannot be booked but the hut wardens won't turn you away if there are no beds left, you'll just have to kip on the floor.

What you need

Blindfold

If you're hiking the King's Trail you're likely to be doing it when it's light every hour of the day, so if you're camping it'll be useful to have something to block out the light so you can get a decent night's sleep. Sweden isn't called the Land of the Midnight Sun for nothing.

Warm clothing

Don't be fooled into thinking you'll only need shorts and a t-shirt. Even

The King's Trail

Start point: Abisko

Finish point: Hemavan

Length: 275 miles (440km)

Estimated time to walk: Roughly a month

Dangers: Long, lonely wildernesses and unpredictable weather

When to go: The summer hiking season is between June and September. The winter ski touring season is between February and April, but be prepared for some extreme weather conditions

Highest point: 1,150m, Tjaktá Pass

Lowest point: 305m, Kvikkjokk

THE HARD
facts

FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT SWEDEN

1. The highest mountain in Sweden is Kebnekaise (2,111m). The King's Trail runs right past the mountain so you can take a day-long detour and summit the peak, and it's said you can see 9% of Sweden from the top – wow.

2. Nearly 80% of the country's land is covered by forest and woodland.

3. Sweden has a medieval law – the Right of Public Access – that means that you are allowed to go or camp anywhere without permission as long as you respect the land. Exceptions to this rule are land which is used for farming or land close to people's homes.

4. In Sweden Santa doesn't come down the chimney, he comes through the front door and hands out the presents. These are opened on Christmas Eve rather than Christmas morning.

5. The indigenous people of northern Sweden are called the Sami. The actress Renée Zellweger is of Sami descent.



Fit for kings: hiking Sweden's magnificent trail

Picture: Nature Travels, www.naturetravels.co.uk

when walking in the height of summer temperatures will rarely reach 10°C. The weather can be unpredictable and you can be walking in snow on some days and sunshine on others.

A tent

If you're camping this is a bit of an obvious one, but even if you're planning on staying in the huts it can be a good idea to take a tent just in case. In peak times the huts can often be packed with people and it'd be more comfortable to camp out. And a tent would be a nice temporary weather break if you get caught in a gale – there's little in the way of shelter along the trail.

Short on time?

Love to be walking a long distance trail but haven't got the time? If you'd like to experience the beauty of the King's Trail but you can't get the time off to do it in one go, then the trail can be split into five sections: Abisko to Nikkaluokta (86km), Nikkaluokta to Saltoluokta (52km), Saltoluokta to Kvikkjokk (73km), Kvikkjokk to Ammarnäs (157km) and Ammarnäs to Hemavan (78km).

More info

For more info on Sweden's finest

long distance trail take a look at www.stfturist.se/royaltrail. Here you can find more information on the trail, breakdowns of the different sections and details about the huts along the path. For guided winter or summer trips, try Nature Travels: www.naturetravels.co.uk. ■



What they say

"Whoever dreamt up the King's Trail must have had the phonetic well-being of overseas trekkers in mind when they placed the start

in the three-syllable lakeside town of Abisko and the finish 440km to the south in the trip-off-the-tongue Hemavan," says *Adventure Travel's* boss Alun Davies who hiked the trail in 1999. "However, the most popular part of the trail is a highly dangerous linguistic challenge that should only be attempted by those capable of pronouncing Tuolpanjunjet-jakka Duolpanjunjecohkka without dribbling.

"The 89km between Abisko and Kebnekaise passes through Sweden's most northerly national park before skirting around Kebnekaise (2,111m) and the most linguistically-challenging mountain range in the world. It's an incredible trail all right but with names like Jukkasjarvi Kronoover-loppsmark, Pakkapahuk-tjdkka and Kdtotjakka Goducohkka don't expect to be able to tell anyone where you are, or for that matter where you've been."

