

Dog Sledding

IN SWEDISH LAPLAND

Mushing beneath the Northern Lights

Bob Carter explains why sledding makes such an exciting holiday experience

Sweden's a wonderful destination especially if you fancy dog-sledding, and Swedish Lapland, which is in the country's far north and deep within the Arctic Circle, boasts the most spectacular scenery. It's hard to imagine a better place to experience the thrill of driving your own dogsled, whether you're a family with children or an experienced adventurer seeking a novel challenge.

The vast lowland landscape of woodland, frozen lakes and rivers makes an inspiring backdrop, as do the majestic mountains, and the magical Northern Lights. Add in the joy of working closely with your own team of huskies and the reasons to go dog sledding in Swedish Lapland are many and varied! →



QUALITY CLOTHING

The company provides most of the specialist winter clothing you'll need as standard (a thermal outer suit, hat, gloves and winter boots). You will also need a thermal base layer, a few pieces of mid-layer clothing (fleece, jumper, pullover), something to cover your neck and face (Buff-style multi-functional headwear is ideal) and ski goggles or ski glasses. You can borrow additional items on request.

Avoid wearing cotton against your skin – synthetic or wool are most suitable in cold weather.

A recommended packing list is included with the booking documentation and clients receive a discount of between 15 and 25% on any purchases with Cotswold Outdoor. If you'd rather have all your own clothing, you can order similar products from the websites listed below



These Grade-1 Gore-tex Finger Trigger Mittens cost £15 from www.the-outdoor.co.uk



The Russian Cossack Trapper Hat 5 costs £15.31 from www.rubysues.co.uk



The Kids Safari Coverall by Scotts costs around £100

Lenses – if you wear glasses or contact lenses, use your lenses because glasses usually mist up in cold weather. Prescription ski goggles are a suitable alternative.

If you're a dog-lover who enjoys a adventure, dog sledding's an obvious choice. Contrary to many people's expectations, the dogs are friendly and thrive on human contact. There's nothing a sled-dog likes better than a hug at the end of a day on the trail!

The dogs typically used in Swedish Lapland are Siberian Huskies. Their strength, energy and thick coats make them ideal in a region where typical winter temperatures can be anything from just a few degrees below zero to -30C or less!

It's normal to feel a little uncertain at the start, but you'll always be given full instruction in harnessing your team and managing the sled before departure. Even the most hesitant novice will be surprised how quickly they gain confidence and, after only a short time, you'll be justly proud of your mushing skills and be able to relax! The first time you harness them you'll probably end up in a tangle, but it soon becomes routine!

A dogsled expedition is a very 'hands-on' experience – as we'll

as driving your own sled, you'll look after the dogs and carry out various duties around the cabins.

A typical day begins with making a fire in the cabin, heating the dogs' water and feeding them, then clearing all their waste. With four dogs per team and a maximum of six participants per expedition (plus a guide), that's 28 huskies, so this can take a while!

Only after you've attended the dogs, can you eat breakfast, pack your belongings, clean the cabin, load the sleds and take to the trail. During the day, you'll enjoy lunch along the way.

After you reach the chosen destination, you secure the dogs on a long wire overnight – while you're tucked up in bed, they'll sleep happily outside. Don't worry though because their thick fur withstands the worst of the Arctic winter. In bad weather, you may have to dig a wall of snow to protect them from the wind. Depending on what facilities and accommodation is available, you may have to melt water the dogs' drinking water.





DOG-SLEDDING EXPEDITIONS

DISCOVER DOG-SLEDDING IN LAPLAND

A dog-sledding experience that adults and families can enjoy

Ideal as a 'taster' expedition, this holiday appeals to adults or families with children, lasting four days and three nights, during which you'll spend a couple of days sledding and sleep in cabins along the way. Participants can choose whether they wish to drive their own dogsled, share one with another participant (ideal if you're a young teenager) or travel on the guide's.

* Dates — Expeditions lasting three nights and four days run Sunday-Wednesday and Thursday-Sunday from mid-November until mid-April and cost (£11-'12 winter season) £698 (adult) and £349 (child under 12).

NORTHERN LIGHTS DOG-SLEDDING IN LAPLAND

Mushing above the Arctic Circle beneath the Northern Lights

Swedish Lapland is a unique wilderness — it covers 25% of Sweden's land mass but has only 1% of the country's inhabitants. Challenging but accessible, this expedition takes you through silent ancient woodland and across frozen lakes and rivers, during which you'll command your own team of Siberian Huskies. Starting from a comfy wilderness camp, you'll spend the first day meeting the dogs and gaining confidence in handling the sled, then enjoy an extended expedition.

* Dates — Eight-day holidays run between mid-December and early March and cost (£11-'12 winter season) between £1,324 and £1,618 per person depending on dates.

HUSKY MOUNTAIN EXPEDITION IN LAPLAND

The longer days, milder temperatures and good snow conditions of 'Spring-Winter' make this an ideal time!

The mountains of Swedish Lapland are spectacular. This extended eight-day expedition takes you through some of the country's most beautiful natural landscapes and into the shadow of Kebnekaise, its highest mountain.

* Dates — Expeditions lasting eight and twelve days run between early March and mid-April, with the price (winter season '12) ranging between £1,564 and £2,010 per person.

After feeding and checking your team, you can relax and enjoy your evening — reflecting on the day's adventures with your fellow mushers, preparing and cooking dinner and, sometimes, even taking a sauna to soothe those tired muscles!

The distance you cover in a day's mushing depends on several factors including the consistency of the snow and the nature of the terrain, but it's usually between 20 and 50km.

Winter in Swedish Lapland comes early and stays late, with the dog-sledding season beginning around mid-November and lasting until late April. The later part of the winter season in March and April, known as 'Spring-Winter' by the indigenous Sami people, is the period when conditions become suitable for dog-sledding in the mountains.

Although you can go sledding at any point of the season, each part of the Arctic winter has its own special atmosphere. The darkest period (and also usually the coldest) between November and February is unique because the deep midwinter has long hours of darkness, which means you're more likely to see a display of the magical Northern Lights.

By March, the longer hours of daylight and milder temperatures let you experience the best of both worlds — the stark beauty of the mountains and the warming spring sun on your face!

Dog-sledding holidays suit a wide range of travellers, with ages ranging between 19 and 55, though older participants with suitable levels of fitness also take part successfully. Dog-sledding can be challenging — you may need to assist your dogsled team at times by jogging or 'scooting' behind the sled for short periods, especially on uphill sections or in heavy snow conditions — but a general level of fitness, love of the outdoor life and a willingness to work closely with your team is more important than strength.

Whatever kind of expedition you choose, you'll find that sledding's a unique adventure. The friendliness and energy of the dogs, the joy of working closely with your team and getting to know their individual personalities, the beauty of the winter landscape and the excitement and challenge of driving your own sled make a tempting combination for your next winter holiday!



TESTIMONIALS

'Well, where can I start – it was the most amazing experience ever. We enjoyed every moment and were looked after from the moment we arrived and met some really lovely people. We've not stopped talking about it since we got back. It really was a dream come true. Once again, thanks for a wonderful time.'

Artur Nosyrev

'The frozen wilderness was stunningly beautiful – I've never been anywhere so quiet, just the whooshing of the sled as it sped across the ice.'

Will Woodhouse

'I can't say enough good things about my trip. Many thanks for making my 'Mid-Life Crisis Tour' better than I could have imagined! [The highlight was] being honest, absolutely all of it.'

Ian Massey



FANCY A DOG SLEDDING HOLIDAY?

Nature Travels, the UK specialists in outdoor experiences, provides a wide range of dog sledding expeditions in Swedish Lapland ranging from those that are family-friendly to others that are much more challenging. Visit Nature Travels Ltd at www.naturetravels.co.uk, tel 01929 463 774 or email admin@naturetravels.co.uk

