



FROM SUFFOLK TO LAPLAND

Julie Croucher from Travel With Jules tells us about her trip to the far north of Finnish Lapland and adventures under the Northern Lights

As the plane descended into Ivalo airport, following winding snow filled valleys and banking round the corners it felt like we were in a James Bond movie! Landing on a runway of compacted snow and ice, we expected to be freezing and slipping around (as we had been back home the previous week, when the ‘beast from the east’ had confined us to our tiny Suffolk village for a week!) but instead we breathed in fresh, clean air under blue skies and walked easily on the well maintained runway, even though the temperature on the small terminal building was showing -17C.

Quickly exiting the small airport, we met our local guide from the Inari-Saariselka Tourist Board who was with us for the week and sped along to our first stop which was Aurora Village Hotel nearby. This area is the



TOP: Snowmobiling on frozen Lake Inari

ABOVE: Jules in Lapland

furthest north in Finnish Lapland which we can access by direct flights from London Gatwick and it’s very close to the Russian border. Seeing a road sign to ‘Murmansk’ made me think of Michael Palin for some reason!

Inside the Aurora cabins (or glass igloos, whatever you like to call them!), it’s very cosy. The problem with Lapland is that they cater so well for the weather you are constantly taking layers on and

off and the cabins and lodge lounges are boiling in comparison to outside. Each cabin has a double bed located under the glass roof with a small sofa and desk area plus a small bathroom. A point to note - there are no baths in Lapland. I asked our guide, Maria, if she had a bath at home and she looked horrified - why would they want a bath? Most Finnish people have a sauna in their bathrooms!

Next day we headed off to check out the Wilderness group of lodges, starting with Wilderness Hotel Nangu, a new adults only boutique hotel in a very quiet setting with the largest icicles I’ve ever seen.

Onwards through snow filled forests and back onto the ‘main’ road, we arrived at Nellim Wilderness Lodge. After a hearty home cooked lunch we toured the rooms and facilities (and had a go at throwing ourselves down an icy slope on toboggans!). Nellim is a



MATT ROBINSON

TOP: Reindeer in Lapland
ABOVE: The Aurora Cabins

favourite in December with families, and we have been booking it for our clients for many years, as they do cater extremely well for young children here and offer a very magical Father Christmas experience.

Further around the shores of Lake Inari, we arrived at Inari Wilderness Lodge which is a newly opened hotel in a stunning location on the shores of a huge frozen lake which is around the

size of Belgium and had ice a metre deep.

Something we book a lot at Travel With Jules, as it is high on most people's travel bucket lists, are holidays to see the Northern Lights - we were lucky to see them on our second night at Lake Inari.

We had a beautiful cloudless day on snow mobiles where we enjoyed endless white vistas before entering the forest to build a fire and try some ice fishing. That night

we were taken across the frozen lake in the dark to an 'Aurora camp' where we watched the night sky as the streaks of the Northern Lights started to appear.

Later that night, back at the hotel, we were treated to the Aurora dancing overhead! And after the excitement of the Northern Lights, we sampled the delights of the Lapland Vodka bar!

At Saariselka we travelled into nearby forests where we met a traditional Sami family at their Reindeer Farm and enjoyed a peaceful sleigh ride through the snow with them.

For our last night we stayed at Northern Lights village just outside of Saariselka where we met some huskies and sampled the gorgeous 'Ice Bar' (where you can choose to eat if you wish, but beware your food will soon get cold!) before heading back into town for our last evening where we enjoyed the local night life and a delicious meal in a local restaurant.

The next day we sadly said goodbye to our local guides and travelled back to distinctly milder and soggier Suffolk. **L**

Julie Croucher is the owner and director of Travel With Jules based in Easton, Suffolk. If you would like to book your own trip to stay in an Aurora Cabin, give her a call on 01728 748209 travelwithjules.co.uk