

Lapland & Sápmi



Lapland casts a powerful spell, and has an irresistible romance to it that haunts the imagination and memory. While you won't see polar bears or rocky fjords, there is something intangible here that makes it magic.

The midnight sun, the Sámi peoples, the aurora borealis and the wandering reindeer are all components of this, as is good old ho-ho-ho himself, who 'officially' resides here. Another part of the spell is in the awesome latitudes – at Nuorgam, the northernmost point, we have passed Iceland and nearly all of Canada and Alaska.

Lapland has awesome wilderness and is *the* place in Finland to get active; the sense of space, pure air and big skies is what is memorable here, more than the towns.

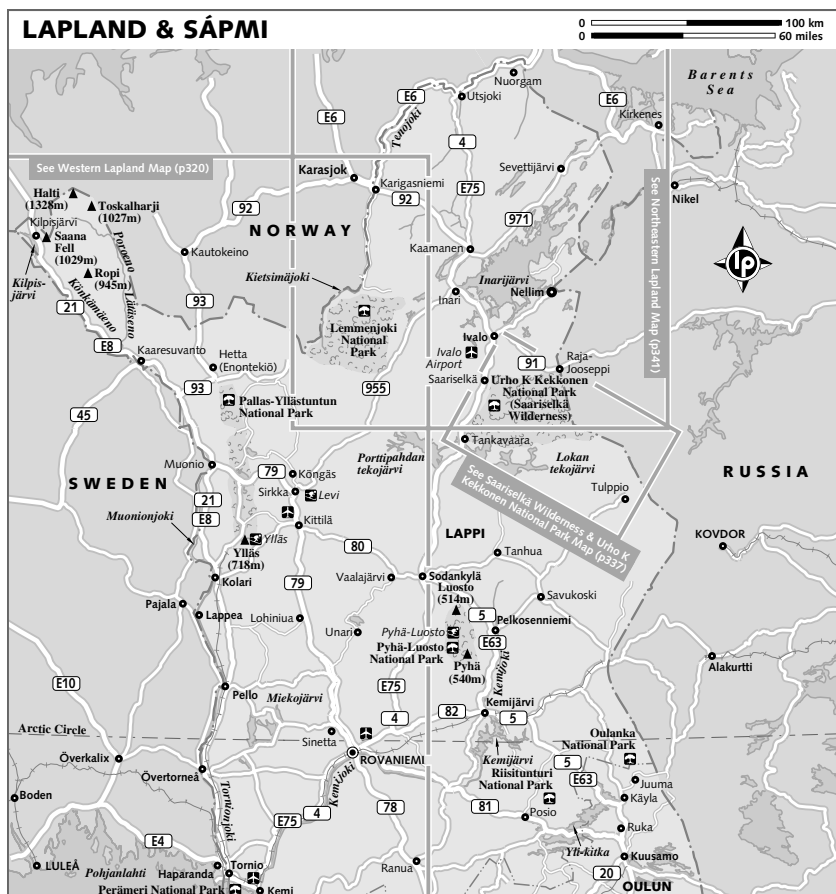
It's important to pick your time here carefully. In the far north there's no sun for 50 days of the year, and no night for 70 days. June is very muddy, and in July insects can be hard to deal with. If you're here to walk, August is great and in September the autumnal *ruska* colours can be seen. There's thick snow from mid-October to May; December draws charter flights looking for Santa, real reindeer and guaranteed snow, but the best time for skiing and husky safaris is March and April, when you get at least some daylight, and less extreme temperatures.

Lapland's far north is known as Sápmi, home of the Sámi people. Their main communities are around Inari, Utsjoki and Hetta. Rovaniemi is the most popular gateway to the north.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Trekking the lonely wildernesses of **Saariselkä** (p336)
- Dashing through the snow in a sled pulled by a team of huskies in **Muonio** (p323)
- Lapping up the wonderful winter experiences on offer in **Kemi** (p315), where you can sail on an ice-breaker, swim in the frozen-over sea, then spend the night in the ethereally beautiful snow castle
- Discovering the culture of the displaced Skolt Sámi in remote **Sevettijärvi** (p346)
- Panning for gold by the beautiful **Lemmenjoki** and walking in the national park (p343)
- Picnicking with an awesome view at the top of Saana Fell in far northwestern **Kilpisjärvi** (p328)
- Learning about the northern environments at Rovaniemi's superb **Arktikum museum** (p308) and the Sámi at **Siida** (p340) in Inari, their Finnish capital





History

For information on Sámi and the history of Finland, see the History chapter, p30. See p326 for more detailed information on the Sámi and their culture. Sámi settlements were spread throughout the vast region but during the 1600s, Swedes increased their presence and in 1670 various cult sites and religious objects were destroyed by the Lutheran Church's Gabriel Tuderus (1638–1703). Churches were built throughout Lapland: Sodankylä's is one of the oldest left.

In the following centuries, more Finns filtered into the vast province, adopted reindeer-herding and were assimilated into Sámi communities (or vice versa), especially in southern Lapland.

The Petsamo area, northeast of Inari, was annexed to Finland in 1920 by the Treaty of Tartu; a nickel mine opened in 1937. The Soviet Union attacked the mineral-rich area during the Winter War (1939–40), annexed it in 1944, and has kept it ever since. The Skolt Sámi from Petsamo were resettled in Sevetijärvi, Nellim and Virtaniemi.

The German army's retreat in 1944–45 was a scorched-earth affair; they burned all buildings in their path to hold off pursuit. Only a few churches, villages and houses in Lapland date from the period before WWII.

Activities

Lapland's joy is the outdoors and range of exciting things to do year-round. There's good