

# Lure of sun at midnight

**TRAVEL:** In our series of dream destinations, a reader writes about the home of reindeer

## NO 12: LAPLAND

I'm off to the Arctic Circle, where sand and surf are foreign and palm trees don't exist. It's hard to envisage from our Pacific haven, yet I have imagined the enchantment of Lapland since childhood.

How glorious to witness the enigmatic midnight sun that marks Lapland's short summer. To see the sun hover on the horizon all day and all night in orange splendour.

It's a snow-covered wilderness for much of the year, and winter dominates the region with icy darkness and cold — elements that add a purpose and charm to winter. Snow means skiing and snowmobiling. It is also riding in a sleigh pulled by a team of huskies and laughing out loud into the vastness.

Home to the Sami people, one of the 'oldest civilisations on earth, Lapland is far removed from the rapidly growing cosmopolitan city of Auckland. How young we are in comparison to the Samis — people who adapted to a harsh land, as our own ancestors once did, but thousands of years apart.

I want to stand still and take in the immensity and charming rawness of nature, alongside people who know its nuances intimately.

Imagine peeking out of a log cabin on a dark night, and catching the mysterious northern lights, spiralling bands of coloured light undulating through the blackness. Illuminated rays dancing across the polar sky like a magic curtain.

Perhaps I'll see Santa. Or his reindeer. But snow on the rooftops, backlit by waltzing ribbons of red and green, will be just fine.

— Sally Blyth

## FACT FILE

### Getting there

Fly from Auckland to Helsinki return from \$1999 a person. Add on a flight from Helsinki to Rovaniemi return from \$760 a person. Three nights accommodation in Rovaniemi starts from \$355 a person, including daily Scandinavian breakfast.

Travel from January 1 to March 31. Contact Flight Centre on 0800 24 35 44. Conditions apply.

### When to go

Finland is a year-round destination. Summer (June-August) is the time to explore some of the country's 180,000 lakes and coastal islands.

Winter (November-April) is for skiing, husky trips and snowmobile excursions. Ruska (late September to early October) is a stunning time of autumn colours.

### What to see

See Helsinki's unique Rock Church and the Finlandia concert hall. Turku has Russian Empire architecture, a 13th-century castle and, in summer, cycling tours and cruising the archipelago.

Try a two- or three-day excursion to Stockholm, Sweden, on the luxurious ferries of the Silja line; or a cross-Baltic cruise to Tallinn in Estonia (only 90 minutes); or the 420km rail journey to St Petersburg, Russia.