

Lapland & Sápmi



Lapland has an irresistible romance that is a draw for visitors and Finns alike. While you won't see polar bears or rocky fjords, there is something intangible that makes it magical.

Part of the spell it casts is in the awesome latitudes that are reached here. At Nuorgam, the northernmost point, we have passed Iceland and nearly all of Canada and Alaska.

It's also linked inextricably with the midnight sun, the Sámi peoples, the northern lights, and the wandering reindeer. And, of course, Santa Claus, who 'officially' resides here!

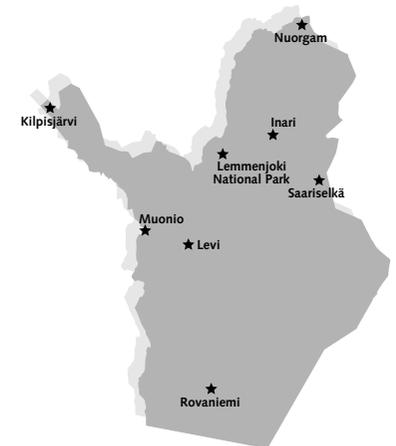
Lapland has awesome wildernesses and is *the* place in Finland to get active. Exploring the tundra, forests and fells is unforgettable. Whether you drive or trek, set aside time to get off the main roads. The sense of space, pure air and big skies is what is memorable here, more than the towns, which, having been razed during WWII, are mainly dull service centres.

It's important to pick your time in Lapland carefully. In the far north there's no sun for fifty days of the year, and no night for seventy-odd days. There's thick snow cover from mid-October to May. In June it's 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 *ruska* (autumn) colours can be seen.

The far northern part of Lapland is known as Sápmi, home of the Sámi people and their reindeer herds. The main Sámi communities are around Inari and Hetta. Rovaniemi is the most popular gateway to the north.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Experiencing Finland's best wilderness fell walking in places like **Saariselkä** (p314), **Lemmenjoki National Park** (p322) and **Kilpisjärvi** (p310)
- Dashing through the snow in a sled pulled by a team of huskies in **Muonio** (p307)
- Seeing the awe-inspiring **aurora borealis** (p307) – nature's Arctic light show
- Skiing or snowboarding at **Levi** (p305), Finland's most happening resort
- Fishing for salmon on the **Tenojoki** (p326) at Nuorgam
- Shopping for handicrafts in **Inari** (p322), the Sámi capital of Finland
- Learning about the northern environments at Rovaniemi's superb **Arktikum** museum (p298)



History

When Sámi peoples were pushed north by migrating Finns, a gradual process that took place through the early first millennium AD, their traditions evolved and developed. Many legends remain, including those of miracle-working witches who could fly and transform themselves into strange creatures. Conspicuous lakes or rocks became *seita* (holy sites), the island of Ukko on Inarijärvi being the best known of these.

Inari was an important Sámi trading centre in the early 1500s, when there were Sámi settlements throughout the vast territory. During the 1600s, the Swedes increased their presence in northern Finland. In 1670 cult sites and religious objects of the Sámi were

destroyed by Gabriel Tuderus (1638–1703), who represented the Lutheran Church. Wooden churches were built throughout Lapland, the oldest remaining in Sodankylä and Tervola, south of Rovaniemi.

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

The area of Petsamo, northeast of Inari, was annexed to Finland in 1920 by the Treaty of Tartu and a nickel mine opened in 1937. Russians attacked the area during the Winter War (1939–40) and the area was evacuated on 4 September 1944. The Soviet Union annexed the mineral-rich area and has kept it

ever since. The Skolt Sámi from Petsamo were resettled in Sevetijärvi, Nellim and Virtaniemi in northeastern Lapland.

The peace agreement of 1944 between Finland and the Soviet Union meant the German army had to retreat. They did so in a scorched-earth manner, burning and destroying 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

The attraction of Lapland is the outdoors and the great range of exciting things to do almost year-round. There's good downhill skiing for almost six months of the year at several spots; Levi (p305) is Finland's most popular ski resort, while smaller Pyhä, Luosto and Ylläs are more family- than party-oriented. All these spots also have extensive cross-country trails too.

One of the most memorable activities in Lapland is sleigh safaris. Pulled by a team of huskies or reindeer, you cross the snowy wilderness, overnighting in log cabins with a relaxing wood sauna and eating meals cooked over a fire. You can organise trips of up to a week or more, or just head out for a jaunt of a couple of hours. Similar trips can be arranged on snowmobiles, too. Muonio and Saariselkä are particularly good places for these excursions.

Once the snow melts, there are some fabulous multiday treks and shorter walks in Lapland. The national parks network offers everything from wheelchair-accessible nature trails to demanding wilderness routes for experienced hikers, but there are good walks almost everywhere, including around Kilpisjärvi, in the far northwest, and Sevetijärvi, in the remote northeast.

Walking in Lapland is good from July until mid-October – there's snow cover from November to mid-May, and the ground is mushy from the thaw until late June. It's great in August, when most of the biting insects have disappeared, and beautiful in September, when the *ruska* colours paint the landscape in an incredible array of hues.

The rivers of Lapland are frisky indeed, and there are several excellent canoeing routes and spots for whitewater rafting. The Ounasjoki (p305) is probably the best of the canoeing routes. Fishing is popular

year-round. Ice-fishing is a memorable and sociable experience, and the beautiful Teno Valley (p326) offers superb salmon-fishing.

All major settlements have plenty of tour operators, most of whom offer all these activities. Rovaniemi, the main town in Lapland, is a popular base, but Saariselkä, Levi and Muonio are equally good and have the advantage of being further out in the wilderness, with a more authentically Lapp feel.

National Parks

There are six national parks in Lapland, three of which – the country's three largest – offer particularly rewarding trekking.

In the northeast, Urho K Kekkonen National Park (p316) covers a huge wilderness area and is one of the country's most popular hiking destinations. Even larger is Lemmenjoki National Park (p322) near Inari.

The Ounasjoki (p305) is probably the best of the canoeing routes. Fishing is popular year-round. Ice-fishing is a memorable and sociable experience, and the beautiful Teno Valley (p326) offers superb salmon-fishing.

All major settlements have plenty of tour operators, most of whom offer all these activities. Rovaniemi, the main town in Lapland, is a popular base, but Saariselkä, Levi and Muonio are equally good and have the advantage of being further out in the wilderness, with a more authentically Lapp feel.

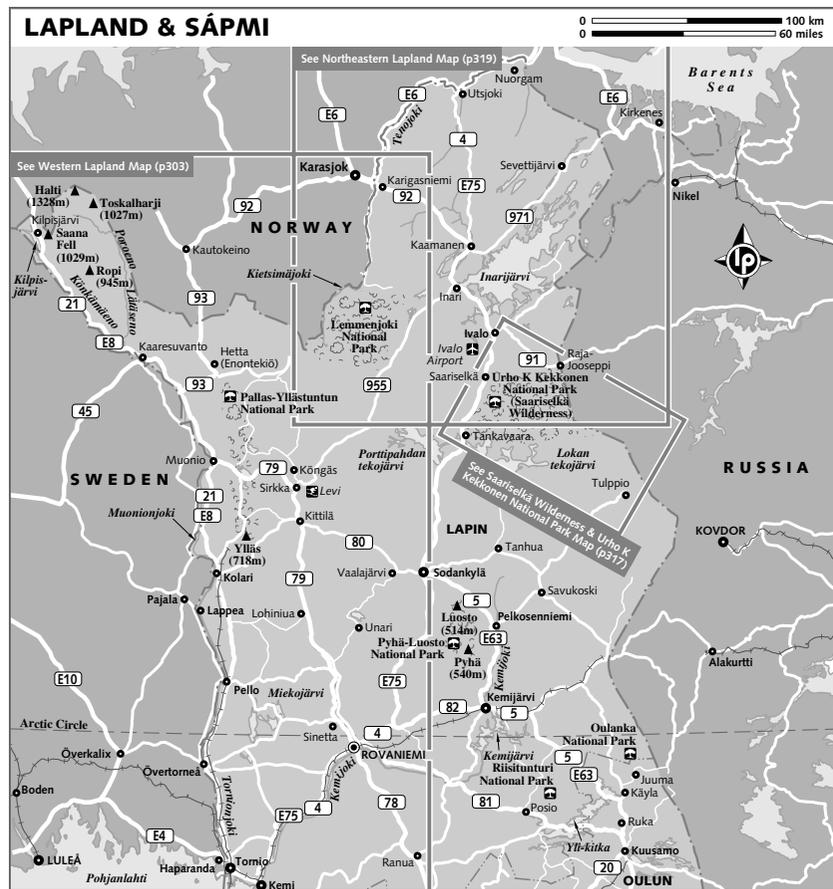
Self-Catering Accommodation

There is a huge quantity of self-catering apartments, wooden cottages and cabins throughout the region. Out of season, the ski resorts are particularly fertile ground; fully-furnished places with their own sauna can be great value in summer.

Local tourist offices often double as booking agents for these accommodation options; see the Information sections of the relevant towns. **Wild North** (☎ 020-564 7647; www.wildnorth.net), an arm of the Forest and Park Service, has a large selection of cabins available throughout the region.

Language

As well as Finnish, there are three Sámi languages spoken in the region, and signs in Sámi areas are bilingual. See boxed text, p325 for more details about Sámi language.



Dangers & Annoyances

Lapland is the coldest part of Finland; winter temperatures regularly fall to -30°C, and sometimes much lower. Even in summer, bad weather can descend rapidly, so be prepared for all conditions when climbing fells or hiking.

From mid-June to early August, Lapland is home to millions of biting insects, ranging from mosquitoes to blackflies, midges and various types of horsefly. At times there are quite literally clouds of them, and during this *räkkä* (biting insect) season, you'll need heavy-duty repellent. By early August, most of the 'squadrons' have dispersed.

Parts of Lapland are real wilderness zones, and trekkers/skiers should always speak to the excellent staff of the national parks information centres before attempting unmarked routes.

Driving in Lapland calls for particular caution due to the reindeer (see boxed text, p42).

Getting Around

Considering how remote some areas are, the bus connections are good, although there may only be one service a day, and none on Sundays. More remote villages may only be accessible by hitching or by postbus, where seats can be booked on the postman's daily round.

Lapland is a good place to hire a car, with Rovaniemi having the most choice. Petrol stations are sparsely spread, and some are automatic. Many of these don't accept foreign credit cards, so always have some cash handy.

ROVANIEMI

☎ 016 / pop 35,377

Rovaniemi is the capital of Lapland, and its major gateway and service centre. Most visitors to the area will find themselves passing through it at some point, and the Arktikum museum is an excellent introduction to the mysteries of these latitudes. That said, Rovaniemi isn't a particularly memorable place; use it as a launching pad for farther-flung parts of Lapland, or to arrange tours, of which there is a huge choice. It also has some of Lapland's better hotels, restaurants, and bars, and is a convenient place to hire a car.

Many of Rovaniemi's visitors come to cross the Arctic Circle, which lies some 8km north of town. This has also become the 'official' residence of everyone's favourite beardie-weirdie Santa Claus, who lives in a tacky complex of tourist shops and ho-ho-hos most cheerfully as the euros roll in!

The town itself is modern and relatively uninteresting, although it is memorably set on the fast-flowing Kemijoki, spanned by Jätkänkynttilä Bridge dubbed the 'Lumberjack's Candle' for its light-topped pylons. After the complete destruction of Rovaniemi by the Germans in 1944, it was rebuilt from a plan by Alvar Aalto, with the main streets radiating out from Hallituskatu in the shape of reindeer antlers – though this is a more than a little hard to actually see on the ground.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Suomalainen Kirjakauppa (☎ 342 3822; Rovakatu 24) Sells English-language paperbacks and maps of Lapland.

INTERNET ACCESS

Public library (☎ 322 2463; Hallituskatu 9; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) Aalto-designed; has free Internet access. There's also pricy (€2/15 minutes) access at the tourist office.

LEFT LUGGAGE

There are lockers (€2 to €3) at both train and bus stations, and a storage counter at the train station.

POST

Main post office (Postikatu 1) Near the train and bus stations. There's a more central branch at Koskikatu 9, but many visitors prefer to send their postcards from the busy Santa Claus post office at the Arctic Circle (see p302).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Etiäinen (☎ 020-564 7820; etiainen@metsa.fi; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri May & Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Apr & Jun-Sep) This place at Napapiiri is the information centre for the national parks and trekking regions, with information on hiking and fishing in Lapland. The office also sells maps and fishing permits, and books cottages.

Santa Claus Tourist Centre (☎ 346 270; www.rovaniemi.fi; Rovakatu 21; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) The tourist office shamelessly goes by this name, but is an excellent source of information for all of Lapland.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

In summer there are river cruises, whitewater rafting, fishing and trips to reindeer and husky farms. In winter, it's snowmobiling, sled safaris and skiing.

Arctic Safaris (☎ 340 0400; www.arcticsafaris.fi; Koskikatu 6) Has weekly tour programmes for winter and summer.

Eräsetti Safaris (☎ 362 811; www.erasetti.fi; Valtakatu) Specialists in this region with another office at Santa Claus Village, Napapiiri.

Lapland Safaris (☎ 331 1200; www.laplandsafaris.com; Koskikatu 1) The largest and best-established of Rovaniemi's tour operators.

Safartica (☎ 311 485; www.safartica.com; Valtakatu 20) Specialists in husky safaris.

ROVANIEMI

0 500 m
0 0.3 miles

To Napapiiri & Santa Claus Village (8km); Rovaniemi Airport (10km); Santapark (12km); Sodankylä (128km)

Lainas

To Ounasvaara Ski Centre (2km); Sky Ounasvaara (2km); Kanu (82km)

To Tornio (122km); Kemi (120km)

INFORMATION	SLEEPING	DRINKING
Arctic Safaris.....1 C2	City Hotel.....16 C2	Monte Rosa.....(see 16)
Eräsetti Safaris.....2 C2	Guesthouse Borealis.....17 A3	Zoomit Cafe.....(see 19)
Lapland Safaris.....3 C2	Hostel Rudolf.....18 B2	DRINKING
Main Post Office.....4 A3	Hotel Santa Claus.....19 C2	Irish Times.....29 C2
Post Office.....5 C2	Hotelli Aakenus.....20 B1	Oluthuone.....30 C2
Public Library.....6 B3	Ounasveski Camping.....21 D3	Pub Yllyö.....31 C2
Rovaniemi Health Centre.....7 C4	Rantsipi Pohjanhovi.....22 C2	Roy Club.....32 C2
Safartica.....8 C2	Sokos Hotel Vaakuna.....23 C2	
Santa Claus Tourist Centre.....9 C2	Sporthotel Oppipoika.....24 C2	ENTERTAINMENT
Suomalainen Kirjakauppa.....10 C2		Doris Nightclub.....(see 23)
		Nite Life.....(see 22)
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Sampokeskus Shopping Centre.....33 C2
Arktikum.....11 B1	EATING	
Lappia-Talo.....12 B3	Arktikum.....25 B1	TRANSPORT
Marttiini Knife Factory.....13 B1	Cómico.....26 B2	Budget.....(see 5)
Rovaniemi Art Museum.....14 B2	Gaissa.....(see 19)	Bus Station.....34 B3
Rovaniemi Church.....15 C4	Hai Long.....27 C2	Hertz.....(see 22)
	Kahvila Pullapiika.....(see 33)	
	Mariza.....28 C3	

Sights

ARKTIKUM

With its beautifully designed glass tunnel stretching out to the Ounasjoki, **Arktikum** (☎ 322 3260; www.arktikum.fi; Pohjoisranta 4; adult/student/child €11/8.50/5; 🕒 9am–7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–6pm daily early Jun, late Aug & Dec, 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Sep–Nov, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Jan–May) is one of Finland's best museums, albeit with a hefty admission fee. Exhibition spaces include superb static and interactive displays focusing on Arctic flora and fauna, as well as on the peoples of Arctic Europe, Asia and North America. The level of information is very impressive; this is really a place to learn about the unique northern environments, and there is an excellent research library. There are also good displays of canoes, dwellings, fishing materials, and costumes of various northern peoples (including a good exhibition on the Sámi), as well as a room devoted to the history of Rovaniemi itself. A scale model shows the destruction wrought by the Axis retreat in 1944. There's also a multivision theatre and a good restaurant. You should allow yourself at least a couple of hours to get around it all.

LAPPIA-TALO

Rovaniemi's **concert hall** (☎ 322 2495; Hallituskatu 11; 🕒 11am–5pm Tue–Thu, 11am–7pm Fri, 11am–2pm Sat) is one of several buildings in Rovaniemi designed by architect Alvar Aalto (others include the adjacent library and town hall). The hall is used by the Rovaniemi Theatre Company, Lapland Music School and Chamber Orchestra of Lapland, and other organisations.

ROVANIEMI ART MUSEUM

This **museum** (☎ 322 2822; Lapinkävijäntie 4; adult/child €4/free; 🕒 noon–5pm Tue–Sun) has changing temporary exhibitions of contemporary Finnish art. Admission is free on Saturdays.

ROVANIEMI CHURCH

Completed in 1950, this **church** (Rauhankatu 45; 🕒 9am–9pm mid-May–early Sep) replaces the one destroyed during WWII. The impressively large fresco behind the altar depicts a Christ figure emerging from Lappish scenery. A work of Lennart Segerstråle, it has two sides, one populated by the faithful, the other by brawling drunkards and ravaging wolves.

MARTTIINI KNIFE FACTORY

This former **factory** (☎ 330 3396; Vartiokatu 32; 🕒 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat, noon–4pm Sun) of Finland's most famous knife manufacturer is open to visitors. It has a small knife and photo exhibition, and a shop where you can buy knives cheaper than elsewhere. It's across the road from the Arktikum

OUNASVAARA SKI CENTRE

This **winter ski centre** (☎ 369 045; www.ounasvaara.net), about 3km east of the town centre, has six downhill ski slopes and three ski jumps, plus 123km of cross-country skiing tracks. Skiing equipment can be rented here, and there's also a fun toboggan run alongside the Sky Ounasvaara hotel (opposite), open year-round if it's not raining.

Activities & Tours

Rovaniemi is a popular base from which to sample 'typically Lappish' activities. There's a greater number of tourists here than elsewhere, so tours go out daily during the summer and winter high seasons; the downside is the feeling that you're not quite in Lapland's remote wilderness.

Snowmobile and husky- or reindeer-sled **safaris** are popular in winter. Summer tours include **river cruises** (often combined with a visit to a reindeer farm), **white-water rafting** and **fishing** expeditions. Summer tours hover around the €65 mark for a three-hour trip; a short jaunt on the river is €20. Unsurprisingly, winter activities are more expensive: snowmobile safaris start at €95 per person and go up to €150, depending on what they're combined with, and there's a hefty supplement if you're only one person riding the snowmobile. Husky or reindeer sledding starts at around €100/150 for two/four hours. There are some good-value trips combining, for example, sledding, snowmobiling and ice-fishing.

For bookings contact one of the travel agencies in town (see p297) or the tourist office. All tours are in English, and most will pick up from hotels in town.

Bicycles can be rented from **Arctic Safaris** (Koskikatu 6) and from **Hertz** (Pohjanpuistikko 2).

Festivals & Events

Rovaniemi is as busy in winter as it is in summer, and there are festivals here year-round. With the Arctic Circle – and Santa

Claus – close by, Christmas is a big time of the year and there are plenty of festive activities in December. The **Northern Lights Festival** in February offers a variety of sports and arts events. In March, Rovaniemi hosts the **Ounasvaara Winter Games**, with skiing and ski-jumping competitions. **Jutajaiset** (www.jutajaiset.net), a Midsummer festival in late June, showcases folk music, dance and other Lappish traditions.

Sleeping BUDGET

Hostel Rudolf (☎ 321 321; www.hotelsantaclaus.fi; Koskikatu 41; dm €23, s/d €34/46; 📞 📧 📺) Currently Rovaniemi's only hostel, this is a handy HI-affiliated spot just west of the centre. The rooms are comfortable and well-equipped, with spick 'n' span beds, TV and bathroom. There's a good kitchen available and a sauna. The hostel is unstaffed and so run by the Hotel Santa Claus, which is, rather inconveniently, where you have to go to check in and get your keycard.

Ounaskoski Camping (☎ 345 304; Jäämerentie 1; tent sites €13 plus €4.50 per person; 🕒 late May–mid-Sep) Beautifully situated on the bank of the river just across from the town centre, this place has tent and van sites only. There are great views of the bridge and fewer insects than in many Lapland campsites.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Santa Claus (☎ 321 321; www.hotelsantaclaus.fi; Korkalonkatu 29; s/d €121/137, Sat, Sun & summer r €82; 📞 📧 📺) We suppose it was unavoidable that something was named after him, but thankfully this excellent hotel is devoid of sleighbells and 'ho ho ho' kitsch. It's right in the heart of town and very new and busy, with helpful staff and a great bar and restaurant. The rooms have all the trimmings and are spacious, with a sofa and good-sized beds; a small supplement gets you a superior room, which is slightly bigger. The bathrooms are stylishly black-marbled. There are also suites with their own sauna and a couple of apartments available.

Hotelli Aakenus (☎ 342 2051; www.hotelliaakenus.net; Koskikatu 47; s/d €65/75, summer r €53; 📞 📧 📺) A short distance west of the centre, this hotel looks fairly unassuming from the outside but actually has very nice bright, comfortable rooms with a decent bathroom and a comfortable couch. The summer rate is

excellent, and is valid from mid-May right through to the end of August. The Arktikum is a short stroll away.

Guesthouse Borealis (☎ 342 0130; www.guesthouseborealis.com; Asemieskatu 1; s/d/tr €47/63/86; 📞 📧 📺) Very handy for the train station, this friendly family-run guesthouse is a good option, and slightly cheaper in summer. The simply decorated rooms are light and warm, with traditional woven mats and their own small bathroom; some also have a balcony. Downstairs is an apartment (€185) that sleeps up to seven people. Breakfast (with porridge) is included and there's a sauna.

City Hotel (☎ 330 0111; www.cityhotel.fi; Pekankatu 9; s/d €91/115, summer r from €65; 📞 📧 📺) This place near the tourist office is fairly stylish and has an intimate feel. The rooms are never going to be 'cat-swinging' venues but are nicely kitted out in dark wood. Summer rates are attractive, and there's a good restaurant and an excellent terraced café-bar, as well as a pub and live music venue downstairs.

Sporthotel Oppipoika (☎ 338 8111, 346 969; hotel.oppipoika@ramk.fi; Korkalonkatu 33; s/d €73/88, week-ends €63/76; 🕒 mid-Aug–May; 📞 📧 📺) This unusual hotel, run by the hospitality school of the local polytechnic college, is very central and pretty good value: it has a pool and gym, and a very elegant restaurant run by the catering section. Reception is open from 7am to 11pm Monday to Saturday; call ☎ 310 445 at other times.

Rantasipi Pohjanhovi (☎ 33711; www.rantasipi.fi; Pohjanpuistikko 2; s/d €115/135, Sat & Sun d €86, summer r €68; 📞 📧 📺) This is the oldest hotel in Rovaniemi, having been rebuilt in 1947 at the end of the war. There are two grades of rooms, some of which have nice views over the river or park. It has a legendary restaurant with live music.

Sky Ounasvaara (☎ 335 3311; www.laplandhotels.com; Ounasvaarantie; summer r from €67, Jan–May from €135; 📞 📧) This is 3km east of the town centre at the crest of Ounasvaara Hill. The main reason to stay here is to be on the doorstep of the Ounasvaara ski centre. In summer, the hotel is a peaceful spot away from the 'bustle' of Rovaniemi, and rooms are quite substantially discounted. Many of the rooms, which are smart, have polished floorboards and their own sauna. There are also apartments and ten luxurious log cabins, as well as a restaurant with great views.

WILL THE REAL SANTA CLAUS PLEASE STAND UP?

Finland, and particularly Lapland, has a strong claim to being the home of Santa Claus. This isn't the North Pole, but Lapland has the reindeer, the winter climate, the mystique and these days it has Santa's post office. But the historic St Nicholas – the real man behind the Santa myth – wouldn't have known a reindeer from a camel and would have melted in a typical Santa suit, as he lived in temperate present-day Turkey!

The story of the real St Nicholas goes something like this: many centuries ago, a poor peasant, father of three daughters, did not have enough money for their wedding dowries. To ensure that at least two of the daughters would have money enough to attract husbands, the man decided that he would have to sell the youngest daughter into slavery. The soon-to-be-sainted Nicholas got word of the terrible situation, crept into the family's house while they were sleeping and magically filled a sock with golden coins. The youngest daughter was saved, all three daughters were joyfully married and the whole family lived happily ever after.

Since then Santa Claus has been filling socks with presents every Christmas. In Finland, Uncle Markus, a legend of children's radio in the middle years of the twentieth century, established the Finnish legend that a gift-giving Santa Claus lived in Korvatunturi Hill, right at the Russian border. Long before that, in pagan times, Finns had believed in an evil male goat spirit that demanded gifts on the shortest day of the year. The two stories eventually blended, which is why the Finnish name for Santa is *Joulupukki*, which literally translates as 'Christmas stud goat'.

Sokos Hotel Vaakuna (☎ 020-1234 695; www.soko.shotels.fi; Koskikatu 4; s/d €112/131, Sat & Sun €85, summer €80; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒) This is one of the town's top hotels with elegant rooms, a big breakfast and free sauna. It can feel a little empty in summer, but the rates are good at this time, and last from May until September.

Eating

Gaissa (☎ 321 321; mains €12-25; ☎ 5.30-11pm Mon-Sat, Sun Dec & Jan) The restaurant of the Hotel Santa Claus is an elegantly candlelit upstairs dining room that serves a mix of Lappish and international food including tapas, pasta and curries. There is a set 'Rovaniemi menu' for €36.50, featuring whitefish roe and flambéed reindeer.

Zooml Café (☎ 321 321; Koskikatu; ☎ 11am-11pm, later at weekends) This large light, modern café is an excellent place to have a drink, breakfast or snack. Right in the heart of town, its terrace is the spot to be on a sunny afternoon. Service is good, and at lunch-times on weekdays there are tasty stir fries, panini and wraps available. There's a minimum age of 20 after 8pm.

Monte Rosa (☎ 330 0111; Pekankatu 9; mains €9-12; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat & Sun) Monte Rosa, attached to the City Hotel, offers very tasty food in an intimate, warmly lit interior and great side terrace. The menu spans a variety of cuisines, with fajitas and pizzas lining up alongside some quality Finnish fare.

Arktikum (☎ 322 3263; Pohjoisranta; mains €10-19; ☎ 10am-4pm, 10am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) Located in the Arktikum museum, this restaurant is very good value. There's a lunch buffet (€10 including hot dish) and an à la carte menu that features good-value local food, such as reindeer fillet, and a selection of excellent soups.

Hai Long (☎ 313 133; Valtakatu 22; lunch buffet €7.50, mains €9-17; ☎ 11am-10pm) The best of Rovaniemi's Chinese restaurants, this has a very spacious interior and good service. It's popular at lunchtime, but also good value in the evenings, with several set menus, larger tables with lazy Susans, and plenty of choice.

Kahvila Pullapiika (☎ 318 189; Sampokeskus shopping centre; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) This café is a popular meeting place for locals of all ages. The glass counter shields a tempting array of savouries and cakes, including a tasty sachertorte. They also do a decent cappuccino.

Mariza (☎ 319 616; Ruokasenkatu 2; lunch buffet €5.90-6.50; ☎ 9.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) A simple but smartish workers' lunch place offering a fabulous lunch buffet of home-cooked Finnish food, including hot dishes, soup and salad.

Cómico (☎ 344 433; Koskikatu 25; mains €8-16; ☎ 11am-midnight, later at weekends) This offbeat American diner-type place serves burgers, steaks and Tex-Mex fare and screens old movies. It's not sophisticated, with a plastic feel, but the portions are generous.

Drinking & Entertainment

Excluding the winter ski resorts, Rovaniemi is the only place north of Oulu with a half-decent nightlife, and along with the partying locals and students there are always a few curious tourists.

Ylityö (☎ 318 755; Koskikatu 5) This self-styled 'minibar' is an independent, offbeat place and great for a drink. There are no seats, just tables to lean on, and the ceiling is festooned with ribbons of business cards. At €3.50, the pints are also reasonably priced.

Irish Times (☎ 319 925; Valtakatu 35; ☎ 2pm-3am) This convivial Irish bar is a top choice for a good night of Finnish pubbing. It has an excellent heated terrace at the back, and regular live music and karaoke, while the downstairs bar has pool tables. There's a snug, friendly feel about the whole set-up. There's a €5 cover charge at weekends.

Oluthuone (☎ 313 715; Koskikatu; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Thu, 11am-3am Fri & Sat, noon-midnight Sun) In summer, it's hard to resist sitting out under the midnight sun in the open beer terrace of this place set up on the pedestrian part of Koskikatu.

Roy Club (☎ 313 705; Maakuntakatu 24; ☎ 10pm-4am) Near the City Hotel, this basement venue is packed after 2am with a cheery student crowd a little the worse for wear. Cover charge is usually €5.

Rovaniemi's major business hotels all have nightclubs and dancing, with a minimum age of 20 to 24 and a cover charge of around €5 on weekends.

Doris Nightclub (Sokos Hotel Vaakuna; ☎ to 4am) This is a popular choice, open late most nights.

Nite Life (☎ 33 711; Pohjanpuistikko 2; ☎ to 4am Fri & Sat) For Finnish-style dancing (tango and *humppe*) try this place, located in the Hotel Rantasipi Pohjanhovi. There's a dancefloor and also a nightclub section, with an €8 cover.

Inside the Sampokeskus shopping centre you'll find a cinema offering recent American releases subtitled in Swedish and Finnish.

Shopping

Sámi handicrafts made from reindeer skin and horn, or Arctic birch, are popular souvenirs; trekkers may want to buy a *kuksa* (carved birch cup).

The traditional Sámi costume, which is very colourful, and handmade Sámi hats, mittens and shoes are also top sellers.

The widest selection of souvenirs (and decent prices) can be found in shops at Napapiiri (p302).

Getting There & Away**AIR**

The Rovaniemi airport is Finland's most northerly major airport, and the 'official airport of Santa Claus' – does he hangar his sleigh here then? Finnair flies here daily from Helsinki, Kemi and Oulu. The budget carrier Blue1 also has almost-daily flights between Rovaniemi and Helsinki.

BUS

Rovaniemi is the main transport hub in Lapland. Frequent express buses go south to Kemi (€18.90, 1¼ to 2¼ hours) and Oulu (€32.30, 3¼ hours); also to Muonio (€33.60, 3½ hours), Hetta (Enontekiö; €39.20, five hours) and Kilpisjärvi (€53.50, eight hours) in the northwest; Kuusamo (€25.40, three hours) in the east; and to Sodankylä (€21.30, two hours), Ivalo (€42, five hours) and Inari (€44.50, 5½ hours) in the north, with some continuing on to Norway.

TRAIN

The train is the best way to travel between Helsinki and Rovaniemi (from €71.40, 10 to 12 hours) – it's considerably quicker and cheaper than the bus. There are four daily direct services (via Oulu), including overnight services. There's one train connection daily to Kemijärvi, further northeast (€12.80, 1½ hours).

Getting Around

The Rovaniemi airport is 10km north of the town centre. Buses meet each arriving Finnair flight (€5, 15 minutes). Airport buses leave the bus station 50 minutes before flight departures, picking up at several hotels in the centre. A shared airport taxi costs €9. These can be booked on ☎ 362 222 a day before departure.

Most major car-rental agencies are represented, and have offices in the centre and at the airport. Try **Budget** (☎ 312 266; www.budget.fi; Koskikatu 9) beside the post office, or **Hertz** (☎ 313 300; www.hertz.fi; Pohjanpuistikko 2), at the Rantasipi Pohjanhovi hotel.

AROUND ROVANIEMI Napapiiri (The Arctic Circle) & Santa Claus Village

The Arctic Circle is the southernmost line at which the midnight sun can be seen, at a latitude of roughly 66.5° north. In Finland the Arctic Circle is called **Napapiiri** and it crosses the main Rovaniemi–Sodankylä road about 8km north of Rovaniemi (although the Arctic Circle can actually shift several metres daily). From here on up the never truly sets in midsummer and never rises in midwinter.

Even though the Arctic Circle can be crossed by road at several points in Lapland, the official **Arctic Circle marker** is right here, conveniently painted on the roadside – and built right on top of it is the ‘official’ **Santa Claus Village** (www.santaclausvillage.info; admission free; ☎ 9am–7pm Dec–late Aug, 10am–5pm late Aug–Nov). Nowhere else in Finland is there such an unadulterated shrine to commercialism. The **Santa Claus Main Post Office** (FIN-96930 Arctic Circle) is here, and it receives half a million letters each year from children all over the world (with kids from the UK, Italy, Poland and France the biggest correspondents). As tacky and trite as this may sound, it’s all good fun, and you can send a postcard home with an official Santa stamp (for €6 you can arrange to have it delivered at Christmas). In a nearby building is the home of the portly saint himself (www.santaclauslive.com); it’s free to queue up to meet the jolly man (present during opening hours except 11am to noon and 3 to 4pm), who is quite a linguist, but check with the bank manager before promising the children photos – they are €17 each and you aren’t allowed to take your own. Tour groups have great fun crossing the line painted on the asphalt (supposedly marking the circle) in order to be awarded their Arctic Circle certificates (€4.20).

If you’re not interested in all the hype, the village still has some of the best souvenir and handicraft shops in Lapland, some good cafés and restaurants, a traditional salmon-smoking fire, and Etiäinen, the information centre for national parks and trekking regions (see p296).

The village is 8km north of Rovaniemi on the Sodankylä–Ivalo road. Bus 8 heads there from town.

Santapark

This Christmas-theme amusement park (☎ 333 0000; www.santapark.com; adult/child/family €20/15/50; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun late Nov–mid-Jan, 10am–4pm Easter holidays & Tue–Sat Midsummer–mid-Aug) at Syväsenvaara Mountain is 2km west of the Rovaniemi airport. Local buses connect the park with the city centre. Additionally, there is a free shuttle service between Santa Claus Village and Santapark, or in winter you can pay a fee to travel by snowmobile or reindeer sleigh between the two attractions. Santapark is built inside a cavern in the mountain and features an army of elves baking gingerbread, a magic sleigh ride, a Christmas carousel, an ice-bar, a theatre, a restaurant and, of course, Santa Claus himself. It’s great fun for young kids but otherwise give it a miss. Discount ticket packages are available for families.

Ranua Zoo

The town of Ranua, 82km south of Rovaniemi on Road 78, is home to the **Ranua Zoo** (☎ 355 1921; www.ranuazoo.com; adult/child Apr–Sep €12/8.50, Oct–Mar €10/8.50; ☎ 9am–7pm Jun–Aug, 10am–4pm Sep–May), the northernmost of all such parks and a popular day trip from Rovaniemi. Its 30 mammal and 30 bird species – including brown and polar bears, forest reindeer, owls, lynx, Arctic fox and wolverines – are native to Finland and the Arctic and are housed in spacious natural enclosures linked by a 3km circular path. Remember that the bears hibernate from November to March.

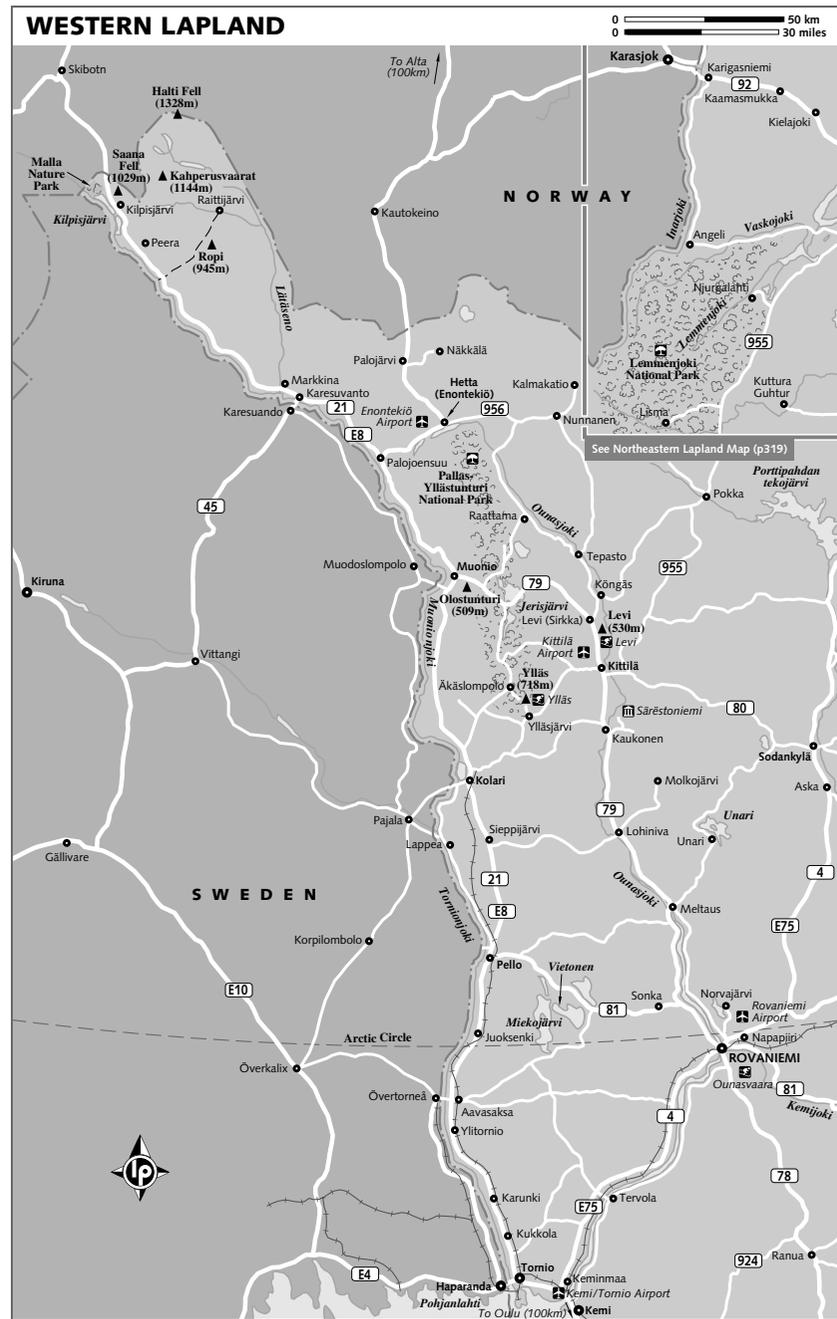
There are daily buses to Ranua from Oulu and Kajaani, and several daily connections from Rovaniemi (€22.90 return, 1¼ hours). There’s a hotel, which also has dormitory accommodation, the **Ilveslinna** (☎ 355 1201; www.hotelliilveslinna.fi; dm from €15, r from €50; P ☎) within walking distance of the zoo.

WESTERN LAPLAND

YLLÄS

☎ 016

Ylläs, 35km northeast of Kolari, is the highest fell in Finland to offer downhill skiing. On either side of the mountain are the villages Äkäslompolo and Ylläsjärvi. Both are typical ski-resort towns filled with top-end hotels and holiday cottages, although



Ylläsjärvi is smaller and virtually shuts down outside the ski season. Äkäslompolo is a nice place to be in summer: it sits by the edge of a lake and pretty river, and there are plenty of good walks around here. The village itself is mostly on the main road; the ski slopes are 5km up a side road. On the other side of the mountain, the centre of Ylläsjärvi is also about 5km from its slopes.

The ski area is at the southern boundary of Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park (see p308).

Kellokas Nature Centre (☎ 020-564 7039; kel. lokas@metso.fi; Tunturintie 54) is a national parks visitor centre at the foot of the fell's western slopes, 4km from Äkäslompolo village. It has environmental and geological exhibits on the surrounding area and multimedia displays, as well as maps, information and advice on hiking in the park.

For tourist information in Äkäslompolo, contact **Ylläksen Matkailu Oy** (☎ 510 5100; www.yllaksenmatkailu.fi).

Activities

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

Ylläs has 37 downhill slopes and 17 lifts, plus special areas for snowboarders. The vertical drop is 463m and the longest run is 3km. Cross-country skiing trails total 250km. Lift passes cost €26 per day and equipment rental and ski lessons are available. The ski season usually runs from November to May.

MOUNTAIN BIKING & HIKING

In summer Ylläs is popular with mountain-biking enthusiasts. **Ylläs Holiday Service** (☎ 569 666) rents bikes (from €11.80 a day) and has guided bike tours.

There are numerous nature trails and hiking possibilities in the region. A couple of long-distance treks head to Olos or Levi from Ylläs (50km to 55km); there are several shorter trails including the 3.5km **Varkaankuru** ('Thieves Gorge') nature trail, and the 15km **Kiiruna Circuit**, both of which start from the Kellokas Nature Centre. For experienced hikers it's possible to walk all the way to Pallastunturi (72km) and from there on to Hetta beyond the park's northern boundary (see p309).

Sleeping

There are plenty of empty hotel rooms and cottages around Ylläs during summer. For

accommodation bookings, contact **Ylläs Majoituspalvelut** (Ylläsjärvi ☎ 482 000, Äkäslompolo ☎ 0208-692 585).

Holiday Centre Seita (☎ 569 211; www.seitahotel.fi); 2-4 person cottages May-Aug €52-67; (P) (X) (E) On the main road in Äkäslompolo is a complex including a hotel, cottages, restaurant and smoke sauna, and it's one of the more reasonably priced places. In the winter high season rooms and cottages are let only by the week from €280 to €560 per person; in the summer the large grassy grounds are very pleasant.

Hotel Ylläshumina (☎ 569 501; www.yllashumina.com; Tiurajärventie; s/d €69/86; (P) (X)) In Äkäslompolo, near the lake, is this flamboyant complex that looks like a wooden peacock in a courtship display. It's got reasonably priced apartments for rent and a good restaurant-pub.

Getting There & Away

During the ski season, there is a shuttle service from Kittilä airport to Ylläsjärvi (€10) and Äkäslompolo (€13). Phone ☎ 0600 14919 for bookings.

The nearest train station is at Kolari and there are connecting buses to Ylläsjärvi and Äkäslompolo.

A few long-distance buses travel via Äkäslompolo each week. For Ylläsjärvi, catch one of the local buses that run Monday to Friday between Kolari and Kittilä.

KITTILÄ

☎ 016 / pop 5833

One of the main service centres for north-western Lapland, Kittilä has little to recommend it to travellers except as a base or jumping-off point for the ski resort of Levi, 17km to the north. Although Kittilä is the regional centre, Levi is now, in fact, so big and trendy that roles have been effectively reversed, at least in winter time.

Gasthaus Kultaisen Ahman Majatalo (☎ 642 043; Valtatie 42; summer s/d €40/50, winter €50/76) is a friendly B&B right in the village centre, with breakfast served in your room. **Hottelli Kittilä** (☎ 643 201; hotellii.kittila@levi.fi; Valtatie 49; s/d €51/59, high season €69/95; (P) (X) (E)), on the main road, is Kittilä's only real hotel. Rooms are spacious, and there's a sauna and a small pool. The restaurant serves a good buffet lunch (€8) and there's dancing and entertainment some evenings.

There are daily flights between Helsinki and Kittilä. The airport is 4km north of town. Four buses a day run between Rovaniemi and Kittilä (2½ hours). All stop at the K petrol station, and continue to Levi.

LEVI (SIRKKA)

☎ 016

Levi is a skiing centre that has experienced massive growth in recent years, and now attracts equivalent numbers of visitors to Ruka (p286), placing it at the top of the tree far as Finnish skiing is concerned. There are several nightclubs, some fine restaurants and plenty of accommodation in a fairly compact area; most of the action is within a stone's throw of the lifts. For this reason, Levi hosts many high-profile skiing competitions. Levi is actually the name of the fell, while Sirkka is the village, but most people refer to the whole place as Levi.

The ski season usually runs from November to May, with the busiest period in March and April, when the snow is good, temperatures aren't extreme, and there's a bit of sun. In summer and autumn, trekking and mountain biking are the main outdoor activities.

The efficient and informative **Levin Matkailu Oy Keskusvaraamo** (☎ 639 3300; www.levi.fi; Myllyojantie 2; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun, open weekends until 5.30pm at busy periods) is the tourist information centre and accommodation booking agency. It's behind the teepee-like building on the roundabout in the centre of the resort. Staff can book accommodation, including cottages, and activities such as snowmobile safaris, dog-sled treks and reindeer rides. Many independent tour operators are based in Sirkka/Levi, making it a good place to join organised tours – from canoeing in summer to dog-sledding in winter.

Activities

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

Levi ski resort (☎ 641 246; leviskiresort@levi.fi) has 47 downhill slopes and 26 lifts (four are free children's lifts, one is a gondola). The vertical drop is approximately 325m, and the longest run is 2.5km. There are two half-pipes and a superpipe for snowboarders, a snow park, and several ski runs for children. Don't let the Arctic darkness put you off either; the main slope is well-lit and stays open until 8pm.

Opportunities for cross-country skiing are also good, with trails totalling 230km, 28km of that illuminated. On longer ski treks, you can stay overnight in wilderness huts, which have supplies of firewood.

In the high season (February to early May), lift tickets cost €4/3 per adult/child for a single ride, €16.50/10 for one hour, €30/19 for one day, and €144/86 for a week. Rates are lower in summer and midwinter. Downhill, telemark and cross-country skis, snowboards, sleds and snowshoes are all available for rental. Standard ski rental costs from €23/83 per day/week; snowboards and boots are €22/90 a day/week. Lessons are also available at Levi.

CANOEING

The long Ounasjoki is one of the best canoeing routes in Lapland. The river runs from Hetta in the north to Rovaniemi in the south, and passes through Raattama, Levi, Kittilä and Kaukonen. **PerheSafarit** (☎ 643 861, 040-504 7364) runs excursions and rents equipment.

DOG-SLEDDING

In winter, **Polar Speed Tours** (☎ 653 447; www.levi.fi/polarspeed) organises one- to five-day dog-sledding safaris, with accommodation in wilderness huts. The dogs are kennelled at a **husky farm** (☎ 040-570 6572; ☎ 10am-4pm) at Köngäs, 10km northeast of Levi. In summer you can tour the farm (adult/child €4/2) and meet the dogs.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

There are numerous other things you can turn your hand to in Levi and the surrounding area, demanding greater or lesser adrenalin levels: snowmobiling, fishing, horse-riding, moped safaris, reindeer races and hot-air ballooning! Due to be opened in summer 2006 is a much-hyped golf course; where else in the world do the greenkeepers get seven months' holiday?! Contact the tourist office for details.

Sleeping & Eating

Levi is one of Finland's most popular winter holiday centres and prices go through the roof in the peak season of February to May and in December, too.

For apartment/cottage rentals, head straight for the tourist information office, which is

also an accommodation booking agency. There's a huge variety of apartments and cottages; in the height of the winter season, expect to pay €1000 to €2000 for a week right in the centre for an all-mod-cons apartment sleeping four to six. In summer, though, you can get a good cottage from €40 per night, sleeping four. Hotel prices are also heavily reduced at this time.

Hotelli K5 Levi (☎ 639 1100; www.k5levi.fi; Kätäkänrannantie 2; r Mar-Apr €169-180, May-Aug €74, rest of year €108-145; ☎ ☒ ☑) Right opposite the tourist office, this sleek modern hotel is Levi's most stylish lodging option. The rooms are excellent; most come with sauna and glassed-in balcony, and those that don't have a Jacuzzi. There are also good family rooms and 16 classy holiday apartments. All rooms feature very comfortable new beds and DVD players (free movies at reception). Although the design is as classy as in any Helsinki hotel, they haven't forgotten where they are: there's a laundry, mountain bikes and sets of skis free for guests' use, and a drying cupboard in all the rooms. There are two good restaurants, one of them specialising in Lapp dishes.

Hullu Poro (Crazy Reindeer; ☎ 651 0100; www.hulluporo.fi; ski season d with sauna €90-160, d without sauna €80-110, summer from €56/66; ☎ ☒ ☑) A bit off the main Sirkka-Levi road, this place has good rooms, a little more expensive with sauna, and some designed for families, as well as eight-person duplex apartments. There are also four very popular restaurants, and a venue, the Arena, with live music almost every night in ski season, DJs, and dancing on two floors. In winter, it also operates the Snow Guesthouse, in Kōngäs, 10km northeast of Levi. It's made entirely of snow and ice, and has seven beautiful rooms.

Hotel Levitunturi Spa (☎ 646 301; www.hotellevitunturi.fi; high season s/d €140/165, May-Sep r €80; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☑) Opposite the tourist office in the heart of the resort, this is a good hotel with spa facilities that are a blessing after a day on the slopes. It's very family-friendly – there's even a 'ball pool'. The complex has five restaurants (grouped together under the moniker 'Restaurant World': is 1500 covers really a selling point?) and also a lively nightlife in winter. Nonguests can use the spa facilities for €12 for 1½ hours.

Tiikun Tii Pii (☎ 0400 405 415; tiikuntii@levi.fi; Kätäkäntie; €50 per head; ☎ evenings by arrangement) The

most interesting eating option by far, this is a Lapp hut 2.5km from the centre which is bookable for two to 15 people. You get a drink on arrival and watch the traditional dishes being prepared (nettle soup, smoked reindeer steak or salmon, Lapp cheese), before enjoying them in the cosy interior. Drinks with the meal are included in the price (you can also bring your own), and there's plenty of entertainment, such as storytelling the Sámi way (*yoiks*). It's a lot of fun. You must book ahead; there are normally two timeslots per night (6pm and 9pm).

For a meal or a drink with panoramic views, **Ravintola Tuikku** (☎ 640 601; mains €13-25) is perched right on top of the fell and looks over the surrounding hills and lakes. It's open year-round and can be reached by chairlift or by road. During the height of the ski-season it has theme nights: fondue, six-course specials, and more.

Getting There & Away

Sirkka/Levi is on road 79, 170km north of Rovaniemi. All buses from Rovaniemi to Kittilä continue on to here; some Muonio-bound buses also stop. A bus also meets all incoming flights at the Kittilä airport, 15km to the south. During the ski season, there are direct buses from Helsinki to Levi, leaving on Fridays at 7.45pm.

MUONIO

☎ 016

The village of Muonio is the last significant stop on road 21 before Kilpisjärvi and Norway. There are plenty of places to stay around here, and some low-key skiing in winter. The wooden **church** in Muonio dates from 1817. When the village was burned during WWII, the church was somehow spared. The local **open-air museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat summer) is a collection of prewar buildings and local artefacts.

Sights & Activities

The large, modern **Kiela Naturium** (☎ 532 280; www.kielanaturium.fi; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat mid-Feb-mid-Apr & Jul-Sep, to 5pm Mon-Fri mid-Apr-Jun & Oct-mid-Feb) opened in 2002 and combines tourist information, a nifty 3D multimedia falls nature display controlled by touch-panel and joystick, an interesting planetarium with an aurora borealis show (adult/child €10/6; every 20 minutes),

THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

The northern lights, or aurora borealis, are an utterly haunting, exhilarating and memorable sight, and they are often visible to observers standing at or above the Arctic Circle (latitude 66°), which includes a large portion of Lapland. They're especially visible around the equinoxes (late September and March), and are particularly striking during the dark winter; in summer, the sun more or less renders them invisible.

The aurora appears as curtains of greenish-white light stretching east to west across the sky for thousands of kilometres. At its lower edge, the aurora typically shades to a crimson-red glow. Hues of blue and violet can also be seen. The lights seem to shift and swirl in the night sky – they can almost be said to dance.

The northern lights have a less famous southern counterpart, the aurora australis or southern lights, which encircles the South Pole. Both are oval in shape with a diameter of approximately 2000km.

These auroral storms, however eerie, are quite natural. They're created when charged particles (protons and electrons) from the sun bombard the earth. These are deflected towards the north and south poles by the Earth's magnetic field. There they hit the earth's outer atmosphere, 100km to 1000km above ground, causing highly charged electrons to collide with molecules of nitrogen and oxygen. The excess energy from these collisions creates the colourful lights we see in the sky.

The ancients had other explanations for the spectacle: the Greeks described it as 'blood rain'; the Inuit attributed the phenomenon to 'sky dwellers'; and the ancient inhabitants of Lapland believed it was caused by a giant fox swishing its tail above the Arctic tundra. The Finnish word for the northern lights is *revontulet* (literally 'foxfires').

restaurant and gift shop. Even if you're just passing through, it's worth pausing to look around in here.

Three kilometres south of the centre, the excellent **Harriniva Holiday Centre** (☎ 530 0300; www.harriniva.fi) has a vast programme of summer and winter activities for individuals or small groups. These range from a couple of hours to multiday adventures. It also rents canoes and kayaks for exploring the Muonionjoki, fishing equipment and mountain bikes, and it organises guided mountain-bike and hiking tours. In winter, there are excellent dog-sledding safaris from 1½ hours (€60) to two days (€440), or week-long trips combining dogs, reindeer and snowmobiling (€1390). In summer, the centre offers daily guided white-water rafting trips from €25 for a 1½-hour trip.

Harriniva has the **Arktinen Reikioirakeskus** (Arctic sled-dog centre) with over 400 loveable dogs, all with names and personalities, and a great guided tour of their town (for that is what it is) is €7/4 per adult/child. This is the best tour in Lapland as far as learning about the different breeds of huskies and their characteristics. You should prebook it the day before; there are three departures daily.

Birdwatchers should get a canoe and head out on Muonionjärvi, which teems with life in early summer. There's a bird-watching tower on the shore and another on Rukomasaari.

Sleeping & Eating

Harriniva Holiday Centre (s/d summer €68/78, autumn €78/88, winter up to €120/140, cabin for 1-/3-persons from €20/36, apt from €95; ☎ ☒ ☑) The Harriniva is also a good place to stay. There are simple cabins by the river (nice but plenty of mosquitoes), as well as good hotel rooms and apartments. There's also a good restaurant and bar here; the kitchen is open until 10.30pm, and the pub is about the liveliest in Muonio.

Lomamaja Pekonen (☎ 532 237; fax 532 236; Lahenrannantie 10; s/d €26/40, cottages €27-59) This place is near the centre of Muonio. It's friendly, and has rooms and a range of cottages in a slightly cramped area by the river, as well as canoes and bicycles for rent and guided trips of the Muonionjoki in summer.

Restaurant Kammari (www.kammari.com; mains €7.50-14.50; ☎ 2pm-midnight) By the Hotel Olos, at the ski area 6km east of town, this restaurant is the best place for pizzas, steaks,

hamburgers and kebabs. It's a friendly spot, with a cosy, intimate dining room.

Getting There & Away

Muonio is at the junction of Lapland's main two northwest-bound roads; the 21, which runs from Tornio to Kilpisjärvi, and the 79, which runs northwest from Rovaniemi via Kittilä.

There are three daily buses from Rovaniemi (€32.30, 3½ hours) via Kittilä, and services from Kemi/Tornio.

HETTA (ENONTEKIÖ)

☎ 016

Hetta (signposted and labelled on some maps as Enontekiö), is the centre of the municipality of Enontekiö, and a good place to start trekking and exploration of the area. This is the northern end of the popular Pallastunturi Trek (right), which brings many travellers to the village. Hetta has a large Sámi population, and although not a big place, with just a few dozen houses on either side of the road, it's very likeable and has some excellent spots to bed down for the night.

The **Tunturi-Lapin Luontokeskus** (☎ 0205-647 950; ☹ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun in summer, Sep & Mar-Apr, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri at other times) at the eastern end of town provides information about Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, and doubles as the **main tourist office** (☎ 556 211; www.enontekiö.fi). There are interesting nature displays relating to the park and slide shows (on request) in English, as well as a café.

In the centre of Hetta is the slender-spired **Enontekiö church** (☹ summer), built in 1952 with the financial help of American churches. The organ was a gift from Germany. The church has an altar mosaic that pictures Christ blessing Lapland and its people.

A less permanent building is the annual **snow castle**, freezing from mid-December to mid-April.

The biggest festival in Hetta is Mari-anpäivä (feast day of the Annunciation), usually celebrated in March; there are Sámi dances and engagement parties, and the town buzzes with activity.

Sleeping & Eating

Hetan Majatalo (☎ 554 0400; www.hetan-majatalo.fi; s/d summer €57/76, rest of year €62/84; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) A great place to stay, this fine guesthouse

is of comfortable hotel standard and very friendly. Set back from the main road, it's quiet but in the centre of town, and has a peaceful garden. The rooms are good, with TV and bathroom; breakfast and use of the sauna are included. At busy periods they do a buffet lunch.

Hetan Lomakyla (☎ 521 521, 0400 205 408; tent sites €10-14, 2-person cabin €45, small/large cottages €60/80; ☹ Mar-Oct) This place has a very up-market set of grey-painted wooden cottages with kitchen, sauna and a loft sleeping area, as well as simpler cabins. It's good-value and very friendly, and there are various discounts and activities on offer.

Lapland Hotels Hetta (☎ 521 361; www.laplandhotels.com; hostel s/d summer €52/64, peak €74/90, hotel s/d summer €74/90, peak €116/128; ☹ Feb-Apr, Jun-Sep, Nov & Dec; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) At the eastern end of town towards the visitor centre, this hotel has two classes of room: 'hostel' rooms that have their own toilet but shared shower and hotel rooms that are spacious, with large beds. There are also apartments for rental, and a good restaurant open for dinner only.

Hotelli Jussantupa (☎ 521 101; www.jussantupa.fi; ☹) This is in the town centre and is a bit of a focal point. It has a good restaurant and the most popular bar in town, with dancing on weekends. The hotel has a sauna.

Ounasloma (☎ 521 055, 049-396 510; tent sites €8, cabins from €43, cottages with sauna from €68; ☹ Mar-Oct) This is a friendly place with a series of excellent cottages and camping facilities in a nice little area by the river. They have free boats and do skiing excursions.

Getting There & Away

Finnair flies to Enontekiö regularly, sometimes via Rovaniemi. The airport is 7km west of Hetta.

Buses to Hetta run daily from Rovaniemi (€42, five hours) via Kittilä and Muonio. One bus continues in summer to Kautokeino in Norway. To get to Kilpisjärvi from Hetta, you have to change buses at Palojoensuu. There are also buses to Hetta from Muonio.

PALLAS-YLLÄSTUNTURI NATIONAL PARK

☎ 016

Now the third-largest national park in Finland, it was created in 2005 from the previous Pallas-Ounastunturi Park, established

in 1938, and the former Ylläs Nature Reserve. It now forms a long, thin area running from Hetta in the north to the Ylläs ski area in the south (see p302). The main attraction is the excellent 55km trekking route from the village of Hetta to Pallastunturi in the middle of the park, where there's a hotel, information centre and transport connections. Experienced trekkers can continue from here to Ylläs, although there are few facilities as yet on that section. In winter, Pallastunturi Fell is a small but popular place for both cross-country and downhill skiing. The longest slope is 2km.

Pallastunturi Nature Centre (☎ 0205-647 930; pallastunturi@metso.fi; ☹ 9am-5pm daily Jun-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) at Pallastunturi Fell sells trekking maps (€18), makes reservations for locked huts (€9) and provides information and advice about the region, and its flora and fauna. It has slide presentations in several languages. You'll also find a **nature centre** in Hetta (opposite) and another one in Äkäslompolo (p302).

Trekking Route

The 55km trek from Hetta village to Pallastunturi (or vice versa) is one of the easiest in the country: pretty, flattish, light forest cover with sandy soil. It takes three to four days to complete. The route is well marked, with poles every 50m or so, and there are several wilderness huts along the way (see right).

The popularity and ease of this trek means that some huts get pretty crowded at peak times – at Hannukuru hut there may be up to 60 people staying at one time!

Day 1 Starting from Hetta village, you must cross a lake to get to the national park. There is a boat-taxi that costs €4. Walk 7km through a forest to Pyhäkero hut, then ascend to the high Pyhäkero (peak), which is part of Ounastunturi Fell. It's 7km to Sioskuru hut.

Day 2 This section of the trail is mostly treeless plateau with good visibility. You might want to take a detour to Tappuri hut for lunch before continuing to Pahakuru hut (10km). If it's full, continue 2km to Hannukuru, the 'capital' of the Pallastunturi Fell area.

Day 3 The first leg is 5km over relatively difficult terrain to a small *laavu* (simple shelter) where you can cook lunch. Another 9km takes you through pleasant mountains to the small hut of Montelli. If it is full, continue 1km on to Nammalankuru hut.

Day 4 The final day takes you through some magnificent high mountains. There is only one place to stop, a simple

laavu and campfire place 2.5km from Nammalankuru. From here, it's a 10km uphill walk to Hotel Pallastunturi.

On to Ylläs It's about 70km from Pallastunturi to the park's southernmost border, by the ski resorts at Ylläs. It's about 21km to the village of Rauka from Pallastunturi, and then another 11km to the Pahtavuoma hut. Beyond here, there's a simple shelter at Kotamaja, and several fireplace points.

Sleeping WILDERNESS HUTS

For trekkers in the national park, free accommodation is available in wilderness huts. Following is a list of huts from north to south.

Pyhäkero This hut is 7km from the lake. There is room for six people, and a gas stove and a toilet. In March and April there's also a café.

Sioskuru Sioskuru is 8km from Pyhäkero hut and accommodates up to 16 people. There are mattresses, a gas stove, a telephone and some dry firewood. There's a rental cabin here also, sleeping up to eight.

Tappuri This nice hut is 1km off the main path. It accommodates eight people, and has a gas stove and good drinking water from a nearby creek.

Pahakuru This hut is 11km from Sioskuru. It sleeps up to six people, and has a gas stove and a toilet. You'll need to walk a few hundred metres to get water.

Hannukuru Just 2km from Pahakuru, and at the halfway point on the route, this hut has room for 16 people, but it is often full. There are mattresses, a gas stove and a telephone here, plus plenty of firewood and a lakeside sauna. There's also a rental cabin sleeping up to eight.

Montelli This intimate little hut on the high fells has a fireplace and sleeps four people. It's 12km beyond Hannukuru and 15km from Pallastunturi.

Nammalankuru Just 2km beyond Montelli hut is this large hut that accommodates 16 people. There is a gas stove, a telephone and fine fell scenery. There's also a rental cabin sleeping up to eight.

Pahtavuoma This hut is 32km south of Pallastunturi on the route to Ylläs. It's low-roofed and sleeps up to four. It has a fireplace.

HOTELS

Hotel Pallas (☎ 532 441; www.laplandhotels.com; s/d winter €111/142, summer €52/64; ☹ ☹) This noble old wooden place is up in the fells, 50m from the national park information centre, and just what you want to see when you finish your trek from Hetta. The first hotel in Lapland was built on this site in 1938. There are cheaper rooms, which have their own toilet but share a shower. Rates include a good all-you-can-eat breakfast. It's over-priced during the ski season, but good value

at other times; it's friendly and has a tame summer reindeer hanging around. There's a nice lakeside sauna and you can jump in the hole in the ice in winter!

Getting There & Away

In summer, there's a daily bus from Muonio to Pallastunturi (€5, 40 minutes). At other times, you'll have to hitch or call a local taxi on ☎ 538 582, or ☎ 0400 393 103.

KILPISJÄRVI

☎ 016

The remote village of Kilpisjärvi, the northernmost settlement in the 'arm' of Finland, is on the doorstep of both Norway and Sweden. At 480m above sea level, this small border post, wedged between the lake of Kilpisjärvi and the magnificent surrounding fells, is also the highest village in Finland. Unless you're just passing through on your way to Tromsøer Narvik in Norway, the main reason to venture out here is for summer trekking or spring cross-country skiing. There are popular walks to the joint border post of Finland, Norway and Sweden, up the spectacular Saana Fell, home to the rough-legged buzzard, and longer treks to Finland's highest fell, Halti (1328m).

Every Midsummer, the folk of Kilpisjärvi put on a ski race at Saana Fell, where the snow may not melt until mid-July. From Saana, you'll see pockets of snow in the mountains of Norway that almost never melt.

Kilpisjärvi consists of two small settlements 5km apart – the main (southern) centre has the information office, the hotel, petrol station and supermarket, as well as most of the accommodation. The northern knot, 2km shy of the border, has the Kilpisjärven Retkeilykeskus (Kilpisjärvi Hiking Centre) and a shop.

Information

Kilpisjärven Retkeilykeskus (Kilpisjärvi Hiking Centre; ☎ 537 771; www.kilpisjarvi.info) This is a central meeting place for all trekkers. They hire bikes and hiking and skiing equipment. There's also a café here and accommodation close to the main walking routes.

Luontotalo (☎ 020-564 7990; kilpisjarvi@metso.fi; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) At the southern end of the village, this new national parks centre is effectively the tourist information office. It has maps and advice on trekking and a nature display.

Activities

TREKKING

The area around Kilpisjärvi offers fantastic trekking. Routes range from easy day treks to demanding two-week treks into the mountains.

A marked loop route to slate-capped **Saana Fell** (1029m) starts at Kilpisjärven Retkeilykeskus and takes around three to four hours return if you walk to the summit. There's a longer loop trail that takes eight hours.

Another incredibly popular day trek is the 15km route through **Malla Nature Park** to the joint border crossing of Finland, Sweden and Norway. At the border crossing is a free wilderness hut, where you can stay overnight. Alternatively, there's a daily **boat service** (☎ 0400 669 392; one way/return €11/16; 1hr return) at 10am, 2pm and 6pm from May to August to a short distance from the border, allowing you to visit the easy way, or to walk only the return leg.

For experienced trekkers, a one- to two-week trip from Saana Fell to **Halti Fell** (1328m), the highest point in Finland (there is still snow in June), is a demanding but rewarding trip. All trekking routes and wilderness huts around the Kilpisjärvi area are clearly displayed on the 1:100,000 *Käsivars* map (€18). The 1:50,000 *Kilpisjärvi* topographical sheet (€6) covers a smaller area.

SCENIC FLIGHTS

There is a heliport at the southern end of Kilpisjärvi. Helicopter sightseeing flights cost around €100 per person with minimum numbers required. For information, call **Heliflite** (☎ 537 743; www.heliflite.fi).

Sleeping & Eating

There are heaps of campsites with cabins lining the main road. Many places are only open during the trekking season, which is June to September.

Hotel Kilpisjärven (☎ 537 761; www.kilpis-jarvi.com; s/d €65/75, 3-/4-bed apt €105/123) This hotel is on the main road through Kilpisjärvi, opposite the supermarket. It's a comfortable place, and one of the centres of village life. It has two grades of room: the 'hostel' beds share showers. Its large restaurant (open 3.30 to 11pm; mains €13 to €24) serves some tasty Lapp dishes, including a 'Northern Union': tender reindeer fillet and salmon (€24). The

bar is open until 2am and is about as lively as Kilpisjärvi can offer.

Kilpisjärven Retkeilykeskus (☎ 537 771; retkeilykeskus@sunpoint.net; tent sites €12, s/d €50/60, 4-person cottages €65; ☎ Jun-Sep) This place, close to the border but 5km north of the village, is conveniently close to the trekking routes and is a centre for information. You'll find a range of rooms and cottages here all of them with a private bathroom. The restaurant dishes up a good all-you-can-eat buffet lunch daily in the high season (€10, open 2 to 7pm daily).

Kilpisjärven Lomakylä (☎ 537 801, 0400 396 684; www.kilpisjarvi.net; camping €10-14, cabins €90-150, apt €70-120) This is the best of the clutch of camping 'n' cabins sites in the centre of Kilpisjärvi. It's got a café, and some excellent wooden cottages and apartments with their own sauna, loft bedroom, fully-equipped kitchen, TV and video (films at reception). These are great value in summer.

As well as the restaurants at the hotel and Kilpisjärven Retkeilykeskus, there's a cheap grilli next door to the supermarket, and **Ida-Sofie Café** (☎ 539 229), serving yummy Lappish dishes and snacks.

Getting There & Away

There is a daily bus connection between Rovaniemi and Kilpisjärvi (€53.50, six to eight hours) via Kittilä and Muonio.

It's a spectacular drive on the excellent sealed road from Muonio to Kilpisjärvi (almost 200km). There are service stations at the small settlement of Kaaresuvanto (where there's a border crossing into Sweden) and in Kilpisjärvi itself. Two kilometres north of Kilpisjärvi, the road continues into Norway and a spectacular ascent through mountains before descending to the fjords.

EASTERN LAPLAND

KEMIJÄRVI

☎ 016 / pop 9,500

Kemijärvi is an alternative gateway to Lapland, situated on the important north-south highway 5, at the end of the northeastern railway line. It's a pleasant enough place on a spectacular lake, although the criss-cross road network and sprawling suburbs diminish the appeal. The centre is compact, and there are a couple of good places to stay.

The **tourist office** (☎ 878 394; Vapaudenkatu 8; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri year-round; ☎) is in the centre of town and like the **public library** (Hietaniemenkatu 3) has free Internet access. Nearby is a bookshop to stock up on English paperbacks for the long Lapp nights.

Kemijärvi's biggest attraction apart from the lake are the fine wooden sculptures dotted throughout the town, legacies of the international wood-sculpting festivals.

Festivals & Events

The **Kemijärvi Sculpture Week**, a festival of woodcarving, is held in late June or early July every odd year. It attracts artists from many European countries and is an interesting event as all the woodcarvers work outside, in view of the public.

In mid-September, Kemijärvi hosts **Ruska Swing**, a festival of swing dancing and swing music. Participants come from around the world, and there is a special 'Swing Train' from Helsinki.

Sleeping & Eating

Mestarin Kievari (☎ 813 577; www.mestarinkievari.fi; Kirkkokatu 9; s/d €70/85, summer €68/78, mains €10-24, lunch buffet €10; ☎ ☒) This is the best place to sleep and dine in town. The rooms themselves are fairly simple with wooden floorboards and small beds; some of the single rooms have their own sauna. The restaurant has a menu ranging from pizza and salads to gourmet fish and game dishes.

Hostel Kemijärvi (☎ 040-581 2007; fax 813 342; Lohelankatu 1; dm from €16, s/d €32/45; ☎ ☒) This place on the lake, 300m west of the camping ground, is HI-affiliated, with a kitchen, sauna and boats for rent. The same owners have cottages for rent nearby.

Hietaniemi Camping (☎ 813 640; tent sites €8, 4-person cabin €30-40; ☎ Mar-late Sep) Just 200m west of the town centre on Pöyliöjärvi, a secondary part of the main lake. There are good-value newly built cabins. You can rent boats and bikes here.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is in the centre of town. There are services to Pyhä (€7.50), Rovaniemi (€15.20), Sodankylä (€18.90) and elsewhere. There's one daily train to Helsinki, via Rovaniemi (€12.80, 1½ hours).

SODANKYLÄ

☎ 016 / pop 9336

The pleasant village of Sodankylä is a busy service centre for the expansive surrounding area, which has a population density of just 0.8 people per sq km! It's at the important junction of the main two southbound highways and makes a decent staging post on the way between Rovaniemi and the north; even if you're just passing through, stop to see the wooden church – humble but achingly beautiful. Sodankylä can also be used as a base for visiting the ski fields at Pyhä and Luosto and the amethyst mine at Lampivaara.

The **tourist office** (☎ 618 168; www.sodankyla.fi; Jäämerentie 7; ☹ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) is at the intersection of the Kemijärvi and Rovaniemi roads on the main street. Opposite is the library, with Internet access. Nearby in a small park, the bronze **statue of The Reindeer and the Lapp** celebrates reindeer husbandry, one of Lapland's most important industries.

One of the few buildings in Lapland to survive the massive destruction of the Germans' scorched-earth retreat in WWII is the **old wooden church** (☹ 9am–6pm Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–6pm Fri–Mon rest of Aug) by the tourist office, near the Kitinen riverside. It is the region's oldest and dates back to 1689. The church stands in a graveyard encircled by a low wooden fence and is noteworthy for its decorative shingles and prominent prong-like standards. The interior is simple and charming, with gnarled wooden benches and pulpit, and a simple altar made from leftover beams. A painting of the Last Supper from the early eighteenth century is the only adornment. The stone church nearby was built in 1859.

Andreas Alariesto Art Gallery (☎ 618 643; adult/child €5/2; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–6pm Sun Jun–mid-Sep, 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat, noon–4pm Sun mid-Sep–May), in the same building as the tourist office, displays paintings by the famous Lapp artist Alariesto (1900–89), who favoured a primitive style. There are many images of Sámi life.

By now you've probably seen reindeer wandering the roads, but if you want to learn more about these vital livestock, **Mattila Reindeer Farm** (☎ 0400 187 877; Meltauksentie 975; adult/child €10/5; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri), at Riipi village 26km southwest of Sodankylä, is a family-run farm where you can meet and feed the reindeer. Phone ahead to arrange a visit; a minimum of four people may be required.

Sleeping & Eating

Majatalo Kolme Veljestä (☎ 611 216; www.majatalo.lolkolmeveljestä.fi; Ivalontie 1; s/d/tr €38/54/65; (P) ☹) This simple guesthouse about 500m north of the bus station has tidy rooms with attractive modern furniture but narrow beds. Guests get free tea and coffee and use of a kitchen; there's also a guest lounge and sauna.

Hotel Sodankylä (☎ 617 121; fax 613 545; Unarintie 15; s/d €85/104, Sat, Sun & summer €70/80; (P) ☹) This place is right across the road from the bus station. It's a standard brick-built hotel with comfortable rooms that aren't quite worth the price outside of summer. The staff is friendly, and there's a restaurant serving tasty salmon, pork and reindeer dishes, as well as a vegetable hot-pot.

Camping Sodankylä Nilimella (☎ 612 181; www.naturex-ventures.fi; tent sites €12, cabin €34–42; ☹ Jun–mid-Aug) This camping ground is across the river from the village. It's a friendly place with a sauna and good facilities. The cabins are simple but have a campstove and fridge.

Cafe Kerttuli (☎ 624 383; Jäämerentie 11; mains €7–16; ☹ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat) A lovely café with soups, quiches (try the reindeer-and-mushroom pie), cakes, full meals, good coffee and a terrace on the street. There's a lunch special on weekdays for €9. Behind it is the popular local bar, Rooperante.

Pizza-Paikka (☎ 612 990; Jäämerentie 25; pizzas €7–9; ☹ 11am–10pm, 11am–11pm at weekends) At the northern end of the main strip through town, this place has a nice terrace and is fully licensed. Pizzas – and only pizzas – are what they serve, and they are pretty tasty.

Seita Baari (☎ 611 386; Jäämerentie 20) A simple place, with plastic chairs and no frills, that offers good and inexpensive home-made food, including Lappish specialities such as *poronkäristys* (sauteed reindeer).

Getting There & Away

Sodankylä is on the main Rovaniemi–Ivalo road (No 4), and road 5 from Kemijärvi and Karelia ends here. There are regular Gold Line and Express buses from Rovaniemi, Ivalo and Kemijärvi. The bus terminal is just off the main road.

PYHÄ-LUOSTO REGION

☎ 016

The area between the fells of Luosto (514m) and Pyhä (540m) forms a popular winter sports centre, with a skiing season extending

from February to May. Most of the area has recently been incorporated into the Pyhä-Luosto National Park, which is excellent for trekking. Pyhä and Luosto, 25km apart, both have ski slopes and are fully serviced resort 'villages'. They make an effort to keep things busy during the summer season as well, with plenty of activities.

Orientation & Information

Pyhä is about 14km from the main Kemijärvi to Sodankylä road, while Luosto is the same distance east of the Rovaniemi–Sodankylä road. A good road connects the two resorts. Luosto is very compact, while Pyhä is spread out: there are services along the road by Pyhäjärvi, but the main ski slope and accommodation is 3km further west (signposted Pyhäntunturi).

For information on Pyhä-Luosto National Park and summer activities, such as hiking and fishing, drop by the park's **Pyhäntunturi Visitor Centre** (☎ 020-564 7302; pyhatunturi@metssa.fi; ☹ 9am–6pm Jun–Sep & Mar–Apr, 9am–4pm Tue–Fri, Sat 9am–2pm Oct–Feb & May), adjacent to the Pyhä downhill ski centre; follow signs from the main Kemijärvi–Sodankylä road 5.

Just down the hill from here, the **Pyhähippu Reservation Centre** (☎ 882820; www.pyha.fi; ☹ 9am–8pm Nov–Apr & Jul–Sep, 9.30am–5pm at other times) offers tourist information and arranges excellent accommodation at 130 cottages and apartments.

In Luosto, the travel agency **Pyhä-Luosto Matkailu** (☎ 020-730 3020; www.pyha-luostomatkailu.fi; Pyhä-Luostontie 2) also has tourist information for the region, and books cottages. It's open office hours, but at other times head next door to Kerttuli restaurant.

Sights

LAMPIVAARA AMETHYST MINE

The **amethyst mine** (☎ 0400 523 924; www.amethystmine.fi; Lampivaara Fell; adult/child €12/7; ☹ 11am–5pm Jun–mid-Aug, 11am–4pm mid-Aug–Sep, call for winter opening hours or ask in the amethyst shop in Luosto) 5km above Luosto is the only working amethyst mine in Europe. There are guided tours on the hour, and you get to have a dig around for your own piece of amethyst. The mine is accessible by forest road from Luosto; follow the signs. If you don't have a car, it's a pleasant hike, or €10 flat fare by **taxi** (☎ 106 425).

PYHÄ-LUOSTO NATIONAL PARK

Created in 2005, this 142-sq-km park was a long time in the making, and incorporates Pyhäntunturi, previously the oldest national park in Finland, established in 1938. The core of the park is the long line of fells stretching 35km from Pyhä itself to north of Luosto. There are several peaks around the 530m mark, and winding gorges between them. The most notable sight is the 200m deep Isokuru Gorge by Pyhäntunturi Fell.

There is a bird-watching tower at the southeastern corner of the park, about 2.5km from the Visitor Centre. A circular nature trail of 5km takes you there.

The small Aittokuru Gorge, just west of Pyhäjärvi, has a spectacular **gorge theatre**, with frequent performances in the summer months. It's well worth a look even if there's nothing on.

ARCTIC ANIMALS

More or less midway between Pyhä and Luosto, **Pyhä-Luosto Husky and Reindeer Park** (☎ 0400 272 714; www.huskysafaris.com; adult/child €12/8; ☹ noon–6pm Jun–Sep) has over a hundred dogs and some reindeer, used in the winter for sled trips. There's a guided visit and presentation at 2pm daily. There's also a café here.

Activities

SKIING

At Pyhä there are 10 ski runs and seven lifts. The longest run is 1.8km, with a vertical drop of 280m. At Luosto, there are seven runs and four lifts, plus a halfpipe and special slopes for snowboarders. The longest ski run is 1.5km, with a vertical drop of 230m.

Between them, Pyhä and Luosto have over 150km of trails for cross-country skiers, some 40km of which are lit. You can rent equipment from the ski centre at either location.

TREKKING

Within Pyhä-Luosto National Park there are several marked hiking trails, including a 10km loop trail to Pyhäkuru Gorge, and a 35km trail to Luosto; this involves plenty of ascents and descents as it climbs from fell to fell. Many of the trails are open in winter to cross-country skiers. These trails start at the Pyhäntunturi Visitor Centre; others begin at Luosto, including a 14km circular

nature trail crossing the fells to flatlands on the other side.

For an overnight trek, a good map is highly recommended, such as the 1:40,000 *Luosto-Pyhätunturi* map (€4), which can be purchased at the Visitor Centre and in local hotels and resorts. Shorter walks are possible without a map.

Tours

LuontoSafarit (☎ 624 336; www.luosto.fi; Orresokantie 1, Luosto) rents snowmobiles and also runs a series of excursions and safaris on the vehicles. As always, you need a valid drivers license to operate one. In summer, canoeing, quadbiking and hiking trips are offered.

Sleeping & Eating

By far the best places to sleep in Pyhä and Luosto are the cottages and apartments maintained by the agencies listed previously under Information. In summer, for example, €47 will get a luxury apartment or cottage for two, a great deal as most come complete with sofa, balcony, sauna, and fireplace with free firewood, not to mention a fully equipped kitchen and a drying cupboard. Rates increase sharply in winter; this is also true of the hotels.

Hotelli Pyhäntunturi (☎ 856 111; www.pyha.fi; summer s/d €51/70; (P) ☒ ☑ ☒) This is the main hotel at the Pyhä ski slopes and has attractive rooms and excellent facilities, including gym and Jacuzzis. There is a great view from the hotel's restaurant, Racca – a spacious but fairly romantic place when candlelit. There are also self-contained chalets available.

Hotel Luostotunturi (☎ 620 400; www.luostotunturi.com; summer r from €70, winter s/d to €116/144; (P) ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) This curious-looking hotel is in the centre of Luosto and is designed to resemble a reindeer's earmark: a series of distinctive notches cut into the ear. (This however isn't readily apparent.) As well as a range of log cabins for rental, the hotel has good rooms and a spa complex that's just what's needed after a day on the fells. It's open to nonguests (adult/child €11/7), too. The hotel also rents bikes and scooters.

Scandic Hotel Luosto (☎ 624 400; www.scandic-hotels.com; r summer €79; (P) ☒ ☑) What, an attractive hotel at a ski resort? Indeed, for this long low building in Luosto is just a good old log cabin. Quite a smart one, mind you, and containing what claims to be the

world's 'largest log cabin restaurant'. There are just five rooms in the old cabin; the rest of the accommodation is in luxurious individual cabins, all with their own sauna and fireplace. There is also a site for caravans and campervans by the ski slope.

There are many designated camping areas within a short walk from the Pyhäntunturi Visitor Centre.

There are several huts where you can stay overnight in the national park. The most useful is the Huttuloma wilderness hut that sleeps six people. On the Pyhä-Luosto trail, accommodation is possible at Kapusta and Rykimäkuru huts and there's another hut at Yli-Luosto, the end-point of the range of fells and the national park itself.

Getting There & Away

There's a daily bus from Rovaniemi to Luosto (€17, one hour 40 minutes) and Pyhä (€19, two hours), that stops at Rovaniemi airport en route. There's also a bus from Kemijärvi to Pyhä, which operates Monday to Saturday. There are buses between Luosto and Sodankylä on Monday to Friday, from mid-August until the end of May.

SAARISELKÄ REGION

☎ 016

The Saariselkä region includes villages and towns surrounding the Saariselkä Wilderness and Urho K Kekkonen National Park (UKK), the most popular wilderness trekking area in Lapland, if not all of Finland. These outposts have national park information centres, as well as shops and supermarkets where you can grab trekking supplies.

In winter, the region is popular for winter sports, with sleigh safaris, snowmobiling, cross-country and downhill skiing all available.

Saariselkä

Saariselkä village (Sámi: Suolocielgi) is a winter sports centre and also a base for trekkers heading into the Saariselkä Wilderness area. It feels more like a resort than a community, and prices are higher than in other towns in Lapland. All necessary trekking supplies are available in local sports shops and supermarkets, and there are good transport connections to and from town, and plenty of accommodation. It's a

great place to set yourself up for some typically Lappish activities, too.

For information, head for the glamorous new Siula Centre, just off the main road near the Neste petrol station. Saariselkä's increasing popularity with tour groups can be seen by the presence of Marimekko and Iittala design shops; here you will also find the office of **Pohjois-Lapin Matkailu** (North Lapland Tourism; ☎ 668 402; www.saariselka.fi; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat Sep & Apr), the helpful tourist information point. There's Internet access here (€1 per 10 minutes). Next to it is **Metsähallitus Customer Service Point Kiehinen** (☎ 020-564 7200; www.outdoors.fi), an information point for the national parks, with hiking information, maps and a small nature display.

Activities & Tours

Saariselkä has plenty to offer the active traveller. For skiers, there are 12 downhill slopes served by six lifts. The longest run is 1300m and the vertical drop is 180m. There's also a sledge run that's a lot of fun. Cross-country trails in the area total 240km, some 35 of which are lit. Cross-country and downhill ski rentals are available in the village, as are sledges. A lift pass for one/five days costs €29/110 in the peak of the season.

There are many other activities that can be organised here, including dog- and reindeer-sledding (around €65 for two hours), gold-panning (€25), snowmobiling (€60/90 for one/three hours), fishing (€60 for three hours), rafting (€160/230 for one/two days) and mountain biking (€30 for four to five hours). Prices for all these vary according to the operator and the time of year.

The big hotels all organise activities, and the tourist office can book them for you too. Other tour operators:

Eräsetti (☎ 668 345; www.erasetti.fi; Saariseläntie 14)

Hiking, biking, canoeing, fishing, gold-panning, snowmobiling, dog- and reindeer-sledding, cross-country skiing.

Lapland Safaris (☎ 668 901; www.laplandsafaris.com; Siura Building) Snowmobile safaris, gold-panning and more.

Luontoloma (☎ 668 706; www.saariselka.fi/luontoloma) Fishing, rafting, snowshoe treks, reindeer- and husky-sledding, snowmobile rental.

SLEEPING & EATING

Prices in Saariselkä's hotels are highest during the ski season and *ruska* (late August

to mid-September). The **Saariselän Keskusvaraamo Booking Centre** (☎ 668 400; keskusvaraamo@saariselka.fi) can organise most forms of accommodation in the village, from apartment rentals to log cabins and hotel rooms.

Here, as in other parts of Finland, Villi Pohjola, the accommodation division of the Forest and Park Service, has many rural cabins and cottages for rental. Ask at the Metsähallitus Customer Service Point, or contact **Villi Pohjola** (☎ 020-564 4333; www.villipo.hjola.fi) directly.

Saariselän Tunturihotelli (☎ 681 501; www.saariselantunturihotelli.fi; s/d €105/125, off-season from €85/100; (P) ☒ ☑ ☒) This fine old hotel is spread over several buildings, including the flamboyant Dalmatian-like Paraspaikka annexe. The rooms and service are good, and there's also a bewildering range of apartments, all of which have their own sauna. They start at €125 for a two-person apartment off-season; an eight-person apartment costs €2210 per week during the high-season, and has a Jacuzzi, balcony, the works.

Holiday Club Saariselkä (☎ 6828; www.holidayclub.fi; s/d from €100/126; (P) ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) This is an enormous spa hotel in the centre of the village. In addition to hotel rooms, holiday chalets are available. There are plenty of leisure activities on offer here, and nonguests can use the spa facilities for €12. The restaurant has a big €14 dinner buffet.

Saariselän Panimo (☎ 6756 500; www.saariselapanimo.fi; s/d from €29/38; (P) ☒ ☑) This is the local village pub with some inexpensive huts for rent out the back. The huts, sleeping six to eight people, have their own kitchen, living room and sauna.

Pirkon Pirtti (☎ 668 050; Honkapolki 2; pizzas €7-9, mains €12-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) Just up the hill from the tourist office building, this unassuming little place doesn't look much from the outside, but has a lovely cosy interior with a fireplace. As well as tasty pizzas, it serves delicious Lapp specialties – readers have extolled the virtues of the reindeer in pepper sauce – at very reasonable prices. It's also a good place for a beer.

Petronella (☎ 668 930; mains €13.50-28; ☎ lunch & dinner Sep & Nov-May) This place serves lavish portions of Lappish food and is probably the finest restaurant in Saariselkä. It's closed in summer.

For lunch, the **Huippu** (☎ 668 803; ☎ lunch & dinner) at nearby Kaunispaä, 2km northeast,

is no stranger to tour buses. It serves tasty food and has excellent views. The buffet is very extensive. You can walk (or ski) there easily from town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Each flight arriving at Ivalo airport is met by a shuttle bus to Saariselkä. Northbound buses from Rovaniemi stop on request at Saariselkä, and some buses make a loop through the village. During the ski season, there is an express bus from Helsinki, leaving at 7.45pm on Fridays.

Kiilopää

Kiilopää, 17km southeast of Saariselkä village, is another major trekking centre for the region, and is an excellent spot to start or finish your trek. Marked trails head directly into the wilderness from here.

Tunturikeskus Kiilopää (Fell Centre Kiilopää; ☎ 670 0700; www.kiilopaa.com; s/d summer from €65/74, high season to €90/120; ♿) is an excellent and very professional facility that takes care of all accommodation and services. It rents mountain bikes, rucksacks, sleeping bags, skiing equipment and more. It also sells fishing permits and dispenses sound advice on trekking; guided treks are possible. There are hotel rooms and a café-restaurant (packed lunch €6, dinner €17), as well as a variety of cottages and apartments starting at €80 for a four-person apartment in summer, and the **Ahopää hostel** (dm from €22), a comfortable HI-affiliated facility with a kitchen, sauna, laundry and café.

Kiilopää is 6km from the main road 4; turn off at the Kakslauttanen hotel complex 11km south of Saariselkä. Several daily buses do the one-hour trip between Ivalo and Kiilopää; a bus meets every incoming flight to Ivalo airport. If you are travelling by bus from Rovaniemi, check whether the bus runs to Kiilopää: not all do.

Tankavaara

Tankavaara (www.tankavaara.fi), 32km south of Saariselkä, is locally famous as the 'Gold Village', a slightly kitsch reminder of the gold-rush days that once brought hundreds of hopeful diggers to the Saariselkä area.

Also here is the excellent **Koilliskaira Visitor Centre** (☎ 0205-647 251; ukpuisto@metsa.fi; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May), with the

best possible advice on activities and trekking in UKK. It also has top exhibitions on local wildlife, including a display on the raptor population upstairs, a slide-show, a shop and a good selection of maps. Three circular **nature trails** arc out from the centre (1km, 3km and 6km); a booklet available from the centre gives good extra information about these routes.

The **Kultamuseo** (Gold Prospector Museum; ☎ 626 171; adult/child €7/3.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) displays tools and other paraphernalia from Lapland's crazy gold-fever years, minerals and gemstones, and extends its scope to gold rushes around the world. You can try your luck and pan for gold in summer (€3.50/20 per hour/day). Gold-related events and festivals are held in summer, the biggest being the **Goldpanners' Festival** in early August, which includes the Finnish Goldpanning Championships.

Korundi (☎ 626 158; fax 626 261; d/apt €50, 2-/4-bed cabin €37/47; ♿) has doubles, apartments and rustic log cabins, as well as a café-bar and the atmospheric, timbered restaurant **Wanha Waskoolimies** (Ye Olde Goldpanner; mains €9-17), which serves steaks, reindeer, salmon, soup and Lapp Schnapps.

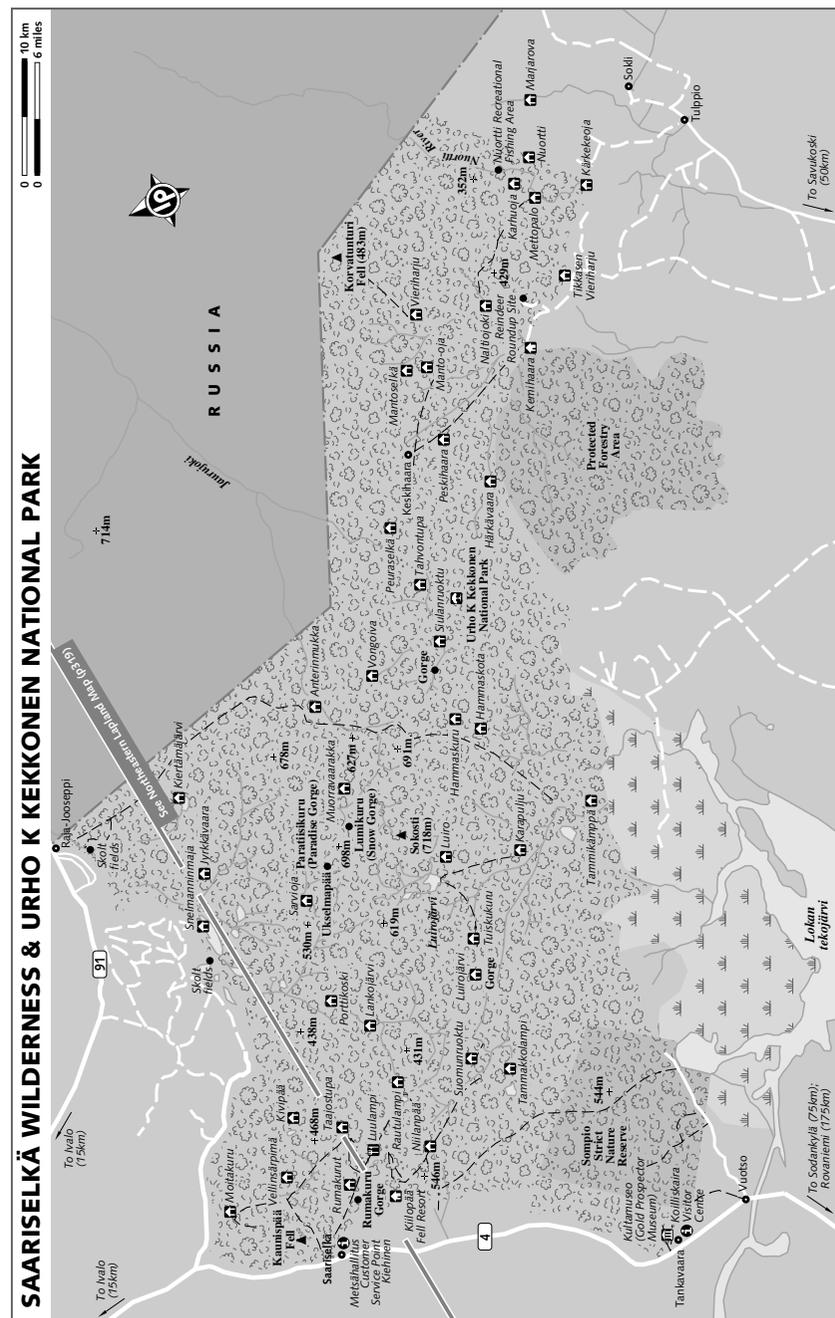
Tankavaara is on the main Rovaniemi-Ivalo road. All northbound buses pass the village, stopping on request.

SAARISELKÄ WILDERNESS & URHO K KEKKONEN NATIONAL PARK

The Saariselkä Wilderness – which includes the 2538-sq-km Urho K Kekkonen National Park and also large tracts of protected forestry lands – extends to the Russian border. It's a fabulous wilderness, home to bears, wolverines and golden eagles, as well as many thousands of free-grazing reindeer. This is a highly rated trekking area, partly because of the large network of wilderness huts, but also for the unspoilt beauty of the low *tunturi* hills. You certainly won't be alone in peak season on the most popular routes, but there are plenty of options in this huge and memorable expanse of forest, fell and marshland.

Orientation & Information

The park is divided into four zones, each with different rules. The basic zone is the area closest to main roads. Camping and fires are only allowed in designated places; to minimise



environmental impact it is recommended to make use of previously-used pitches. In the wilderness zones of Saariselkä (west) and Nuortti (southeast, between Tulppio and Kemihaara), camping is allowed everywhere except in certain gorges and on treeless areas. In the Kemi-Sompio wilderness zone (east), camping is allowed everywhere.

Although fires (using dead wood) are allowed in certain areas, you should take a camp stove, because fire bans are common in summer. In most areas, fires are only allowed at designated fireplace zones (these are supplied with firewood). The fire bans supersede all other regulations.

There are national park visitor centres in Saariselkä, Tankavaara (Koilliskaira) and Savukoski villages. The Koilliskaira centre is particularly good for practical trekking tips; you can also pick up information at Kiilopää, although it isn't an official information centre. A map and compass are *essential* for the most remote areas of the park.

There are three maps available for the area, published by Genimap. The western part of the park is shown on the 1:50,000 *Saariselkä-Kiilopää* map; the 1:50,000 *Sokosti-Suomujoki* map will take you beyond Luirajärvi; the entire park is shown on the 1:100,000 *Koilliskaira* map. Each map costs €14. The visitors' centres also sell a simpler map for day-trip walks (€3).

Sights

There are several natural attractions within the park boundaries, of which the **Rumakuru Gorge**, near the hut of the same name, is closest to the main road. **Luirajärvi** is the most popular destination for any trek, including a hike up the nearby **Sokosti summit** (718m), the highest in the park. **Paratiisikuru** (Paradise Gorge), a steep descent from the 698m **Ukselmäpää summit**, and the nearby **Lumikuru** (Snow Gorge), are popular day trips between Sarvioja and Muorravaarakka huts.

There are two historical **Skolt fields**, with restored old houses, 2km south of Raja-Jooseppi, and 2km west of Snelmannimaja hut, respectively.

Trekking

There are a large number of possible walking routes in the Saariselkä area. Use wilderness huts as bases and destinations, and create your own itinerary according to your ability:

an experienced, fit trekker can cover up to 4km per hour, and up to 25km per day. You will need to carry all food, as wilderness huts in the park are not stocked with supplies; water in rivers is drinkable.

The four- to six-day loop from the main road to Luirajärvi is the most popular, and can be extended beyond the lake. To reach areas where few have been, take a one-week walk from Kiilopää to Kemihaara.

The most remote route follows old roads and walking routes through the fells all the way from Raja-Jooseppi in the north to Kemihaara or Tulppio in the southeast.

Note that despite its popularity, Saariselkä can be tough going for the less experienced. Trails – particularly in the eastern part of the park – can be faint or almost nonexistent. Winter ski safaris can become especially dangerous during cold spells, and some areas are only suitable for expert ski-trekkers. Take advice from the park visitor centres on current conditions and route descriptions.

Sleeping

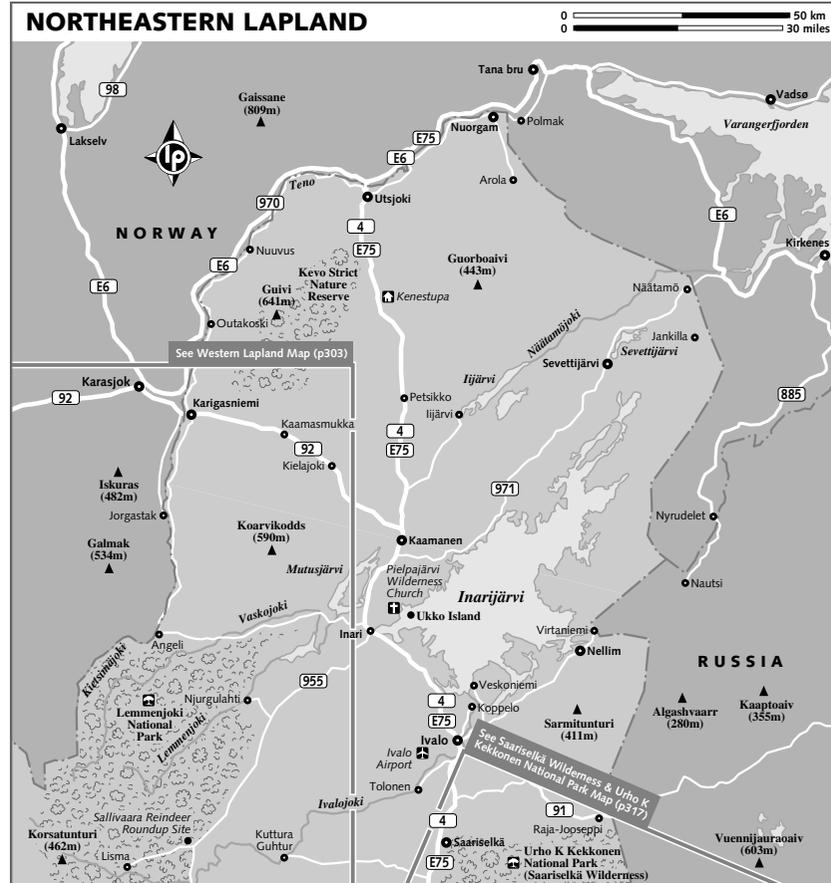
Within the park are 200 designated camping areas, all free. There are close to 30 wilderness huts in the park that may be used free of charge. Some of these have locked areas with beds and a few cabins within the park, which must both be booked in advance. The charge is €9 per bed per night; this is on a shared basis. Book beds at any of the park visitor centres.

A few wilderness huts close to the main road are for day use only – you can overnight at one of these in an emergency. You'll need a sleeping bag and mat for the wilderness huts; the bookable ones have mattresses. Some huts have gas or wood-burning stoves and sometimes telephones and saunas. Almost all are near water. The visitor centres can supply maps and details of the huts.

Getting There & Away

The easiest starting points for treks are Saariselkä or Kiilopää. From Savukoski you can catch a **post taxi** (☎ 040-730 6484; ☹ Wed & Fri) to Kemihaara village, 1km from the park's boundary.

The Raja-Jooseppi border station is another starting point for treks, as it takes you directly into the real wilderness; you can get there by taxi-bus from Ivalo.



IVALO

☎ 016 / pop 3500

Ivalo (Sámi: Avvil) has all the shops and services you would expect in a small Finnish town, but it makes no pretence of being a tourist destination, apart from having an airport used mainly by incoming tour groups.

Ivalo does have a unique subculture though: gold-panners. This is the nearest 'big smoke' for hermits who spend their time panning the Ivalojoiki for gold. Hotel Kulthippu is one place where any gold found is traded for booze, and where incredible tales are told before panners return to their solitary, secretive hunt for the mother lode.

Opposite the Spar supermarket on the main road, **Inarilainen** (☎ 663 311; Ivalontie 7;

☹ 9am-4.30pm, to 7pm in summer) is the local weekly news-magazine shop, but also serves as a tourist information point.

Activities DOG-SLEDDING

There are several husky breeding farms around Ivalo, and in winter, a dog-sledding safari is a superb, though demanding (and expensive), way of experiencing the Lapland wilderness.

Kamisak (☎ 667 736; kamisak@hotmail.com), run by Eija and Reijo Järvinen, is about 5km south of Ivalo and open year-round. There's a good little café, plenty of knowledgeable chat about all things canine, and you can take an informal tour of the husky

enclosures and meet the dogs (adult/child €4/2); a boardwalk points out some of the area's typical berries and plants. In winter, from around November to April, they run safaris weekly. These range from a half-day trip with a two-person sled (€100, 10km) and full-day safaris (€135, 30km) to three- and five-day safaris, where participants get their own sleds and are taught how to drive and care for their own team of five to eight dogs. The price (around €1000 per person for five days) includes everything.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

If you've always fancied yourself as another Mikä Häkkinen, Kimi Räikkönen, or Marcus Grönholm, or are simply a bit short on confidence swerving around reindeer or negotiating those icy roads, pay the **Arctic Rally Team** (☎ 663 456; www.arcticrallyteam.fi; Ivalontie 25) a visit. They organise crash courses (so to speak) in winter driving, rallying and even navigating (left! I mean right! Oops!).

Based at the Hotel Ivalo, Club Nord arranges mainly winter activities, including husky-sledding and snowmobiling.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

Hotel Ivalo (☎ 688 111; www.hotelivalo.fi; Ivalontie 34; s/d with breakfast €75/95; meals from €9.50-22; 📶 📺 📺 📺 📺) On the southern approach to town is this well-equipped hotel, with standard rooms, a sauna and a nice indoor pool. In quieter periods, you may be able to nab a 'walk-in' discount. The hotel hires bikes to guests; there's also a pool table and pub, as well as a tour agency on site. The restaurant is the best eating option in Ivalo.

Hotel Kultahippu (☎ 661 825; fax 662 510; Pet-samontie 1; s/d from €57/70) Ivalo's other hotel, the 'speck of gold' is by the riverside at the north end of town. It has the town's main pub, and the nightclub Hipun Kellari (🕒 10pm-4am Fri & Sat) is where the community gathers for weekly drinking and dancing.

Getting There & Away

There are daily flights from Helsinki to Ivalo, and regular air services from many other Finnish towns. The airport is 12km south of Ivalo; a connecting bus to the centre meets each arriving flight.

Daily buses from Rovaniemi all stop in Ivalo. Car-rental companies with offices at Ivalo airport (and in town) include Avis,

Budget, Hertz and Europcar. Rates are the same as elsewhere in Finland.

A road runs east from Ivalo to the Russian city of Murmansk, 303 kilometres away. Three weekly buses (see p346) travel the distance. The border is crossed at Raja-Jooseppi, 53km from Ivalo. This is also a possible starting point for treks into the Saariselkä wilderness. For Raja-Jooseppi, catch the Murmansk bus, which leaves Ivalo at 3.30pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (€9, 50 minutes).

INARI

☎ 016 / pop 550

If you blink behind the wheel or nod off in the bus you might miss the village of Inari (Sámi: Anár). It is the main Sámi community in the region and a centre for genuine Sámi handicrafts – although the galleries and boutique shops have an air of commercialism, this is the best place in Finland to shop for genuine Lappish and Sámi handmade textiles, jewellery, silverware and woodwork.

Inari is a good base for exploring Sápmi, but it has some fine attractions of its own. Spend a day or two here visiting the Siida museum, trekking to the Wilderness Church, and taking an afternoon cruise on Inarijärvi.

Information

Inari Info (☎ 661 666; www.inarilapland.org; 🕒 10am-5pm mid-Sep–May, 9am-7pm Jun–mid-Sep) In the centre of the village, it has tourist information as well as Internet access and a post office. Fishing rods (€10/day) and bikes (€10/20 for 4/24hr) can be hired.

Sights

SIIDA – SÁMI MUSEUM & NORTHERN LAPLAND NATURE CENTRE

One of the finest museums in Finland, **Siida** (☎ 665 212; www.siida.fi; adult/student/child €8/6.50/4; 🕒 9am-8pm daily Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) should not be missed. Overall, the exhibition successfully brings to life Sámi origins, culture, traditions, lifestyle and present-day struggles. There are diverse temporary exhibits, a good timeline introduction to the history of the area, and a superb, detailed display on the Arctic environment, flora, fauna and geology. Outside is a good open-air museum featuring Sámi buildings, handicrafts and artefacts, including several

dastardly traps for bears, foxes and wolves. A theatre shows pretty visuals of the northern lights and Inarijärvi; there's also a fine craft shop and top-value café, where €8.50 will get you a hot dish and free use of the salad bar (open 11am to 3pm).

PIELPAJÄRVI WILDERNESS CHURCH

The *erämaakirkko* (wilderness church) of Pielpajärvi is accessible from Inari by a marked walking track (7.5km one way) from the parking area at SIIDA. If you have a vehicle there's another car park 2.5km beyond here, up Sarviniementie, from where it's a 4.3km walk to the church. In winter, you'll need snowshoes and a keen attitude to do this. The church area has been an important marketplace for the Sámi over the centuries, with the first church erected here in 1646. The present church was built in 1760, and restored in the 1970s. It's always open.

SÁMI CHURCH

This church (🕒 mid-Jun–mid-Aug) was built in 1952 with American financing. The altar painting depicts a wandering Sámi family meeting Christ. Inari Sámi and Fell Sámi are spoken in this church, west of the main street on the road to Lemmenjoki National Park.

Festivals & Events

It doesn't get much more Lappish than **reindeer races** – they're held in Inari, sleds and all, over the last week of May on Inarijärvi. It's a local event with festivities, betting and a winner's cup. The reindeer are antlerless, and the sport looks a little like crazy water-skiing (with the reindeer as boats).

Tours

There are daily cruises run by **Lake & Snow** (☎ 0400 295 731) on Inarijärvi from mid-June (as soon as the ice melts) to late August (€13, two hours). Departures are at 2pm daily, with an additional departure in July at 6pm. Boats leave from the wharf at the Siida car park. The destination is **Ukko Island** (Sámi: Ájjih), sacred to the Sámi. During the brief (20-minute) stop, most people climb to the top of the island, but there are also cave formations at the island's northern end. The same company also organises fishing trips and snowmobile safaris.

There are two seaplanes parked in the lake that serve as air taxis. They also do

10-minute **scenic flights** (☎ 0400 879 628; €110 for 1-3 people) and chartered trips around Inarijärvi.

At the Kultahovi Hotel, **Koskenlaskua Rafting** (☎ 0400 453 234) runs one-hour trips on the rapids here (€25), or more involved three-hour excursions on the Juutua river (€87).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Inarin Kultahovi (☎ 671 221; inarin.kultahovi@co.inet.fi; Saarikoskentie 2; s/d €66/86; 📶 📺) This is tucked away just off the road to Lemmenjoki National Park and is a cosy place popular with tour groups. The rooms have been recently renovated and are pleasant but nothing special – unless, that is, you can get one overlooking the rapids. The riverside sauna is great, and there's a **restaurant** (mains €9.50-26; 🕒 11am-11pm) with a good-value à la carte menu of Lappish specialties and set three-course menus. The dining area looks over the beautiful Alakoski. Appetisers include crêpes filled with forest mushrooms (€5.80), while the local trout is tasty, as is the reindeer fillet with game sauce.

Hotel Inari (☎ 671 026; www.hotellinari.fi; s/d €38/45, apt €79; 📶 📺) This place is the hub of the village and has decent rooms with private bathroom, a minibar and TV; it's worth paying a little extra to face the lake, rather than the road. It can get noisy on Friday and Saturday nights, when the bar downstairs kicks off. There are also mini-apartments with their own sauna and kitchenette. The hotel also has a **restaurant** (pizzas €4-8, mains €10-13) with all the Lappish dishes – plenty of reindeer and salmon prepared in a variety of ways. Pizzas include sautéed reindeer, peach and onion, and there are inexpensive burgers. There's also a grill that claims to be open 24 hours, and a bar, which is the hub of village life and has a glassed-in terrace where you can watch the seaplanes and see the amazing things the sun can do at these latitudes.

Lomakylä Inari (☎ 671 108; fax 671 480; 2-/4- person cabin from €25/35, cottages with sauna €84-150; 🕒 Jun-late Sep) There are a couple of bungalow villages near the camping ground but closer to town is this place, within easy walking distance of the bus station. It's not particularly friendly but has a café and sauna, decent cabins with fridge and stove, and good facilities. Call ahead out of season as it sometimes opens if there are bookings.

Uruniemi Camping (☎ 671 331; www.uruniemi.com; tent sites €11, d cottages from €17, 4-person cottages €34-42; ☹ Jun-late Sep) This place, 2km south of town, is a well-equipped lakeside camping ground with cottages, café, sauna, and boats and bikes for hire.

The Siida museum is a great spot to have lunch.

Shopping

Inari is the main centre for Sámi *duodji* (handicrafts) and there are several studios and boutique shops in the village. Among the items on sale here are bags, pouches and boots made from reindeer hide, knitted gloves and socks, traditional textiles, shawls and the strikingly colourful Sámi hats, bone-handle knives, carved wooden bowls, cups and other souvenir handicrafts, jewelry, and CDs and tapes of Sámi music.

Sámi Duodji Ry (☎ 671 254; Lehtolantie 1; ☹ 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat Sep-Jun) This place, next door to the library, is the main outlet representing Sámi products. It has a good range of Sámi books and CDs, as well as beautifully crafted silverware and clothing.

Samekki (☎ 671 086; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, also weekends mid-Jun-mid-Aug) Down a small lane behind the library is the studio of Petteri Laiti, a famous artisan among Finnish Sámi. The silverwork and handicrafts are very highly regarded; you'll often see the artist at work here.

Inarin Hopea (☎ 671 333; Sillankorva), opposite the Siida museum, sells hand-worked silver items.

Getting There & Away

Heading north on the much-travelled Arctic Rd 4, Inari is the next stop after Ivalo, 38km beyond it. At least two daily buses travel between Rovaniemi and Inari, and on to Utsjoki.

LEMMENJOKI NATIONAL PARK

At 2855 sq km, Lemmenjoki (Sámi: Leammi) is the largest national park in Finland. Saariselkä is much more popular with trekkers, but the Lemmenjoki experience is more diverse: slush through desolate wilderness rivers, explore the rough landscape and bump into gold-panners in the middle of nowhere. The Morgamjoki is the main gold-panning area, and there are several

old huts where gold-panners still sleep in summer.

The **Lemmenjoki Nature Centre** (☎ 0205-647793; ☹ 9am-5pm Jun-Sep) is just before the village of Njurgulahti (often just called Lemmenjoki), about 50km southwest of Inari. It has a small interpretative exhibition and a powerful set of binoculars, and you can purchase maps and fishing permits here. There is food and accommodation in the lakeside village.

Sights & Activities

SALLIVAARA REINDEER ROUNDUP SITE

The roundup site, 70km southwest of Inari, was built in 1933 (although some huts date back to the 1890s) and used by Sámi reindeer herders twice yearly until 1964. Roundups were an important social event for the people of northern Lapland, usually lasting several weeks and involving hundreds of people and animals. The Sallivaara reindeer corrals and cabins were reconstructed in 1997, and it's now possible to stay overnight in one of the Sallivaara huts. Many people come here in spring and summer for the top quality bird-watching on nearby wetlands. To reach the site, park at Repo-joki parking area then follow the marked trail, 6km one way. Reindeer roundups are held in this area (although these corrals are no longer in use), but since the timing is dependent on many factors, to see one requires a great deal of luck or contact with a reindeer herder.

TREKKING

Almost all trails start from Njurgulahti, including a 4km marked nature trail suitable for families with children. The majority of the trekking routes are within the relatively small area between the rivers Lemmenjoki and Vaskojoki. An 18km loop between Kultala and Ravadasjärvi huts takes you to some of the most interesting gold-panning areas. As you can do this in two days, many trekkers head over Ladnjoivi Fell to Vaskojoki hut and back, which extends the trek to four to five days. For any serious trekking, you will need the 1:100,000 *Lemmenjoki* map (€18), available at the Lemmenjoki Nature Centre.

Tours

In summer, a couple of local boat services cruise the Lemmenjoki valley, from Njurgulahti village to the Kultahamina wilderness

hut at Kultasatama (Gold Harbour). A 20km marked trail also follows the course of the river, so you can take the boat one way, then hike back. You can also get on or off the boat at other jetties along the route. There are at least two departures a day from mid-June to mid-September (€14/27 one way/return).

Sleeping

There are two camping and cabin places at Njurgulahti, 12km from the main (a relative term in Lapland) Inari-Kittilä road. They both have cafés and operate boat trips on the river. The national park entrance and trailheads are 1.5km away.

Lemmenjoen Lomamajat (☎ /fax 016-673 435; ahkuntupa@hotmail.com; camping per person €2, 2-/4-person cabin from €31/43) This is a switched-on place with various packages including half and full board. The owner speaks good English and runs river cruises (from €8 for a run-about, to €21 for a trip up to the gold-panning areas), rents canoes (€17/100 per day/week) and makes transport arrangements. The café, Ahkun Tupu, does a great lunch for €8.50 and has buns with enough cinnamon to season a small nation.

Next door, **Lemmenjoki Travel Service** (☎ 016-673 430; tent sites €6, r per person €10, cottages €20), has a similar set-up.

Valkeaporo (☎ 016-673 001; www.valkeaporo.fi; tent sites per person/family €7/14, 4-/6-person cottages €40/56; ☹ Apr-Oct) Near the turn-off from the main Inari-Kittilä road, on the shores of Menesjärvi, this is another good base for river trips on the Lemmenjoki. In addition to good facilities and boat and canoe hire, it offers three-hour trips on the river for €22 and all-day gold-panning trips for €37. Both trips require a minimum of six people.

Inside the park, nine wilderness huts along the most popular trekking routes provide free accommodation (three can be booked in advance for a fee). Several are along the riverboat route.

Getting There & Away

There is one taxi-bus on weekdays between Inari and Njurgulahti village; it currently leaves Inari at 3pm and involves a change, but check with the tourist office in Inari. In summer, the afternoon bus waits in the village until the boat has made the return trip, then drives back to Inari. A local taxi service can be called on ☎ 0400 396 312.

KEVO STRICT NATURE RESERVE

The 712-sq-km Kevo Strict Nature Reserve, northwest of Inari, was established in 1956. Within its boundaries you'll find some of the most breathtaking scenery in Finland (although it's nothing spectacular if you've spent your life in Norway, or near the Grand Canyon) along the splendid 40km gorge of the Kevojoki (Sámi: Geävu), which also has some decent waterfalls.

Rules for visiting the Kevo reserve are stricter than those concerning national parks: hikers cannot hunt, fish or collect plants and berries, and *must* stay on marked trails. The gorge area is off-limits from April to mid-June.

The main trail is 63km long and runs through the canyon, from Ruktajärvi, near the Utsjoki-Kaamanen road, to the Karigasniemi-Kaamanen road. The trek is rough and takes about four days one way. Use the 1:100,000 *Kevo* topographical sheet.

Sleeping

You will need a tent if you plan to hike through the canyon, as there is only one wilderness hut on this route (although there are another two on the return leg). Camping is permitted within the reserve only at a dozen designated sites.

Kenestupa (☎ 678 531) On the Utsjoki-Kaamanen road, this place is an option for those who hike through. It rents cabins and has a sauna, so end your trek here and take advantage of that cleansing sweat!

There are three free wilderness huts along a northwestern path that does not descend into the gorge. From south to north, the huts are: Ruktajärvi, at the southern end of the gorge route (accommodates eight people and has a telephone and an oven); Njávgoivi (10 people, telephone); and Kuivi, inside the park (10 people, oven). It's best to do these as a round-trip trek, from Sulaoja trailhead to Kuivi hut and back.

Getting There & Away

The preferred route is to start from the southwest; catch the Karigasniemi-bound bus from Inari and ask the driver to drop you off at the Sulaoja trailhead. From Kenestupa you can catch buses to Inari or Nuorgam.

Those with a car can leave it at Kenestupa, catch the afternoon bus to Kaamanen and change to the Karigasniemi-bound bus.

THE SÁMI OF FINLAND

Sámi (sápmelaš in their own language) are the indigenous inhabitants of Lapland and are today spread across four countries from the Kola peninsula in Russia to the southern Norwegian mountains. More than half of the 70,000 Sámi population are across the border in Norway, while Finland numbers around 8000, but there are close cultural ties across the borders. The Sámi region is called Sápmi. About half of Finnish Sámi live in the Finnish part of Sápmi.

According to stone carvings and archaeological evidence, this region was first settled soon after the last Ice Age around 10,000 years ago, but it wasn't until the beginning of the Christian era – the early Iron Age – that Finns and Sámi had become two distinct groups with diverging languages. The early inhabitants were nomadic people – hunters, fishers and food-gatherers – who migrated with the seasons. They hunted wild reindeer, fished and harvested berries in the summer months, and traded meat, clothing and handicrafts.

EARLY TRADITIONS & BELIEFS

Early Sámi society was based on the *siida*, small groups comprising a number of families who controlled particular hunting and fishing grounds. Families lived in a *kota*, a traditional dwelling resembling the tepee or wigwam of native North Americans. It could be easily set up as a temporary shelter while following the migrating reindeer herds, and more permanent *kota* were overlaid with turf to insulate the fabric and reindeer pelt covering. A 'winter village' system also developed, where groups would come together to help survive the harsh winter months.

The natural environment was essential to the Sámi existence: they worshipped the sun (father), earth (mother) and wind and believed all things in nature had a soul. The stars and constellations provided mythology – the North Star, the brightest in the night sky, was the Pillar of the World. The Sámi believed in many gods and their link with the gods was through the shaman, the most important member of the community. By beating a drum, the shaman could go into a trance and communicate with the gods, ask advice or determine their will. The drums featured in drawings depicting life, nature and the gods, usually with the sun as the central image. Forced conversion to Christianity in the 17th century spelt the end for the shamans and the traditional drums.

Traditional legends, rules of society and fairytales were handed down through the generations by storytelling. A unique form of storytelling was the *yoik*, a chant in which the singer would use words, or imitate the sounds of animals and nature to describe experiences. The *yoik* is still used by the Sámi today, sometimes accompanied by instruments.

ROLE OF THE REINDEER

Reindeer has always been central to the existence of the Sámi people. They ate the meat, took milk from the cows, used the fur for clothing and bedding, and made fish hooks and harpoons from the bones and antlers. Today around 40% of Sámi living in Sápmi are involved in reindeer husbandry; tourism is another big employer.

Originally the Sámi hunted wild reindeer, usually trapping them in pitfalls. Hunting continued until around the 16th century, when the Sámi began to domesticate entire herds and migrate with them. Towards the end of the 19th century, Finland's reindeer herders were organised into *paliskunta* (cooperatives), of which there are now around 56 in northern Finland. Reindeer wander free around the large natural areas within each *paliskunta*, which is bordered by enormous fences that cross the Lapland wilderness. Each herder is responsible for his stock and identifies them by earmarks – a series of distinctive notches cut into the ear of each animal.

The reindeer cycle follows a distinct pattern. Calves are born in May and June. At the end of June the herd is gathered and the calves earmarked. In summer, when not being driven mad by insects, the reindeer graze on fells and meadows, storing energy for winter. In September, before mating season, males are herded and separated for slaughter – up to 120,000 reindeer are slaughtered annually. By November the snow has come and the reindeer subsist by foraging for lichen. The animals are herded onto winter grazing grounds – these days herders use snowmobiles, mobile phones and even helicopters to control their herds, so they no longer need to continually migrate with them.

SÁMI CLOTHING & HANDICRAFTS

The Sámi have always used the material at their disposal – reindeer furs, antlers and bone, birch burl and wool – to make utensils, carvings, clothing and textiles. The colourful Sámi costumes, featuring jackets, pants or skirts embroidered with bright red, blue and yellow patterns, are now mostly worn on special occasions and during Sámi festivals.

Sámi handicrafts (including bags and boots made from reindeer hide, knitted gloves and socks, textiles, shawls, the strikingly colourful Sámi hats, jewellery and silverware) are recognised as indigenous art. Genuine Sámi handicrafts carry the name *Sámi duodji* (see p322 for more information).

SÁMI LANGUAGES

The cultural identity of Finland's Sámi population is closely linked to language, which has undergone a revival in recent years. Sámi languages are related to Finnish and other Finno-Ugric languages. There are three Sámi languages, not very mutually intelligible, used in Finland today, although there are under 2000 regular users. Sámi is taught in local schools, and legislation grants Sámis the right of Sámi usage in offices in Sápmi. In Utsjoki Sámi speakers constitute almost the majority of the population. You will find another seven Sámi languages in Norway, Sweden and Russia.

Fell Sámi

The most common of Sámi languages, Fell Sámi (also known as Northern Sámi or Mountain Sámi), is spoken by Utsjoki and Enontekiö Sámi, and thousands of Sámi in Norway. Fell Sámi is considered the standard Sámi, and there is plenty of literature, printed in Utsjoki and in Karasjok (Norway).

Written Fell Sámi includes several accented letters but does not directly correspond to spoken Sámi. In fact, many Sámi find written Sámi difficult to learn. For example, *giitu* (for 'thanks') is pronounced **gheech**-too, but the strongly aspirated 'h' is not written. Likewise, *dat* is pronounced as tah-ch. You can ask Sámis to read these words out loud to learn the correct pronunciation.

Inari Sámi

Although spoken by some people in the region around Inarijärvi, Inari Sámi is rarely written and seems to be heading for extinction.

Skolt Sámi

The rare Skolt Sámi language (Finnish: *kolttsaame*) is spoken by approximately 600 Sámi people who live in Sevetijärvi and Nellim villages. Being refugees from the Petsamo region (which was annexed by the Soviet Union), they maintain Russian Orthodox traditions and have close ties with Sámi groups who live on the Kola peninsula in Russia. Skolt Sámi contains some Russian loan words.

THE SÁMI TODAY

Sámis have been subjected to oppression in the past. They were forcibly converted to (Protestant) Christianity in the 17th century, and their religious traditions were made illegal. This has led to a situation where many Sámi define themselves not as Sámi but rather as ordinary Finns.

They were also heavily taxed by the Swedish state but were not officially recognised as landowners. Today Sámi rights are defended and their language is prominently displayed in Sámi regions in Finnish Lapland. Finland was the first country to inaugurate a popularly elected Sámi parliament in 1972 (Norway followed in 1989 and Sweden in 1993). The universal right to 'Sámi territory' (a somewhat blurry definition) is continuously disputed. No 'homeland' or 'reservation' has been created so far, and the parliament does not have power of self-government on issues relating to Sámi peoples.

However, the Sámi identity is gaining strength in Finland. There is a common Sámi flag, Sámi National Day is celebrated on 6 February, there is a Sámi radio station (101.9FM) and increased tourism is providing economic benefits through the sale of Sámi handicrafts. For more information on Sámi culture, visit the excellent Siida museum in Inari or the Arktikum in Rovaniemi.

INARI TO NORWAY

☎ 016

Since Norway stretches across the top of northern Finland, there are three main routes north from Inari into Norway: to the west via Karigasniemi (the most common route to Nordkapp); straight up to Utsjoki; and east to Kirkenes via Sevettijärvi. From Utsjoki, you can turn east along the fabulous Teno salmon river to Nuorgam, the northernmost village in the EU.

Kaamanen

Kaamanen, 25km north of Inari, is just the crossing point of the three northern roads. The Kotipuoti shop has postal services and a petrol station. All buses – and most locals for that matter – call at **Kaamasen Kievari** (☎ 672 713; mains €13-23; ☎ 9am-midnight), a busy, legendary pub and roadhouse a few kilometres north of the Sevettijärvi turn-off and 5km south of the Karigasniemi crossing. It has a café, petrol station and hard-drinking bar, as well as an excellent restaurant serving local dishes such as salmon, whitefish, and a top reindeer steak with herb potatoes (€22.30). They also have rooms and cabins (HI-affiliated), but Jokitörmä, 1km to the south, is better.

Hostel Jokitörmä (☎ 672 725; fax 672 745; tent sites €13, dm cabin/room €16/19, s/d cabin €28/38; ☎ ☎), on the Arctic Hwy about 24km north of Inari, is a great little HI-affiliated hostel. The cabins are small and cosy and look over the river, although mosquito repellent is in order in summer. They have a simple stove but no fridge. You can camp here with tents or vans, too. There are also good two- and four-person rooms, and a separate set of cottages, with full facilities.

Karigasniemi

The small village of Karigasniemi (Sámi: Gáregasnjárga) is the main crossing point from Finland to Norway, along the popular Nordkapp route. It has services such as a bank and a post office. Fell Sámi (see boxed text, p325), the language of the local people of Karigasniemi, is a dialect spoken across the border in Norway.

Camping Tenorinne (☎ 676 113; tent sites €14, 2-/4-person cabin €30/42; ☎ Jun–mid-Sep) has rustic log cabins and a pleasant location away from the main road.

Two buses a day travel from Ivalo to Karigasniemi, continuing on to the Norwegian town of Karasjok. A shared taxi travels to Sámi villages north of Karigasniemi along the Tenojoki on Tuesday and Friday.

Utsjoki

The border village of Utsjoki (Sámi: Ohcejohka) is not an attractive place by any means, straggling along the main road, but there's a crossing into Norway here and it's home to a fairly large Sámi population. There are two banks, a post office and several shops here, but little else to detain the visitor.

The tourist office, **Utsjoki Info** (☎ 686 234, 686 111; ☎ Jun-late Sep) is on the left just before the bridge to Norway and jointly run by the municipality and Metsähallitus (the Forest and Park Service). There's a small nature display, maps for sale and information specifically on Kevo Strict Nature Reserve.

There's a campsite, and **Hotelli Luossajohka** (☎ 321 2100; fax 677 126; Luossatie; s/d €55/73, with bath €73/93; ☎ ☎), up the road by the Osuuspankki bank, is the only hotel in the town itself; it also has a restaurant and bar, but isn't particularly inviting. There are a couple of fast-food places on the main road, and Giisá, a café with Internet access that sells bus tickets.

Nuorgam & the Teno Valley

The 43km road from Utsjoki northeast to Nuorgam (Sámi: Njuorggan), the northernmost village of Finland (70 degrees and 4 minutes north of the equator), is one of Lapland's most spectacular. It follows the impressive and broad Tenojoki, one of Europe's best **salmon-fishing** destinations. Most anglers gather near Boratbokcankoski and Alaköngäs Rapids, 7km southwest of the village centre, but there are good spots right along this stretch (and also the other way from Utsjoki, towards Karigasniemi).

Apart from fishing, there's not a great deal to do in Nuorgam, but it's a relaxing spot, and much nicer than Utsjoki. The majority of the 200 residents are Sámi. There's a supermarket, petrol station, restaurant and pub in town, but the heart of village life is **Nuorgamin Lomakeskus** (☎ 678 312; tent sites €10-16, r €25-40, cabin €45-65; café ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun; ☎ ☎ ☎),

which has a range of accommodation options, including camping and log cabins, and a sauna. It sells fishing permits, has a café with good daily hot meals and an Internet terminal, and is a good source of local information. It also sells the souvenir T-shirt 'Nuorgam: Pieni mutta pohjoisin' (Nuorgam: Small but northernmost).

There are many campsites and cabin villages scattered along the narrow road on the Finnish side of the river; at least a dozen between Nuorgam and Utsjoki, and several more on the Karigasniemi road. They cater mainly to fishing parties and are good-value, costing from €35 for a basic cabin. The Utsjoki tourist office has a full list.

Nuorgam is the northern end of a trekking route from Sevettijärvi (see right).

A late-evening bus travels from Rovaniemi via Ivalo and Inari to Nuorgam; there's also an afternoon bus on weekdays. At weekends, an afternoon bus makes the journey from Ivalo. The late bus heads on to Tana bru in Norway, but otherwise it's 4km to the border, and a further 2km to the Norwegian border town of Polmak.

Sevettijärvi

The road east from Kaamanen heads along the shore of Inarijärvi to the village of Sevettijärvi (Skolt Sámi: Ce'vetjäu'rr), in the far northeast of Finland. This area is home to a distinctive Lappish group called Skolt Sámi; some of the Skolt speak Skoltish (see boxed text, p325), Finnish and Russian. There are 300 Skolt Sámi in and around Sevettijärvi. It's a peaceful wilderness drive along the shores of Inarijärvi up this way, but there's not a lot in the way of attractions except fishing on the Näätämöjoki and the Sevettijärvi, and the excellent trekking opportunities in the lake-filled, remote corner of Finland to the northeast and northwest.

Sevettijärven Lomamajat (☎ 672 215; cabin from €30) behind the church is a family-run place

with two- and four-bed cabins. Amazingly it's not on a lake, but there is a sauna.

Nilituvat (☎ 672 240; tent sites €10, s/d cabins €20/30), 3.5km south of Sevettijärvi, is right on the main road but also beside a lake. There are cabins, and a self-contained eight-person cottage with sauna for €70.

Sevetin Baari, by the lake in the centre of town, is the only place that offers meals, snacks and coffee, and is also the local post office. Its opening hours are somewhat erratic, so don't rely on it. There is a single supermarket in the village.

There is a bus connection between Ivalo and Sevettijärvi on weekdays. There is no petrol station in Sevettijärvi; the nearest services are in the border village of Näätämö, 30km northeast, or Kaamanen, 92km away. Näätämö (Skolt Sámi: Njauddam) has a seven-day supermarket as well.

Trekking Around Sevettijärvi

The Sevettijärvi region has more lakes per square kilometre than any other region in Finland. Very few trekkers explore this remote wilderness, yet it is worth the effort it takes to reach it.

The **Sevettijärvi to Nuorgam** trek is an established route, and the most popular from Sevettijärvi. You'll need the 1:50,000 trekking maps for the area, available at Karttakeskus in Helsinki.

There are two places to start the trek; the better one is just north of Sevettijärvi, at Saunaranta. You'll see a sign that reads 'Ahvenjärvi 5', and a trekking sign – 12km to Opukasjärvi, 69km to Pulmankijärvi. There are six mountain huts along the route; from the final wilderness hut you can walk to Nuorgam along a road, or make a phone call from a local home for a taxi to Nuorgam village.

There are several other possible routes in the area, all more or less waymarked.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'