

FROZEN HOLIDAYS

It is that time of the year again when the winters are in the forefront and it is also when you can make the most of your winter holidays. Imagine yourself sitting in a warm and cosy glass igloo with nature's light show playing out in the middle of the night. A visit to any frozen place is winter wonderland that offers a surreal experience.

TEXT: BINDU GOPAL RAO

A team of sled dogs is pulling a sled through a snowy landscape. The dogs are harnessed together and are running towards the camera. The sled is in the foreground, and the snow is deep and uneven. In the background, there are bare trees and a clear blue sky. The text "Hi! BLITZ" is overlaid on the image in a large, grey, serif font.

Hi! BLITZ

FINNISH LAPLAND



Hi! BLITZ

The charm of Lapland is unmissable. Where else can you see 24-hours sunlight in the summer and the exact opposite in winter? While you might think of visiting Santa Claus' official hometown or staying in a glass igloo, the charm of this place is in the fact that this is where you can see the Aurora Borealis. The Northern Lights as they are better known are a unique natural phenomena that can be easily categorized as a once in a lifetime experience. Finland is one of the best places from where you can see them as they are visible for 200 nights a year! This apart, is where you can indulge in snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, ice climbing, ice fishing, snowmobile safaris and dog sled touring. As far as

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accommodation options are concerned, check into a log cabin with your own sauna (Finnish sauna, smoke sauna, ice sauna, sauna on wheels) or a glass igloo and gaze at the starry sky. There are several interesting options available in the Inari-Saariselkä region ranging from a lakeside cabin, ski resort and even a wilderness retreat. While the place is covered in a sheath of white, this is where the Arctic Design Week happens every February with the theme of 'Arcticness' that allows you to experience Arctic culture and design. If you are in the Ylläs region, you can visit a reindeer farm and learn about reindeer herding and get up close with these animals. Wellness programmes like sauna yoga are great fun too.

ICELAND



If you love the outdoors and like extreme experiences, Iceland is for you. Blessed with rough terrains, the topography includes mountains, volcanoes, glaciers, rivers, lakes and caves. Hiking is a key activity and you can stumble upon many stunning trails in Iceland. However, the 53km long, Laugavegur trail that takes you past Eyjafjallajökull volcano into the interior of Iceland is the most spectacular hiking trail in the world. Skiing and snowboarding on the hillside, guided snowmobile trips around the glaciers and jeep safaris across the highlands are other invigorating experiences. In fact, this is where you can see some rare wildlife as well. Hop on to a whale-watching boat and

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also soak in the amazing avian life and trek around on an Icelandic horse. The beauty of the landscape is something that is impossible to miss. The NLFÍ Rehabilitation and Health Clinic in Hveragerði, South Iceland is popular among health seekers for their interesting and organic approach to wellness, something you must check out while you are here. And yes, if you would like to party in sub zero temperatures, head to the capital Reykjavik. Post partying head to the Blue Lagoon to soak off the hangover in a lovely thermal pool. You can even go scuba diving between the tectonic plates of North America and Europe! Your adventures here are only limited by your imagination.

TROMSO, NORWAY



There cannot be a better place to start your Arctic adventure than experiencing the -15 degrees temperature at Tromsø in Northern Norway. This modern city blends nature and culture seamlessly and apart from an aquarium, there are museums to explore and the world's northern-most botanical garden to visit. While you are here do not miss paying obeisance at the Arctic Cathedral whose architecture is inspired by Arctic nature and has stunning glass mosaics. Special mention must be made of the 'Return of Christ' glass mosaic on the interior that has a striking design.

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city of Tromsø. A two-day boat trip gives you a beautiful experience of the ocean waves and gets you in close contact with the narrow straits between 99 beautiful islands and reefs. Also check out POLARIA, an Arctic-themed experience centre that shows films like *In the Land of the Northern Lights* and *Spitsbergen—Arctic Wilderness* and also has an Arctic walkway, fish aquariums and bearded seals from Spitsbergen. You can feed the seals while you are here. Of course, this is also a great place to catch the majestic phenomenon of the Northern Lights too. The atmosphere is almost surreal and you can take a ride on the husky dogs and see it for yourself. Go whale watching and if lucky, you can spot a Viking or two and listen to stories of Viking history.

SWEDEN



Sweden is one of Europe's least populated countries and the Swedish Lapland is the last remaining wilderness in Europe. With a coastline comprising thousands of islands, the country has a large number of national parks and trails that are waiting to be discovered. If you want to get a real winter experience stay in an Ice Hotel where everything from the bed to the side-table to the bar are all made of ice! The hotel is so beautifully sculpted that each corner and room have a different theme and the hotel reincarnates every year in a new avatar! Outside the hotel there is much to do including a wilderness safari on dog sleds and snowmobiles. Tuck into some yummy food as this area offers venison, ptarmigan and wood grouse,

Did you know that there are more dogs than people living in Jukkasjärvi? Well if you did not, this still is the best place to do a spot of husky sledding on Torne River. You can opt for a variety of safaris including the five-day Arctic Circle safari, rough terrain mountain safaris and family friendly safari outings on Caterpillar.

salmon and grayling. Try your hand at ice fishing in -10 degrees and you may just get lucky with catching your own dinner. To make the most of a Swedish winter season, you can enjoy skiing, ice-skating, dog-sledding and other winter sports. Did you know that there are more dogs than people living in Jukkasjärvi? Well if you did not, this still is the best place to do a spot of husky sledding on Torne River. You can opt for a variety of safaris including the five-day Arctic Circle safari, rough terrain mountain safaris and family friendly safari outings on Caterpillar. The snowmobile safari can be customised to include wilderness lunches, dinner in Sami teepees, saunas, hot tubs, mountain lodges, campfires, ice fishing, rally car, quad and cross bike on ice.

GREENLAND



Well, to start with Greenland is not green and simply put that means that there is a whole new world waiting to be discovered here. The world's largest non-continental island is a delight in the winter. Ski touring is when you actually walk—no snowmobiles or helicopters to take you up the snow clad hills and very often you can set up your own accommodation in the midst of the snow. Greenland has many options depending on the place you are headed and if anything remote turns you on, this is for you. This is also a paradise for hikers and there are all kinds of intensity levels. One of the longest hikes is the Arctic Circle Trail between Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut—a whopping 160km that usually takes

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8-9 nights to complete. South Greenland has hiking trails that link towns and villages and link you to Greenland's Viking history as well. Heliskiing in East Greenland takes you to large mountain expanses, tiny villages along the coast and the icy Denmark Strait where you can see seals, whales and polar bears. If you have the nerve and drive for it—diving in the Arctic with certified divers will show up a new world of underwater life that you probably did not know existed. Take a coastal ferry ride that typically lasts four nights and stops at small towns and villages. Think icebergs and you think Greenland. The largest collection of icebergs is at the Ilulissat Icefjord that you can see while hiking, sailing or flightseeing.