

**HIGHLY COMMENDED** Nutti Sámi Siida, Sweden

# Play it again, Sámi



**SAPMI IS ONE OF THE** last great wilderness regions in Europe. Better known as Lapland, it's a vast territory stretching across four countries – Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

It's home to the Sámi, one of the world's indigenous people, who have lived in the same area throughout their history, and have retained their own culture, language, customs and traditions. The Sámi live in close harmony with nature, relying heavily on the reindeer, iconic symbol of their culture.

Nils Torbjorn Nutti is a reindeer herder, like his father Henrik before him. Back in the mid-1990s Nils and his wife Carina Pingi faced a crisis, when the pasture for their herd was so bad that the reindeer would have starved if they had not fed factory-made food to the corralled animals. Visitors came to the corral to get a hands-on cultural and reindeer experience. Then Henrik dusted off his old reindeer harnesses which had been used for reindeer sled transportation before the advent of the snowmobile in the 1960s. He taught Nils and Carina the traditional

skills of taming and training reindeer to pull a sled. In turn Nils and Carina decided to share this knowledge with their visitors and a new ecotourism venture was born.

Now their company Nutti Sámi Siida specialises in running reindeer sled tours – anything from 3.5-hour round trips to 8-day adventures – across the vast frozen tundra of Swedish Sapmi. Based in the village of Jukkasjarvi, 15 minutes from Kiruna airport, the ecotours give guests insights into Sámi culture, while providing them with a unique wilderness experience. Guests drive their own sled, sleep in a Sami tent and can fish in a frozen lake – as well as spend a night at the region's ice hotel.

'These tours are away from the stresses of everyday life – away from everything,' says manager Katja Bechtloff. 'They are once-in-a-lifetime experiences, that bring you in direct contact with animals and nature. The polar light is amazing – pink and blue twilight – and of course, there are the Northern Lights to watch out for.'

And the eco-adventures have

enabled Nils and Carina to maintain their reindeer husbandry traditions.

Nils and Carina's project was at first greeted with scepticism from the conservative Sámi community, in which there is no real tradition of operating businesses or using traditional livelihoods in more modern ways. But the tours provide employment for herders as guides and all guests' meals are sourced locally. Nutti Sámi Siida even provides tourism internships for pupils at the upper school in Kiruna where they can learn how to introduce Sámi culture to visitors through ventures of their own. The company is now working with three other Sámi family businesses in Kiruna and hopes to build up a pool of Sámi tourism that will help to keep the culture alive for the generations to come.

Standing on the back of a reindeer sled gliding across the still, silent, frozen untracked mountain valleys is a breathtaking singular experience. I mean, who else do you know who rides on a sleigh pulled by reindeer?

 [www.nutti.se](http://www.nutti.se)

To view a short film about reindeer sledding, go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/nuttisamisiida>