Join JACQUI PATERSON on two scenic, and very different, Scandinavian journeys.

cool Sweden



ICY ADVENTURES

Snow blankets every surface, blending seamlessly into the pale clouds. The only colour comes from the spiky green tips of the pine trees, and the log homes painted in mustard yellow and rust red.

There are few places cooler than Northern Sweden in the winter.

From Stockholm it's a 90-minute flight to the Arctic town of Kiruna. Driving takes about 12 hours but I take the overnight train from Stockholm Central. I spend most of the 17-hour journey in my gently rocking bunk bed and arrive the next morning at Kiruna.

Here in the Arctic Circle temperatures can drop to a bone-numbing -30°C, but when I arrive in March it's a comparatively mild -2°C. In winter there are a wide variety of Arctic adventures.

I decide first on a husky safari, where seven dogs tethered to my sled take me on a ride through pine forests and across gently rolling plains, as the flaming orange afternoon sun sets.

Another unique attraction is in the tiny village of Jukkasjärvi, just 10-minutes' drive from Kiruna. The Icehotel is built every December using frozen building blocks cut from the Torne River. There are warm cabins on site, but the whole point is to sleep overnight in a room carved from ice.

Traditional Swedish dishes are rich and heavy to counteract the energy-sapping cold, so I head to the restaurant for a hearty meal of reindeer fillet and potatoes, followed by a dessert of sweet yellow cloudberries. With a warm, full feeling I head to my icy suite. My bed is literally a slab of ice, covered with a mattress and thick reindeer skins so I climb into my heavy-duty sleeping bag, keeping on my hat and gloves. Despite the -5°C air temperature I sleep soundly.

If you don't stay the night it's still worth taking a tour around the hotel and chapel. Or simply enjoy a tipple in the Absolut Icebar, where even the drinks are served in ice glasses.

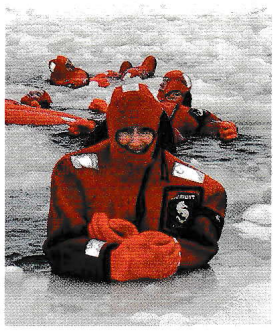
The next day I drive 55 miles south to the eastern Swedish town of Haparanda. I then cross the Torniojoki River into neighbouring Finland and drive another half an hour to the port of Kemi. There I board the Sampo – the only tourist ice-breaker in the world. Cruising into the frozen Gulf of Bothnia a deep grinding noise shudders through the ship as we cleave through ice one metre thick.

The view from on deck is like nothing I've seen before, with never-ending plains of brilliant white ice. The starkness is stunning.

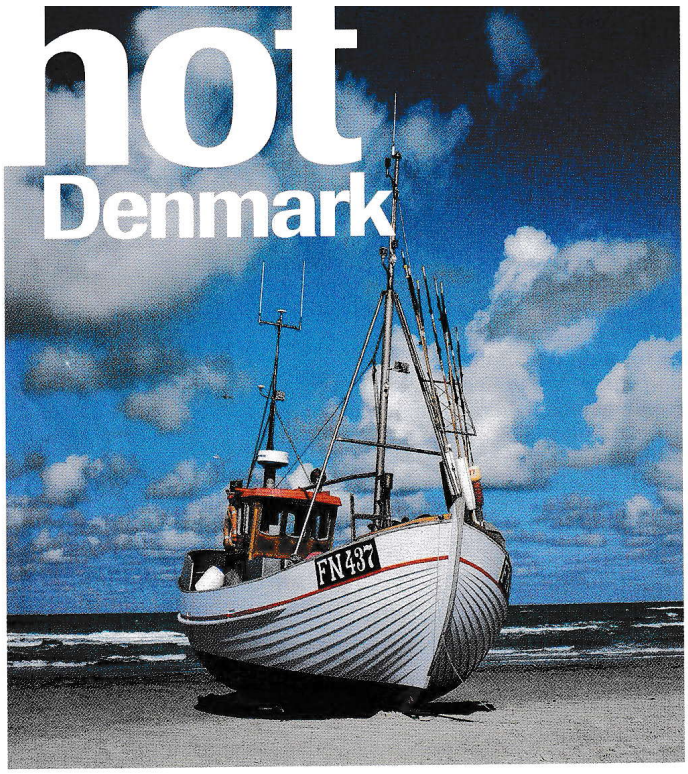
When the ship stops halfway through the journey I pull on a thick rubber survival suit and ease myself into the trail of shattered ice behind the ship as part of an organised activity.

Normally, I wouldn't survive more than a few minutes in the freezing waters but the insulated suit keeps me warm and allows me to bob between the icebergs. It's a unique Arctic adventure.

Main picture: A sled ride on a husky safari in Jukkasjärvi. Below: Jacqui bobs about in the ice.



not Denmark



Left: A fishing boat moored on the beach at Løkken in north-east Denmark. Below: The grassy sand dunes of this popular Danish coastal village.



SCANDINAVIAN SURPRISE

Undulating dunes flatten into soft, white sand beaches. On one side of the wide cove I can see fishing boats bobbing among the inky blue waves. At the other end sunbathers are soaking up the rays.

When planning your summer holiday Denmark doesn't usually spring to mind. But perhaps it should, because you're never further than 32 miles from the unspoilt white sandy coastline. Last year, 205 Danish beaches were awarded Blue Flags, which are given for exemplary cleanliness, water quality and safety.

Denmark sits lower than its Scandinavian neighbours, so summer temperatures can reach a pleasant 25°C. From London I catch a 90-minute flight to Denmark's fourth largest city, Aalborg, in the northern county of Jutland.

I'm perfectly positioned to explore the northern coastline, known as the Land of Light because of the long summer days and abundance of sunlight.

Driving is the easiest way to get around, but there is an extensive and efficient public transport network. It's a pleasant 90-minute train ride north-east to Skagen, the northernmost point of Denmark. This charming fishing port sits on a thin peninsula surrounded by the Skagerrak Strait and Kattegat Bay. Its unspoilt beauty and romantic sea views have made it a popular spot for artists and writers for more than a century. I follow the sound of the seagulls through winding streets and past clusters of mustard yellow cottages until I reach the harbour, where the wharfs are crammed with yachts and brightly coloured trawlers.

The brisk sea breeze stirs up my appetite so I stop at one of the nearby seafood restaurants for a traditional Danish meal of breaded plaice stuffed with shrimps and asparagus.

Afterwards I head to Grenen, a shifting sand spit located at the tip of Skagen. For about £2 you can take a tour to literally walk off the end of Denmark and into the sea. Looking closely I can see the watery seam where the two waterways clash against each other. The resulting rip tides make this spot of coastline a no-go for swimming, but it's the perfect place to see the sunset.

The following day I head over to the north-east coast. It's a one-hour bus ride from Aalborg to the laid-back coastal village of Løkken. I walk towards the grassy sand dunes until the seafront opens out in front of me. With sweeping beaches as far as the eye can see, this is one of Denmark's most popular summer spots. As I walk along the water's edge my feet sink into the soft white sand. Swimmers bob in the deep blue water while children play in the foaming surf.

Dozens of white bathing cabins snake along the sand. There's a wide selection of restaurants and bars just minutes from the beach, making Løkken a family favourite during the day, and a bustling nightspot as soon as the sun goes down.

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