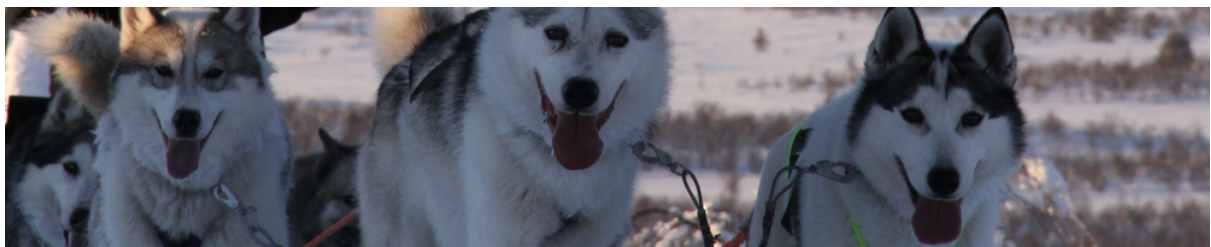




PARTICIPANT INFORMATION



5-DAYS OF WILDERNESS MUSHING

DAY BY DAY INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR 5-DAY TOUR

DAY 1 – INTRODUCTORY SAFARI DAY AND INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AS A MUSER

As you know from the safari description, there will be five days of dog-sledding during your tour. Your mushing adventure will start at 10am on the first day so please arrive promptly. We are quite easy to find – just 4km from the centre of Hetta. FYI: Even though you have chosen not to stay with us before the start of the tour, please let us know where you are intending to stay since we have sometimes had delays caused by people trying to stay too far afield and we need to be able to plan for potential issues (eg, potential flight delays, if you are arriving into Enontekiö that morning). If you are staying locally, it might be worth asking if they can keep your extra bags until the end of the tour.

Once everyone taking part in the tour has gathered at the farm, it is time for introductions, a basic check of your kit and clothing and the issuing of any arctic kit needed before heading down to join the others on the longer tour programmes who will already be involved with life at the farm.

We will take all of your bags down to the farm with you (in pulks if need be) since you will be staying in the kota for the first night. The farm kota is a traditional circular log building with a central fireplace over which we cook the evening meals. There are set sleeping spaces for 7 which can be extended to 10 for family groups.

You will have time to sort through all of your kit in the evening and, hopefully, to leave some of it behind. We find that people tend to feel more comfortable doing this, having tested their issued kit on Day 1 and this, for us, is one of the major benefits of returning to the farm after the first day of sledding – and hopefully, to be convinced, after having mushed for a day - that you can leave quite a bit of it behind. There will be a large cold-store for your bulky items and small electronics can be left behind in boxes in the kota itself.

With all of the logistics and a basic farm tour out of the way, it is time for your dog-sledding experience to start! First things first, we kick off with a session on how to drive sleighs and how to put your dog team together. We will build upon this base knowledge through the week so that by the end of the week you have a chance of being a pretty competent musher. There may be other safaris going on in the farm at this time so you will get a real feel for the life of an arctic husky guide as they make teams and break them down again whilst also interacting with client groups from all over the world.

Your first introductory safari day will include c.30km of riding relatively close to the homestead with at least one of the guides who will be with you through the remainder of your tour. You may or may have the same dogs when you head out into the wild since we will be trying to give the multiday dogs as much of a rest in-between the long tours as possible, ready for the hard days on the high tundra. Nevertheless, you will see how the guide will work hard at the beginning of the day to balance the speed between the teams. This is affected as much by how the dogs are feeling about running on that particular day as it is by the relative weight of the clients themselves.

Most normal sized groups (6 clients) are led by both a guide on a lead dogsled, and a lead guide on a snowmobile. The snowmobile hovers nearby on the first day until you literally find your feet and it then gradually moves further out of range until, by the end of the tour, it is just present at breaks and road crossings. FYI: Although it is a huge additional expense to have a second guide on a snowmobile, the security it provides is priceless. So, too, is the fact that it is able to take a lot of the weight which would otherwise be in your sleighs, needing to be propelled forwards by you and your dogs' (yes, you may need to push too!). The advantage to having a snowmobile 'around' is overwhelmingly supported by the feedback of clients who have participated in the tours, to date.

Your lunch will be in a (pre-warmed on cold days) wilderness cabin and the trails are some of our favourites close to our base. Today is the day when we figure out how much you need to eat so we get the portions right for the tundra!



Once back at the farm in the evening there will be warm drinks and snacks available in the kota, and you will have the chance to either

relax before dinner or to really get stuck in to experiencing life on a husky farm. As a general rule, the dogs tend to get fed before the clients since that way, the dogs can maximise their rest (dogs coming first will be a theme of your stay). However, if it looks like it will take us too long to get started with feeding, we will of course try to feed you first.

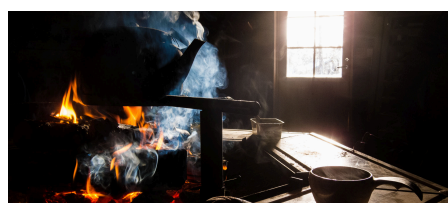
NB: There are few places which give the chance to join in with life on the farm to the same extent as we do – and it is certainly something that we think is a positive experience for the clients so we do our best to incorporate you. (If we did not, we would just feed, etc, ourselves, since it is actually a lot more efficient, that way). Having said that, we do understand that it is not for everyone and the kota is therefore kitted out with a number of board games and books if you prefer to rest inside. We do hope that you are sufficiently interested to at least walk either some of the old retirees who aren't getting to run anymore and haven't yet managed to find a forever sofa, or maybe a crazy pup who just needs cuddles or a fun time on the agility course. The dogs adore the attention. Alternatively, why not wander around our 2km farm loop, in search of northern lights or visit the farm's souvenir shop for a mug showing a sketch of your favourite dog or a necklace showing a silhouette of our logo of 'Valko' howling? There are lots of options when on the farm!

For those who choose to head back out to work alongside a guide mentor, there are any number of jobs that you can participate in, depending on your level of interest: food to prepare (but few clients help with that one), dogs to feed and poop, long-haired dogs needing their coats brushed and medical needs to be taken care of in the farmhouse.

Later that night, we will talk more about how we care for the dogs, our record-keeping systems and sled-dog welfare in general and we will also conduct a thorough 'cold talk' and answer any questions you may have (about routes, fun aspects, challenges, emergency procedures, etc.) about the days ahead. A map of the route you will be taking will also be available for perusal so by the end of this session, you should have few questions left about your final selection of goods to pack and take with you. And, hopefully, we will have persuaded you to leave a lot of it behind!

DAY 2, OFF TO THE WILDS AGAIN

This is the first morning when everyone starts together at the farm. Breakfast is normally the starting point for the day - unless there is someone who is extra keen to join in the basic farm work. Once finished, everyone works together to pack away everything from the night before so as to leave the kota in good condition for the next group, and to complete their own final kit preparations for the tour. As much as possible is left behind so as to lighten the load for you and the dogs.



Assuming you really want a 'behind the scenes' view of the work on the farm, we can include you in a few more things this morning since most clients find making teams a much easier and less 'chaotic-feeling' process already by this day. (Remember that there is a two-hour window following completion of morning souping of the dogs, when we cannot yet set off on safari). You could end up helping with pups / old dogs / brushing the 'fluffies' / laying out and the sleighs and doing their final wear and tear check or making the teams for the other morning safari departures. Or, of course, you could relax in the kota until departure time.

At least one of your tour guides will be around to coordinate activities and help you to prepare – but they will also need to clear away breakfast to the farmhouse and make sure that everything is ready in both the guide sleigh and the snowmobile pulk. Hence, they might hand you over for a while to someone else in the guiding team who isn't so focused on departure.

When everyone has their kit packed in their personal sleigh bags, and their dogs massaged and ready to go, it will be time to head off into the wilderness for the day that we call the 'Obstacle day'.

You will cover somewhere between 35 and 55km each day with your dogs during the next four days. This first day out of the farm is one of the shortest and normally the easiest (after the introductory day) but we call it the obstacle day since it contains a number of challenges designed to hone your skills, including bridge and reindeer separation fence crossings, and a couple of short but pretty steep descents and ascents which will get your heart racing.

The day will also set the tone for the following days in that you will be stopping along the way on the trail for coffee and snack break(s) and lunch. We will stop a little more frequently on the very cold tours, just to watch to see that you are doing OK. For the sake of expediency, we will generally have hot soup and sandwiches at lunch and wait for the larger meals at the start and close of each day.

During the safari days you will transition seamlessly from open marshland to lake, river and forest glen. And, you will not only discover many hidden gems in the terrain but will also experience the changing light of the Arctic days. The soft light of mid-morning gives way to the mystical twilight colours and spectacular sunsets of the afternoons and then, for those who are lucky, you are likely to also have the chance on at least one day to run with the dogs under a star-filled Arctic sky, guided by northern lights in the heavens above.



The first night out from the farm is normally spent in the best-equipped cabin of the journey, in Galdotieva, the last settlement on the Finnish side of the Norway-Finland border. Once at your overnight camp, the dogs will be bedded down for the night and then you will be free to relax whilst waiting to enjoy your supper.

You will no doubt appreciate the luxury of this location if you are lucky enough to stay in a heated Galdotieva cabin since there is an indoor sauna in each shared cabin as well as a shower, toilet. Down by the lake, near to where the dogs sleep, there is a large lake-side sauna which can be booked if requested. There is even an ice hole to challenge the brave.

DAY 3 - THE HIGH TUNDRA

If you want to try helping with the care of the dogs whilst out on safari on just one morning, this is probably the best morning since it is easier to get out of bed here in this warm cabin than in the cabins warmed simply by log fires in the days to come. The first morning duty is to ensure that the dogs have a good, warm drink, at least two hours before they are scheduled to run – and then, of course, we also have to clean up after them.

And then it is time for breakfast for you and for those who have remained behind in bed. If you have realized that you have forgotten something of critical urgency, you also have one final chance, here, to purchase odds and ends like chocolate bars, beer etc, in this hamlet's sole shop.

Then it is time to turn your teams towards the high tundra – a beautiful plateau which climbs above the tree-line, is swept bare by the arctic winds.



The luckiest groups encounter both white-out conditions on one day and clear sunny skies on the next whilst up on the plateau – in other words, the full spectrum of arctic weather. It is incredibly beautiful up there in good conditions but it can also become incredibly hostile when the trails are blown and the conditions challenging – e.g. after fresh snow. Hence, spending two of the five days above the tree-line and the rest down amongst Europe's Boreal taiga forests is just about the perfect combination.

Please note that you might want one extra layer of clothes to hand for this day since there may be added wind chill that you might not have encountered to this point. Lunch will also be 'out in the open' since there are few trees to provide shelter.

Your cabin this night has no electricity but it is comfortably heated by two central wood-burning fires so you will be able to relax and tell candle-lit stories in their warmth during the evening. The sauna will also be heated for you to use if you wish and is a great place to dry socks.





Keeping each of the fires going is something you can definitely help us with since we will be running around juggling looking after the dogs (bedding them down comfortably and feeding them), the sauna, the cabin and your food. The cabin has four separate sleeping areas but because of its extra space, it can be quite chilly again, by morning. You will probably appreciate your arctic sleeping bags whilst here and you might want to wait until your guide has warmed it up again in the morning, before getting up.

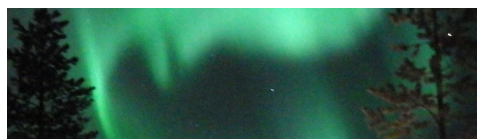
NB: Those taking part in this safari later in the season will spend a greater proportion of their time riding in daylight vs in twilight and dusk and you will have long evenings – as you can see from the arrival shot, taken from the back of this night’s cabin, here - that the others do not have when they may arrive, already, in the dark of the early winter season, in which to explore the area around your overnight cabins or just hang out with the dogs).



NB: Past experience has shown us that those who participate in as many of the linked tour activities as possible get more out of their holidays than those who leave everything to the guides. For this reason alone, we will keep encouraging you to join in with dog-related activities but we do want to stress that whilst there is nothing much that you HAVE to do, there is lots that you CAN do if you want to get involved. Feeding and caring for your huskies is the most important element in making a great holiday. The more you work as a team with your huskies, the more they will work for, and respond to, you.

We recommend you spend time with them morning and evening feeding them, checking their well-being (particularly their feet!), grooming the fluffy ones that really need it and generally making a fuss of them. By the end of the tour, most clients know the names of most of the dogs travelling in the group (they sometimes get switched between sleds to balance speeds so you will probably get to know c. 10 dogs very well over the course of your safari), as well as the harnesses they wear and how to put the teams together and take them down at the end of the days.

The more that you walk in the vicinity of the cabins, too, the more that you will see signs of the wildlife all around you but seldom seen. If you look carefully at the snow, the abundant tracks will show what is moving around in your area. Identifying them all can be great fun. Here, reindeer outnumber people by 10 to 1 and wolves, arctic fox, lynx and bear all exist in their natural habitat. There is no better way of feeling close to nature – or, indeed, of gaining a historical perspective of life in the Arctic - than by travelling with this ancient mode of transport. And, of course, you are now in as remote a location as possible from which to search in the night, for the northern lights!



DAY 4 – FELS AND MORE FELS

During this day you will not only traverse again across the tundra landscape but you will encounter one of the biggest climbs and descents of the whole journey in the final moments of the day. Hence, keep some reserves back for this last challenge before arriving at your final cabin in the small Sami village of Näkkälä on the edge of the Pöyrisjärvi wilderness area. The descent to this cabin may literally take your breath away and, at minimum, will give you an adrenalin-filled buzz right at the end of the day!

This area is still a very vibrant reindeer herding area and there are reindeer separation fences just 3km from your cabin. On some nights you may even hear the noise from a reindeer separation (your guide can tell you more about this fascinating lifestyle)! Indeed, the village of Näkkälä was made 'famous' (in the German speaking world) in a film of the same name made by a Swiss man who lived for some years amongst the reindeer herders.

The cabin we use is a typical Finnish wilderness cabin, without electricity, (although the light switches on the wall - connected to batteries and solar power - sometimes confuse the clients in the winter). There are two differently sized cabin options. We sometimes opt for the smaller one during the colder months just because it is far quicker to heat up! Both cabins have access to an outdoor sauna.



You will have had a chance, by this stage, to really get to know your group well and also to understand what optional activities are possible on your free day and who you might like to do something with! Please make sure that you let your guide know what you are interested in, by this night at latest, so that they can call your interests through to the homestead and we can try to arrange things for you. If you leave it until the last minute, when you return from the fells, it might not be possible to organize reindeer farm visits, snowmobile tours etc.

DAY 5 – HOMEWARD BOUND

We head south again during the last day of your journey. When the weather is crisp and clear and the trees laden with snow, this part of your journey is truly spectacular. One of our guides once described the terrain here as 'a lunar landscape interspersed with tropical-looking islands of ice-covered trees'.

There is also a panoramic view of the rounded chain of fells which make up the northernmost part of the [Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park](#) through most of the day. Even in the Spring conditions illustrated here, this is an awesome day when the skies are clear.



However, before any of that can happen, we have to start the day, once more, by ensuring that the dogs have a warm drink at least two hours prior to their scheduled departure. And then, of course, we also have to clean up after them before eating ourselves and getting organized for the day.

The majority of your day will be spent mushing on gentle rolling hills as you gradually descend back down to Hetta. The final leg of the day is down the length of the Ounasjärvi lake where, if you are lucky, you may see the sun starting to set in spectacular fashion or, at least, see the changing colours of the arctic day. The lake can be a chilly windswept place, so have some extra gloves and buffs to hand, in case the sun sets and the wind comes up.

Once you have finally arrived back at the farm, you will have a chance to put your team of dogs back in their own kennels, thank them one final time, return your borrowed kit and clothing and collect anything that you had left behind. We will then spend some time chatting through the highlights of the tour and giving you a chance to provide some feedback before it is time to leave us and continue on your journey. Please note that we cannot guarantee that we will be back at base and have to ready to leave before 6pm – particularly at the start of the season. Hence, please make your continuing hotel plans accordingly. I would advise booking a room in Hetta since you might be quite tired after all of the fresh air and exertion in the past few days!

