

TRAVEL

Edited by JANE MEMMLER

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HO HO HO: There's Santa, reindeer and much more in Lapland

All round to Santa's place

THE look of wonder on Marina's face was worth all that waiting in the icy cold. I could read her mind: "So this is the real Father Christmas and he's about to open my letter asking for an iPod."

Why bother with the disappointment of all those pretend winter wonderlands in Britain when you can fly direct to see the Big Red Daddy in his real home in Lapland?

I reasoned that at eight years old, my daughter Marina was probably on the cusp of continuing to believe that there was one proper Father Christmas amid all the actors with stick-on beards that she had come across in department stores.

So now was the time to take her to meet Santa Claus (as they insist on calling him in Lapland) on his own territory amid the pine forests 100 miles inside the Arctic Circle.

I couldn't honestly say that an encounter with this elderly man in a red velvet suit was high on my list of priorities but what sold the idea was all the other activities, snowmobiling through the forest, sledging with huskies and riding in a sleigh pulled by reindeer.

After a three-hour flight from Gatwick to Kittilä in Finland, what first strikes you is how completely different Lapland feels, with a stillness as magical as Narnia.

ADAM HELLIKER whisks his daughter Marina off to Lapland for the ultimate Christmas adventure



CHRISTMAS GREETING: Adam and Marina meet Big Red Daddy

With the temperature at -10C, the first priority was to get warm at the Hotel Snow Princess in the village of Ylläs.

The hotel was plain with the sort of pine-clad décor found in utilitarian ski establishments, functional bedrooms with a tiny sauna squeezed into each bathroom. The elf in charge of our group was Cranberry who busied herself fitting everyone with thermal suits and snow boots.

This winter weather kit made us look like Kwik-Fit mechanics but proved essential for the next day's expedition.

After being taken to a clearing in the forest, sitting around a camp fire with mugs of hot berry juice

and listening to an elf recounting some strange tale about woodland creatures, it was time for us to clamber aboard the snowmobiles for a safari deep into the tundra.

The adults soon learned to control the machines (no previous experience required) while the children were pulled, laughing and chattering, in a communal sleigh.

Zooming about on these powerful snowmobiles took concentration as you follow the leader in a convoy but it was exhilarating because of the beauty of the landscape, travelling for two hours into the forest, among thousands of snow-bowed pine

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