

Put your holiday on ice

Tamara Hinson braves the low temperatures of the Icehotel in Swedish Lapland to marvel at the dramatic ice sculpture

'THAT man,' my musher yells as I fly along on a dog sled, 'is a legend in these parts. Rumour has it he killed a moose with his bare hands.'

We're in Jukkasjärvi, a village near the town of Kiruna in Swedish Lapland, and the man is a wild-looking Scandinavian who overtakes our sled on his own more authentic version.

I'm in this teeth-chattering part of the world to spend the night at the famous Icehotel, formed of more than 5,000 tonnes of ice from the nearby Torne river. The ice is removed every March, when it reaches a thickness of 80cm, and stored in refrigerated on-site warehouses until it's needed. The water here freezes exceptionally slowly, resulting in crystal-clear, bubble-free ice that is transformed into sculptures, interior walls and furniture.

The hotel started life in 1989 when local businessman and Icehotel founder Yngve Bergqvist hosted an ice-sculpting workshop. One of the creations was an igloo and passing members of the Swedish army asked if they could spend the night inside. The next morning they raved about the experience and the Icehotel, a complex that now contains an Ice Chapel, a 'warm' permanent hotel and a restaurant, was born. More than 35,000 tourists come from around the world to visit the Icehotel and gaze at the Northern Lights.

The Icehotel has 64 'cold rooms', 13 of which are spectacular art suites. Artists submit designs in spring and arrangements are made for them to visit in November, when the hotel is built, to create their masterpieces. Many have never sculpted ice, so they get a crash course on arrival.

I'm staying in the Mind The Gap suite created by British film director



Cold comfort: The Northern Lights will entice you into temperatures of -26C; the Tube train-themed Mind The Gap suite (left)



Marcus Dillistone, who has carved a London Underground platform out of ice. My bed is inside the life-size frozen Tube train.

'The idea of a Tube train in the Arctic is bizarre,' says Dillistone, 'but I wanted to question increasing urbanisation while bridging the gap between the wilderness and London.'

Other suites are equally spectacular. One contains a pole-dancing polar bear and another has a bed surrounded by enormous, intricately carved snowflakes. Hanging reindeer furs replace doors but the hotel is incredibly quiet, thanks in part to its metre-thick walls.

I need some Dutch courage so knock back a gin-loaded Mind The Gap cocktail at the hotel's Icebar. In the chalet-style restaurant I scoff moose carpaccio with lingonberry, then reindeer steak. Guests can also dine on moose meatballs at the Hembygdsgården restaurant.

AT midnight, I'm one of the last guests in the heated lounge area, all united in our fear of the unknown. Most come for several days, staying in the 'warm hotel' and braving the Icehotel for one night.

Feeling decidedly dirty (I'm advised not to shower or use water-based moisturisers so the water doesn't freeze on my skin), I don my thermals and sprint 50m to the Icehotel, clambering into what resembles a giant cotton pillowcase before wriggling into my sleeping bag,

which zips so far up that I'm left peeking out of a saucer-sized hole.

I've forgotten my hat, so undo the zip, retrieve said accessory and start the re-entry process from scratch. The icy blue glow is actually subtle lighting but once I flick the switch, I'm shocked by the darkness.

My sleeping bag sits on top of reindeer furs and a thick board so I only wake once and the insulating properties of the ice mean the temperature remains at around -5C. It's -26C outside so the Icehotel feels positively toasty. I wake up fresh, with a packed day ahead of me: snowmobiling, an ice-sculpting lesson and a visit to a Sámi camp.

The Icehotel will remain in place until April, when it will melt into the river from which it was created. Mr Moose-killer and his huskies will take a well-earned break and the next batch of ice, removed from the river in March, will wait inside the enormous warehouses until the whole process begins again.

ICE ICE BABY WHERE TO FIND MORE FROZEN ART

Snow Village, Lainio, Finland



Finland's Snow Village can be found in Lainio, 124 miles above the Arctic Circle. The village, which opened in December, comprises a hotel, restaurant and bar, and there are sculptures and slides made from ice. Until Apr 6. www.snowvillage.fi

Sapporo Snow Festival, Japan



This annual event is the largest of its kind, with more than two million people visiting Sapporo every year to see the snow slides, buildings and sculptures made from ice and snow. Feb 5-11. www.snowfes.com/english

Loon Mountain Ice Castle, New Hampshire, US



Loon Mountain ski resort is home to an enormous ice castle, the work of Utah-based artist Brent Christensen, who created the 25ft-high frozen fortress with the help of a sprinkler system. Until Mar. www.loonmntn.com

GETTING THERE

Tamara travelled on Discover The World's three-night Icehotel package. From £1,164 per person, it includes return flights from London Heathrow to Kiruna and transfers, two nights in warm accommodation and one night at the Icehotel. A three-night stay with one night in an art suite costs from £1,246 per person. www.discover-the-world.co.uk

ROAM the GLOBE with Lisa Scott

This week, Lisa takes us on some healthy holidays. Where do you think we should go next? Tweet your suggestions to @LisaScott

NEPAL

The new Dwarika holistic resort (right), which offers 180-degree views of the mighty Himalayas, takes Zen to new heights (1,700m above sea level) thanks to its immense menu of alternative medicines. They include: singing bowl therapy for meditation, which involves 'playing' a Tibetan singing bowl, a type of bell that vibrates and produces a deep tone; chilling in the Himalayan Salt room; and getting lost during sunrise



in the meditation maze. £2,099 per person for seven nights including flights. www.westernoriental.com

SICILY

The 203-room Verdura Golf and Spa Resort on the south coast of Sicily has an impressive golf academy but this year all eyes will be on its new Tennis Academy, which takes place on six floodlit tennis courts in the mountainous



Sicilian countryside. A week's stay includes six hours of private tuition, use of its award-winning spa and cardio tennis sessions – an exhausting mix of aerobic exercises combined with different shots in groups of up to ten.

£1,979 per person for seven nights including flights. www.thehealthyholidaycompany.co.uk

SENEGAL

The Fitness Travel Company has launched a new seven-day trip to Toubaouta on the



west coast of Africa.

A typical day starts with a sunrise stretch and a local vegetable juice outside your hut, sand dune running or an 18-mile cycle to a local game reserve followed by an afternoon of kayaking (left) around the Seapo beach shoreline. There are plenty of cultural activities included, such as a trip on a Proa vessel around the mangrove delta and tracking hyenas and warthogs by moonlight. £2,450 per person, flights not included. www.fitnesstravelcompany.com