

# Travel



# GURU

HOLIDAYS OUT OF THE BOX?  
by Paul Dugan



## Dog Sledding in Lapland

Try this for an energetic holiday but make sure you have big footy warmers and lots of spirit for adventure. The sleddogs used are the Alaskan Husky breed which are well suited for the arctic climate. The dogs love running and working and it is this characteristic that is prioritised in the breeding.

On your sleddog adventure you will learn a lot about the dogs, see how they work for you, how sociable they are (how they love to be cuddled – RGBB Board Members take note!) and how they work together as team. To hear almost 50 dogs howling at the same time is an experience of its own.

In order to drive a sleddog team you need a leaddog. With the help of commands given to the leaddog at the front you can direct the team. The command words are quite easy; right, left and go on and stop (in Swedish).

Many people wonder how you teach a dog these commands – practice, practice and practice - is the answer. Not all dogs have the intelligence and authority. Communication between lead dog and musher (the American word for the person driving the sleddog team) is built on confidence between the two and many years training.

You may also wonder how much training the dogs need. The answer to the question is that in order for dogs to work for the whole season they need to build up their muscles and fitness. Training starts in August after the dogs have had their summer break. At that time of the year the four wheel drive is used (no snow in Lapland at this time of the year). Starting with short runs of a couple of kilometres and then

gradually getting longer it is like training for a marathon – slowly building up the muscles. During the peak season the dogs are working 5-6 times a day and after a 6 day sleddog trip in the mountains the dogs will need to rest for 2- 3 days. Resting for Alaskan Huskies is not something they are familiar with – however it is important that they rest in order to avoid injuries, you will also need to rest!

The season ends at the beginning of May. During the summer until the autumn training starts again at the beginning of August, the dogs are on holiday.

On the base the dogs run freely in big yard. Alaskan Huskies are very sociable and friendly dogs and very easy to adopt. Dog owners considering this option are recommended to take an older dog that has lived in kennels and been a sleddog for a while.

**Why do the dogs howl?** Probably because Alaskan Huskies still have a lot of wolf characteristics. Why the dogs are howling at a particular time, one can never know for sure however, research with wolves show that it probably demonstrates that they are part of a group and it is believed to strengthen ties within the group.

**How often do huskies howl?** Dogs normally howl 2-3 times a day, often in the mornings after the morning meal and again in the evening. The howling often takes about 30 seconds and after that it is quiet.

**How much food does a sleddog eat?** Every dog is fed twice a day. Sleddogs demand nutritious and high-energy food. Usually they get fish, chicken and meat from the local butchers (elk and reindeer) and dry food.

