



Three days in Lapland

Rovaniemi, three days, before Christmas. Built around the things a four-year-old will actually remember, and honest about why January would have been the better month.

A sample plan by **Nik and Neva**, aroundeurope.blog

When

Any three days in December

Travelling

Two adults and a four-year-old

Base

Rovaniemi, with a car

Pace

One booked thing a day, the rest flexible

Honest advice before you book anything

We would never go to Rovaniemi in December before Christmas. This is the highest of high seasons: accommodation is at least two to three times more expensive, there are crowds everywhere, and the queue for Santa in Santa Claus Village will probably run to a couple of hours. And judging by the last two years, you might not even get much snow — the permanent cover arrived around the 10th of December in both 2024 and 2025.

If you can move to January, the day is slightly longer, prices start coming back to normal, and you will have twenty people on your reindeer safari instead of a hundred. In January you are also guaranteed a decent snow cover. We would take that trade without hesitating.

One more thing before we start. Two nights and three days is not enough to see everything Lapland has, so we have focused on the main things. In your own plan the focus is yours to set — love museums? We will build them right in.

This works on any three days, so build it around your flights rather than the other way round. The single exception is the Arktikum café, which is closed at weekends — if your last day is a Saturday or Sunday, swap the museum to another day or eat in the city.

[Open your map](#)

Every stop in this plan, pinned and grouped into days, hotels, and food and drink.

What you're going there for



Santa Claus Village

Day one, straight from the airport, before the queues build.



Driving your own husky team

Day two, and the hour she will still be describing at school in March.



The fire, the sauna, the sky

Both evenings, with Sanna watching the forecast on your behalf.

Where you're staying

Two nights, either of these.



Sandhill Cottage

Airbnb, Rovaniemi · about 15 minutes' walk from the centre

Why this one

- Sanna, the host, will make you feel right at home
- Its own sauna and fireplace, firewood included in the price
- Spacious and cosy, and there is room for a small person to spread out
- Mintaka, Sanna's husky, who loves children and being played with
- An insulated sledge for your four-year-old, yours to use for the whole trip
- You can see the northern lights from the house, and Sanna will tell you when they are active

Santa Claus Hotel

Korkalonkatu, city centre · hotel · breakfast and sauna included

Why this one

- In the middle of the city rather than fifteen minutes out, so the whole of day two happens on foot and you never think about parking
 - Nili, Roka, Lordi Square and the sledging hill are all a short walk away
 - Breakfast is done for you, which is worth more than it sounds with a four-year-old and four hours of daylight
 - Sauna in the building, so the evening ritual survives even without the cottage
 - No fireplace, no yard to play in, and no one watching the aurora forecast for you
-

Food and drink

Roughly in the order you will meet them.

Santa's Salmon Place

Santa Claus Village · salmon

One thing on the menu: salmon grilled over an open fire in front of you. We cannot really describe how good it tastes. When we were there with our ten-month-old, he ate a third of our portion.

Lapland Restaurant Kotahovi

Santa Claus Village · Lappish · mid

Just behind Santa's main office, in a traditional kota with a fire pit in the middle. A proper sit-down meal with a main, a dessert and drinks. If it is full, wait a few minutes — the turnover is high and you will be seated soon.

Roka Street Food & Bistro

City centre · street food · cheap

Sandwiches and street food with some things worth trying, the reindeer sandwich above all. They also do chips, which solves lunch if nothing else works for your four-year-old.

Naava

City centre · coffee

A café beside the park with the playground and the sledging hill, so you can have a glögi while a four-year-old wears herself out in the snow. Order a pulla while you are there — brioche-like dough, filled if you want it, soft and very Finnish.

Nili

City centre · Lappish · book ahead

Traditional Lappish cooking, exceptionally friendly staff, and the best meal of the trip. They hand out paper and pencils for children, and it goes without saying in Finland that there are high chairs. Consider the chef's surprise menu, which is essentially the whole kitchen in courses — salmon, reindeer and mushrooms in different combinations. Or order à la carte. If you drink, try the local lingonberry or cloudberry wine.

Arktikum café

Arktikum · lunch buffet

An all-you-can-eat lunch with a different menu every day, usually one meat main and one vegetarian with plenty of salads, spreads and rye bread around them. Children between three and twelve eat at half price.

And one decision to make before you fly

Rent a car. The airport is about fifteen minutes from the city and there is a bus, but it takes too long. Paying a taxi out to Rovaniemi and back again will cost almost as much as a car for the whole three days — a slight exaggeration, but the taxi does run around €40 each way. More to the point, a car lets you move quickly and change your mind, and on a stay this short that is worth more than the money.

If winter driving in Lapland worries you, our full guide is here: [Do you need a car in Lapland?](#)

Book these before you go

In this order.

What	When	Why it matters
Rental car	As early as you can	December prices rise sharply and the whole plan assumes you have one.
Your stay	Months out	One cottage and one host, in peak season. You might get lucky closer in; we would not count on it.
Husky tour	1 month out	Most farms run a one-hour safari and prices are comparable, so the choice is about how you like to travel rather than cost.
Nili	1 month out	Small, popular, and the one dinner in this plan you would be sorry to miss.

Before you pack

Everything in this plan happens outdoors except one museum and the meals.

What the cold is actually like

A Lapland winter runs anywhere from 0°C down to about -30°C, and you will not know which you are getting until a few days before you fly. That sounds worse than it is. The cold is dry rather than damp, and the trick that makes a whole day outside workable is simply going in and out of buildings — twenty minutes in a café or a shop resets you completely. We spent an entire morning in Santa Claus Village at -12°C doing exactly that.

Three or four layers: merino against the skin, fleece or wool over it, an insulated windproof shell on top.

Buy this, rent the rest

Rental gear in Rovaniemi runs around €80 per person for three days, less for children, and usually covers a thermal overall, wool socks, insulated boots and mittens. Check what your activities include before you rent anything separately — it is often bundled into the price of a guided tour, which can save you the whole cost.

What almost nobody rents out is thermal underwear, and that is the layer that does the actual work. So buy your base layers and rent the outer shell if you need it. Don't pre-book the rental either: arrive, look at the forecast, then decide.

What people get wrong

- **Jeans.** Denim is cotton — it holds moisture, cools you down rather than warming you, and stops nothing of the wind. Leave them at home.
- **A scarf instead of a neck warmer.** Scarves are bulky and stop your jacket zipping shut properly. A balaclava or neck warmer sits against the skin and seals the heat in.
- **One pair of gloves.** Bring two. A wet pair takes a day to dry and you have three days.
- **No swimsuit.** There is a sauna every evening in this plan. It is the single most commonly forgotten item in Finland.
- **A child's entire wardrobe.** Two or three good merino sets beat a suitcase of bulk. Hang them outside overnight and the dry air freshens them.
- **Synthetics on children.** They overheat, then sweat, then chill. Merino does not do this.

Our full guide, with the complete list and a separate one for travelling with small children, is here: [How to dress for winter in Lapland](#) and [Lapland with a toddler](#).

Day one

Arrival, first impressions, and a quiet evening in.

On landing

Airport, car, and straight across the road

We are assuming a morning flight, which means you will be landing roughly as the sun and the daylight start to appear. Collect the car and drive basically across the street to Santa Claus Village. Parking there is free.

Why not the hotel first

The village is a few minutes from the runway and check-in is hours away. Going into the city and coming back out would cost you most of the daylight you have on day one.

First thing

Book your slot with the elves

Before anything else, go to Santa's office and book a time slot for your visit. Yes, the village is commercialised and yes there are a lot of people, but you cannot really skip meeting Santa with a four-year-old.

The slot is not a queue pass

You will wait regardless. It only governs when you are let in, and once inside it is a long corridor to Santa. Plan on an hour in there.

Morning

The rest of the village

Santa's Pets is a petting zoo and works well at this age — an hour is the maximum, and we mean maximum. On a cold day there are little shelters dotted around where you can go in and warm up.

A reindeer sleigh ride is the other highlight: through the forest is longer and more expensive, around the track is shorter and more affordable. Then send a postcard home and to friends from the working branch of the Finnish post office, which is a genuinely good feeling from the Arctic Circle, and cross the line itself for the photograph.

One more option, and at exactly four she has just become eligible: the Arctic Circle Snowmobile Park, a short walk from the restaurants, lets children between four and twelve drive their own mini-snowmobile around a dedicated track. Maximum height 150 cm. The staff suit them up and talk them through it, and it does not take long.

Sledge

You can rent a sledge in the village, which makes the walking parts much easier at four.

Lunch

Santa's Salmon Place, or Kotahovi

Both are in the village and both are in the food section above. Salmon Place if you eat fish and want the memory; Kotahovi if you want a sit-down meal with choices on the menu.

Afternoon

Into the city and check in

When you are done with Santa, drive into Rovaniemi. If you are staying at Sanna's, stop at one of the K supermarkets near the train station on the way and pick up groceries for the evening.

Evening

Fireplace, snow, sauna

Light the fire. There is snow in the yard in front of the house and a four-year-old will not need to be asked twice. Eat, put her to bed, and then start the sauna.

Tap water

Drink it without a second thought. It is some of the cleanest and best water in Europe, and you will not need to buy a bottle all trip.

Day two

A husky morning, then the city at whatever pace is left.

Morning

Husky safari

Breakfast at the house, then out to the farm. You will get an introduction to the dogs, how they are raised and trained, and a quick lesson in driving your own sledge. Then the real thing: you, the sledge and your huskies. It is difficult to describe and you simply have to do it.

Dress warmer than you think

Even moderate cold feels much colder moving on a sledge. This goes double for your four-year-old, who will be sitting still the whole hour. The farm does provide blankets, but bring your own layers anyway.

Who with

We went with Raitola and they were great. Most farms run a one-hour safari at comparable prices, so the choice is about fit rather than money — but if you want a name, that is ours.

Around 12:30

Into the centre, and lunch at Roka

Street parking in the centre is paid; the shopping centre car park is free and about five minutes' walk from Lordi Square. Lunch at Roka, in the food section above.

Afternoon

Lordi Square, Naava, and the sledging hill

Lordi Square is the main square, named after the Finnish metal band who won Eurovision in 2006 and who are from Rovaniemi. There is an ice rink there for children. A short walk away is Naava, with a park, a playground and a hill for sledging beside it. Bring Sanna's sledges, they are yours for the whole stay.

If it gets too cold, walk into the mall and warm up for twenty minutes. Going in and out of buildings is how you make a whole afternoon outdoors work in December.

Why this order

Huskies first, city second. The safari is fixed to a booked time and the afternoon is not, so anything that overruns eats the flexible half of the day rather than the expensive one.

Evening

Dinner at Nili, then the sauna

The best meal of the trip, and the one booking you made a month ago. Then back to the house and light the sauna again.

Day three

Bags in the car, one museum, and an unhurried move to the airport.

Morning

Pack, then Arktikum

Load the bags into the car before you leave, so the rest of the day is yours. Arktikum is a science centre and museum in one, with free parking. The science centre had a substantial revamp in 2024 and is more interactive than it was; you will come out knowing a great deal about the northern lights and about Arctic exploration. The museum half is so-so, but it is a decent quick look at Rovaniemi's history.

Why this is the last day

It is indoors, it is warm, and it does not care what the weather does. That makes it the right thing to have left over on the day you cannot afford a plan to fall through.

Lunch

Arktikum café

Stay where you are. The lunch buffet is in the food section above, and at half price for a four-year-old it is the cheapest proper meal of the trip.

Check the day

The café is closed at weekends. If this lands on a Saturday or Sunday, move Arktikum to another day or eat in the city instead.

Afternoon

Airport

Head out with time in hand. It is not a big airport, and when several flights leave close together the lines get long out of all proportion to its size.

Getting around

Why we keep saying car

- Public transport exists but runs infrequently and takes decidedly longer
- Taxis are plentiful and good, but on the expensive side — around €40 to the airport
- Fifteen minutes from the airport to the city, and everything in this plan is a short drive

Parking

- Santa Claus Village — free
- Arktikum — free
- City centre streets — paid
- The shopping centre car park — free, five minutes from Lordi Square

What a longer trip would need

Everything above fits inside one base, one car and a radius of about twenty minutes. That is what makes three days workable, and it is also what three days costs you.

A week is a different kind of planning. The northern lights stop being luck and start being a plan — several nights, and driving away from the city's light rather than hoping from the garden. Ranua comes into range as a comfortable day trip, an hour each way and no reason to move base for it. The national parks are further, and that is where the real question starts: whether to shift base for a few nights or spend the driving. And a week with a four-year-old has to be paced rather than filled: which day is the empty one, what you do instead when it is -25°C and nobody wants to leave the house, and which days get the daylight, since there is never much of it to spread around.

None of those questions come up in three days, which is why this plan does not answer them.

This is a real plan in the format we send to families who book with us, published in full so you can see exactly what you would get before you pay anything.

We have been to Lapland three times, close to a month in total, in temperatures down to -32°C, and we have done it with a ten-month-old as well as with a four-year-old. Both worked. They just needed different plans.

Yours would be built around your dates, your children's ages and the things you already know you want. If you tell us what would ruin the trip for you, we will plan around that too.

[Tell us about your trip](#) — nothing to pay until you've seen what we'd do and said yes.

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