

Join **JACQUI PATERSON**
on two scenic, and very
different, Scandinavian
journeys.

COOL Sweden

ICY ADVENTURES

Snow blankets every surface, blending seamlessly into the pale clouds. The only colour comes from the spiky green tips of the pine trees, and the log homes painted in mustard yellow and rust red.

There are few places cooler than Northern Sweden in the winter.

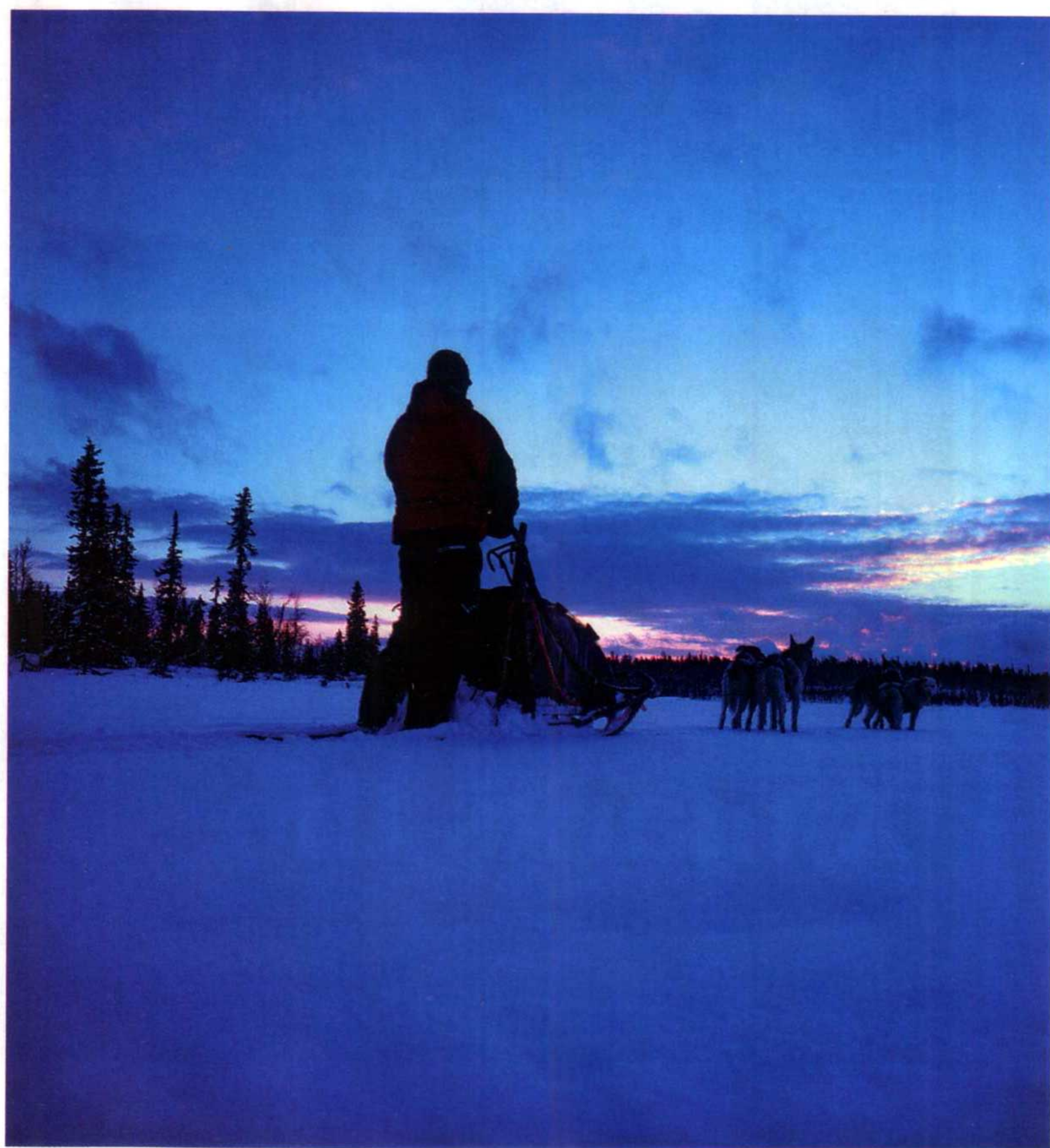
From Stockholm it's a 90-minute flight to the Arctic town of Kiruna. Driving takes about 12 hours but I take the overnight train from Stockholm Central. I spend most of the 17-hour journey in my gently rocking bunk bed and arrive the next morning at Kiruna.

Here in the Arctic Circle temperatures can drop to a bone-numbing -30°C , but when I arrive in March it's a comparatively mild -2°C . In winter there are a wide variety of Arctic adventures.

I decide first on a husky safari, where seven dogs tethered to my sled take me on a ride through pine forests and across gently rolling plains, as the flaming orange afternoon sun sets.

Another unique attraction is in the tiny village of Jukkasjärvi, just 10-minutes' drive from Kiruna. The Icehotel is built every December using frozen building blocks cut from the Torne River. There are warm cabins on site, but the whole point is to sleep overnight in a room carved from ice.

Traditional Swedish dishes are rich and heavy to counteract the energy-sapping cold, so I head to the restaurant for a hearty meal of reindeer fillet and potatoes, followed by a dessert of sweet yellow cloudberries. With a warm, full feeling I head to my icy suite. My bed is literally a slab of ice, covered with a mattress and thick reindeer skins so



I climb into my heavy-duty sleeping bag, keeping on my hat and gloves. Despite the -5°C air temperature I sleep soundly.

If you don't stay the night it's still worth taking a tour around the hotel and chapel. Or simply enjoy a tipple in the Absolut Icebar, where even the drinks are served in ice glasses.

The next day I drive 55 miles south to the eastern Swedish town of Haparanda. I then cross the Torniojoki River into neighbouring Finland and drive another half an hour to the port of Kemi. There I board the Sampo – the only tourist ice-breaker in the world. Cruising into the frozen Gulf of Bothnia a deep grinding noise shudders through the ship as we cleave through ice one metre thick.

The view from on deck is like nothing I've seen before, with never-ending plains of brilliant white ice. The starkness is stunning.

When the ship stops halfway through the journey I pull on a thick rubber survival suit and ease myself into the trail of shattered ice behind the ship as part of an organised activity.

Normally, I wouldn't survive more than a few minutes in the freezing waters but the insulated suit keeps me warm and allows me to bob between the icebergs. It's a unique Arctic adventure.

Main picture: A sled ride on a husky safari in Jukkasjärvi. **Below:** Jacqui bobs about in the ice.

