



The Palace of the Snow Queen: Winter Travels in Lapland

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A Frequent traveler to Northern Europe, Barbara Sjoholm set off one winter to explore a region that had long intrigued her.

Sjoholm first travels to Kiruna, Sweden, to see the Ice Hotel under construction and to meet the ice artists who make its rooms into environmental art. Traveling to the North Cape, she encounters increasing darkness and cold, but also radiant light over the mountains and snow fields. She crosses the Finnmark Plateau by dogsled, attends a Sami film festival (with an outdoor ice screen), and visits Santa's Post Office in Finland.

Over the course of three winters, Sjoholm uncovers the region's rich history, including the culture of the Sami. As Sjoholm becomes more familiar with Kiruna, she writes of the changes occurring in northern Scandinavia and contemplates the tensions between tourism, the expansion of mining and development of the Ice Hotel, and age-old patterns of land use, the Sami's struggle to maintain their reindeer grazing lands and migration routes.

In *The Palace of the Snow Queen*, Sjoholm relates her adventures in the far north, and considers how ice and snow shape our imaginations and create, at a time of global warming, a vision that increasingly draws visitors to Lapland.

The Palace of the Snow Queen: Winter Travels in Lapland Details

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From Reader Review The Palace of the Snow Queen: Winter Travels in Lapland for online ebook

Janet says

Loved reading about Lapland but in general the book was a slog.

Louise says

Barbara Sjoholm tours the European countries of the Arctic Circle in the peak of darkness. She visits the Icehotel, sees MacBeth in an Ice theater, makes a dog sled trip, tours an iron mine and meets Santa Claus at his home. This book is much richer than these travelogs because Sjoholm shares her sensitivity to the indigenous people of the area, the Sami.

The narrative is symmetrical, starting and with Icehotel construction and an introduction to Sami lore and ending with the melting of the Icehotel and thoughts on the economic impact of tourism and the changing economy on the Sami.

Sjoholm has some interesting experiences with the cold. The temperatures are brutal. When its 23F in the ice hotel it may be -23 outside of it. The huts on the dogsled trip are of much colder and humans are more exposed in every way.

The author meets a lot of people, all are participants in various aspects of the life in this area. She adds their observations to her reading, primarily classic travel narratives, to paint a rounded portrait of life in this region.

I looked for other resources on this area. There is some joiking on You Tube, but accessible contemporary works like this book are hard to find.

Abby says

I had to renew this one twice from the library. While I love travel writing, this one just didn't grab me. I kept getting confused as to why the author was there and when she was there. Many trips to the north are referenced and it's often difficult to tell if something happened before, during or after the moment she's narrating.

One thing I learned, though, was the struggle of the Sami (indigenous people of Lapland). They are going through similar struggles as the many of the indigenous people of the US and Australia (to name a few). The Sami's struggle to hold on to their traditional lifestyles in the face of the rapidly booming tourist industry was sobering and enlightening. (Note: think twice about dogsledding in Lapland.)

This book challenged me to think about WHY I travel and why I want to travel to places like Lapland. Until

I read this book, it was a place of darkness, Northern Lights, ice, snow and reindeer. Now I have begun to think of it differently and think about what impact my tourism could have on the region.

Bonnie says

I know nothing about Nordic history, so I figured a travelogue would be a good way to go about it. Sjoholm is a good travelogue writer and also brings in some interesting modern-day experiences – the Ice Hotel, dog sledding, etc. But what I didn't realize but becomes more and more blatant is that Sjoholm's main focus is not the countries themselves but the Sami people (the native people of the area). Sami people and their rights is Sjoholm's passion. And it is definitely interesting to learn about a group of people I barely knew existed but I wish that Sjoholm had also taken more of an interest in the general history of Sweden, Norway, and Finland. When Sjoholm discusses maybe one or two things about general Nordic history, when the past is talked about, it's usually about the Sami (which, since her focus stays in the arctic north does make sense, because the Sami history is the history of that area).

Cherie says

While the beginning seemed quite promising, and her writing is good, certain sections tend to go on for too long and lose the reader's interest. Towards the end I found myself skimming a bit. However, I found this highly fascinating, as I have long had an interest in Lapland. I enjoyed her descriptions of snow and cold.

Susan Morris says

The Palace Of The Snow Queen is a travel memoir. Barbara Sjoholm escaped to Scandinavia one winter to grieve the end of a relationship. She travels to Sweden, Finland, and Norway and on to the Sapmi lands of the far North. As she describes the deep cold and dark, the reader shivers and reaches for a blanket. Her narrative includes not just her experiences in the North, regional history and research, but an account of how the experienced transformed her. Her understanding of the Sami people of the far north moves beyond the stereotypes and exploitation that comes with winter tourism, to a true affinity for the people. She contacts "Lapland" sickness, a love of the far north that will call her back again.

Evelyn says

Interesting descriptions of Sweden's Ice Hotel and life above the Artic Circle in winter. Some parts are dull

Jean Matthews says

Set in Lapland, interesting

Lucy Pollard-Gott says

Author Barbara Sjoholm makes her winter travels in Lapland personal from her first pages, where she confides her deep sadness and restlessness after a breakup with her long-term partner. These two emotions propelled her to undertake a difficult journey north, first to Kiruna, Sweden, and nearby Jukkasjärvi, the site of the famed Icehotel. In the end, she will describe three trips to Lapland, or Sápmi, inhabited by the Sami people, lands which stretch across the northern portions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and even into Russia. She is very conscious of author-travelers who have preceded her to these regions, and she repeatedly compares and contrasts her impressions with those of the British travelers Frank Hedges Butler, Olive Murray Chapman, and Norah Gourlie, whose published journals she includes in her helpful bibliography. She is a journalist at heart, in both senses: one who keeps a careful journal of experiences, and a reporter who wants to dig for the story behind appearances. Her reporter instincts will lead her to track down information about the tense relationship between the growing winter tourism and the local inhabitants. But I'm getting ahead of things; let's first savor her bellwether experience visiting the Icehotel while it was under construction in mid-November.

Sjoholm arrived in Kiruna, an iron-ore mining town, and by her own admission, couldn't wait to leave it and get on with her trip to Jukkasjärvi. When she told the receptionist at her hotel in Kiruna that she was staying only one night, that lady felt obliged to let her know the Icehotel wouldn't be open for a while. Apparently, not many people make the trip early to watch the artists, architects, and ice sculptors at work on creating the multi-room hotel of ice. Sjoholm lived among what amounted to an artists' colony for a good portion of the time it took to make the structure and finish the lighting and other interior decoration. She learned about the construction process and reports it in fascinating detail. The Icehotel uses principles learned from both ice-block fortresses and igloos, with their perfect insulation caused by heating and refreezing of the inner surfaces. Blocks of ice are cut in spring from the Torne River, stored, and used for some basic construction tasks, and for ice sculptures. For unusual shapes, snow (or "snice"—a specially made mixture of snow and ice crystals) can be cast in molds with a reinforced frame. On the igloo model, a blowtorch is used to melt the snow and ice surfaces and create a glassy coating. I especially liked the process of "sneezing" or spraying snice on the walls for a final smoothing. The author likens the frozen building material to concrete, or even stone and mortar: ice is the stone and snow is the mortar. Of course, the snow eventually compacts and turns to ice, adding even further to the hotel's solidity and strength.

For the rest of my review, along with pictures from the Ice Hotel, visit Northern Lights Reading Project.

Susan says

Wonderful book if you are fascinated with cold climates (as I seem to be increasingly - and oddly as I really hate to be cold!) Sjoholm finds herself, in the midst of a personal crisis, spending time at the IceHotel in northern Sweden. She is drawn back several times as her interest in the Sami deepens. Sjoholm has the advantage of speaking Norwegian and - seemingly - at least understanding Swedish. She thoughtfully explores the conflicts between touristic businesses and the reindeer-herding Sami. Very interesting is the recent history of the Sami becoming involved with movements across the world of indigenous peoples fighting for their rights. She thoughtfully explores the question of what a "true" Sami life would be - as few are actually reindeer herders (and their traditional grazing areas are becoming mines, or hotels, or roads) and

few speak the language. Her discussion of these issues is relevant to the struggles of indigenous peoples throughout the world, not just in Scandinavia. And she makes it clear that it SURE DOES GET COLD in the North!

Emily says

Not sure why I read so many travel memoirs when really what I would love are actual memoirs and histories of the folks encountered by the author (or is that the point of good travel writing, to make us want that?). Beautifully tied in to my second favorite Hans Anderson story ever, so there's that. Mostly though I felt a little...distanced.

Kirsty says

I was incredibly excited to read Barbara Sjoholm's *The Palace of the Snow Queen*, in which she spends several winters in the Arctic Circle. Sjoholm's entire account is vivid and fascinating; she brings to light so many elements of life in the far north, always with the utmost sensitivity for those who live there.

Throughout, Sjoholm writes about the Sami, tourism, custom and tradition, the Icehotel in Sweden, and ways to travel around, amongst a plethora of other things. She strongly demonstrates just how quickly times change, and how some centuries-old traditions are being dropped in favour of the necessity of tourism.

Everything has been so well researched here, not only with regard to her own experiences, but with insight by others who have explored the region in years past. Her narrative voice is incredibly engaging, and I learnt so much from her account. It was the perfect tome to read over the Christmas period, and has extended my wanderlust even further. *The Palace of the Snow Queen* is undoubtedly one of the best travelogues which I have ever read, and is a sheer transportative joy to settle down with during long winters' nights.

Randy Nelson says

A very thoughtful, personal travel book both subjective and descriptive of Kiruna and Jukkasjarvi and beyond.. It inspired my own journey to Lapland which I completed last week, 2 years after reading the book.

Brighid Moret says

I like Barbara Sjoholm's writing, and this matches her style in *The Pirate Queen*. The book provides a different perspective on Lapland, and the second half really delves into the Sami's place in the modern world.

Ashley Lauren says

I picked this memoir off the shelf at Half Price books with high hopes - it was a memoir of a woman

traveling alone (my serious book weakness) AND it was about the far north and focused on the indigenous people of the area there, the Sami. I have Sami ancestry and have learned many things from my grandmother about her relatives and thought this was the perfect mix. I realized only halfway through this book that Sjoholm also wrote *Incognito Street: How Travel Made Me a Writer* - a fantastic memoir based on her travels in Spain. Despite my love of that previous work of hers and the topic, I had a hard time enjoying this one in particular. And, as someone with Sami ancestors, I think that the average memoir reader is going to have a seriously hard time with this one.

So how was it I didn't like this book? Well, for starters it reads VERY much like a history book. Sjoholm spends a lot of time going into the history of the area, etc, which in some ways I appreciate, but so much of it is quoted from other books, or people, or... anything that it just gets confusing. I thought I would for sure find a bibliography at the end of the book (and there kind of is with the list of "suggested reading").

Secondly, and I apologize ahead of time for how non-PC this is, but Sjoholm was old when she took this trip, and I think it really shows. In "Incognito Street" she's an adventurous 20 year old, learning her life, experiencing the world and writing about it. In "The Palace of the Snow Queen" she's still curious and adventurous and experiencing the world - but (at least in her writing) her spunkiness has declined. She's 50 now and while still learning and growing it has a much different feel to it. As a 24 year old myself I just didn't feel the same connection.

Overall I found the book a bit repetitive (she goes back to the same place three different times - in one respect it's cool to see the transition, in another respect, I wish she would have flubbed it historically and made it all one trip to eliminate the overlaps) and the reflection on the Sami people a little confusing. There are a few examples of that but I'll use her title as one in particular - The Sami people for the most part agree and refer to themselves as Sami. The term Laplanders (what Sami are often known as throughout Norway, Sweden, and Finland) is generally thought of as a derogatory term. Now, I know she has MUCH more information than I do but she seemed to say this herself in the book, and then promptly used the term "Lapland" in her title. I just felt she was preaching (in a good way) sensitivity throughout the book and then she generally crushes it by using Lapland.

Anyway, if you're a serious Arctic Circle/Sami buff, it's fun. If you're just interested in a travel memoir, aim your way toward *Incognito Street*!
