

Lapland, Finland

March 3 – 16, 2020

Trip leaders: Stephen and Loraine Walter



We invite you to come on a ski adventure to Finnish Lapland. The main activity will be participating in the Rajalta Rajalle - Hiihto (Border-to-Border skiing event, known as the RR), across Finland from near the Russian border to the Swedish border, very close to the Arctic Circle all the way. This tour has taken place annually for 36 years. The RR is a small-scale event primarily organised by tourist departments and volunteers in the various small communities it passes through. There are usually about 50-70 skiers in the group, mostly Europeans (Germany, France, Spain, others) with a smaller number of Americans and

Canadians. It is a tour, not a race. Some skiers are fast and can cover the full distances, while others elect to ski only part of the trail on each day. The following details are based on the 2019 arrangements; minor changes do occur from year to year, but the basic structure of the tour remains the same. In addition to the RR itself, we will have time for sightseeing in Helsinki.

March usually offers comfortable skiing weather in Finland. The weather cannot be guaranteed, of course, but it is usually fine, with little wind. Temperatures are typically in the -10 to -5 deg. C range during the day, sometimes with somewhat colder starts in the morning. There are usually sunny or moderately clear skies; falling snow or rain is relatively infrequent. Also, daylight hours are long because of extended twilight experienced at high latitudes. Northern lights can often be seen.

Our itinerary would be approximately as follows:

- Day 1: depart Toronto in late afternoon or evening.
- Day 2: arrive Helsinki (via connecting flight in Europe) early afternoon. 2 nights stay.
- Day 3: full day available for sightseeing in the capital.
- Day 4: Fly Helsinki to Kuusamo in Lapland (1 hour flight), arriving early afternoon. Opportunity to explore the extensive ski trail network directly from our hotel, to shop, or to use the spa facilities in the hotel. A night here will provide an opportunity to acclimatise to the local conditions.
- Day 5: Most of the day available to ski locally. In the late afternoon, move about 10km to the Oivanki outdoor centre, where we will join the rest of the RR skiers. One night in Oivanki.
- Days 6 – 12: Take part in the RR itself (7 days skiing), finishing in Tornio, on the Swedish border. (More details below)
- Day 13: Bus from Tornio to Oulu airport (about 1 hour). Fly Oulu to Helsinki (1 hour). Overnight in Helsinki.
- Day 14: Fly Helsinki to Toronto.

Further details will become available once we are able to book specific flights.

There are 7 days of skiing on the RR tour. The full distances each day are quite long, ranging from 44 km to 84 km, but there is always the possibility to ski a shorter distance. **Generally, the minimum distance per day being 25 km. or less. HOC members should be aware of their own capabilities, and be comfortable skiing a minimum of 25 km in a day.** For average skiers, this distance will take about 3.5 hours of actual skiing, plus stop time; slower skiers might take up to 5 hours, plus stop time. We suggest that you estimate your typical travel speed, and thus be confident that you can make the minimum distances required on a given day.

Each day, participants who do not want to ski the full distance can ski the first portion of the route and transfer to a dedicated bus shuttle at an intermediate point on the route, or they can take the bus from the hotel to that intermediate point and ski the remaining distance. It is helpful to ski with a small day pack, but the RR shuttle buses can be accessed at the midday lunch stop if you need to drop or add anything (change skis or clothing, for example). There is always at least one bus meeting-point each day, with the minimum ski segment distances on the 7 days of the tour in 2019 being 21, 23, 25, 18, 14, 22 and 23 km. Slightly longer segments are available on certain days, and on longer days there may be additional bus stops.

In addition to a major lunch stop each day, there are “service stations” provided at about 10km intervals along the trail, with drinks and light refreshments and snacks.

The terrain is generally easy, with relatively few big hills. Some sections are very flat. When we do meet larger hills, they tend to be long and gradual, both up and down. In some places, the RR uses existing trail networks that are maintained by local councils or ski resort areas, and in other places a special track is set for the RR. The snow is reliably ample (usually with at least 1 metre of lying depth) and the trails are well maintained and very well signposted for any tricky places. As a result, even relatively inexperienced skiers can enjoy the journey without feeling out of their depth.

Most participants use waxed skis; a professional waxing service is available almost every day, or space is provided for doing your own waxing at each night’s accommodation. Waxing conditions tend to be easy. However, no-wax skis can also be used, although they are often slower. Skate skiing is possible on a few selected sections of the route. Almost everyone brings their own ski equipment, but it may be possible to rent, if desired.

If you do not wish to ski at all on a given day, you can simply ride the bus instead, and enjoy the scenery, sometimes joining the skiers at the lunch stop. Certain alternative activities may be possible during the RR week, by private arrangement (see below).

There is a designated ski guide, who explains the route and other logistical issues each evening, and a “bus guide” who liaises with us about room assignments and other practical issues. Both these individuals stay with the RR group for the whole week.

Accommodation

During the RR week, we stay in a different location each night, and buses transport our luggage during the day. As noted in the itinerary, we will have two nights in a hotel in Helsinki on arrival, and one further night in Helsinki during the return trip. Finally, one hotel night is required on day 4 in Kuusamo.

The accommodation on the RR is mostly in hotels, with shared rooms as the default (usually 2 - 4 persons per room). The hotels range from a spa hotel in Kuusamo, small hotels and lodges in rural communities, a mountain resort, and a larger hotel in Tornio for the final night or two. On one night (or, exceptionally, two nights), the accommodation is at rural camps with dormitories, or at a rural primary school house; for these nights, skiers need to bring a light sleeping bag and/or sheet liner (mattresses are provided at the school; separate male and female rooms are available). Final details of the RR accommodation vary slightly each year.

Saunas (men and women separate) are available every night (at no charge), and they are a wonderful way to refresh oneself after a day on the trail.

For the nights in Helsinki, we will use a hotel near the airport, in order to facilitate the domestic flight departure to Kuusamo on the morning of day 4. The airport has recently been linked to the city by a new metro, with easy connections to most points of interest (approx. 30 minutes each way).

Air transport

The international component will be Toronto to Helsinki, with a connection (likely Frankfurt, Amsterdam, or London). Domestic flights will be used from Helsinki to Kuusamo, and Oulu to Helsinki, before and after the RR week, respectively. Detailed flight schedules and fares are only available 11 months in advance, i.e. during April 2019 for us. Flight deviations or extensions will not be available.

Ground transportation

During the RR tour, the group has dedicated buses available to transport us and luggage each day, as required. Ground transfers to and from the hotels in Helsinki and Kuusamo are included.

Other activities

We plan to arrive in Helsinki in the early afternoon of day 2. The next day, we will have a full day available for sightseeing. Being the capital city, Helsinki offers a wide range of museums and shopping, and the architecture is quite interesting. The Lutheran Cathedral is a signature landmark, and there is a harbour area. Depending on the schedule, there may be a concert or opera performance at Finlandia Hall. There is an optional 90-minute (approx.) 'big bus' tour of the city available. There are also several ski trails around the city, notably at Paloheina. Ski trails in Finland are always free!

In Lapland, one or more locations on the RR route offer reindeer or husky "safaris" (and doing one of these may also be possible on day 5, when we are in Kuusamo prior to joining the RR group). There is also an Arctic Zoo in Ranua, one of the communities visited on the RR route. Members wanting to do these optional activities (instead of skiing) would need to arrange their own transport and bookings, but it is very possible that the RR local organisers will help in this regard.

Meals

All meals during the RR week (breakfasts, lunch packages, suppers and evening snacks) are included. Full buffet breakfasts at the Helsinki and Kuusamo hotels (days 3, 4, and 5; and day 14) are also included.

The following optional items are not included in the trip cost:

- Sightseeing tour or other personal activities in Helsinki; other personal activities, such as Lapland "safaris", Ranua zoo. (Information about these options can be made available to trip members).
- Meals not included: four evening meals (days 2, 3, 4, and 13), and four lunches (days 3, 4, 5 and 13). This is because we anticipate people will not necessarily want to stay together in the group on those days. These meals are available at reasonable cost in the hotels we will be using (approx.. 10-20 euros), and there are many other eating options elsewhere.
- Local transport (metro, bus) in Helsinki.
- Optional tips at hotels for cleaning staff.
- \$25 club registration fee
- Baggage fees for air travel
- Alcoholic beverages.
- Inclement weather or unforeseen circumstances which result in travel delays and the necessity to seek alternate accommodation and meals, will be at your own expense.

Cost

Total per person cost is estimated at \$4670, based on shared occupancy (double occupancy in Helsinki and Kuusamo; and as assigned by the RR during the tour week).

Add a 3% surcharge if you wish to pay by credit card. There will be an additional \$25 per person cost payable to the club upon registration. We will use Teacher's Travel Service for all travel services.

Fluctuating currency exchange rates mean that the above cost is an estimate, and could change before our arrangements are finalized.

REGISTRATION

Register online on the club website haltonoutdoorclub.ca. There are two parts to your registration. Your spot is not confirmed until both parts are completed. In other words, the first deposit to Teacher's Travel is due at the time of registration.

1. On-line Registration: Use the Club website / Events Calendar and pay the \$25 per person club registration fee.
2. The second part of registration is to pay a deposit of \$600Cdn per person to Teacher's Travel Service. This may be paid by cheque or credit card. If paying by cheque it should be made out to Teacher's Travel Service and dated for the date you register. The address is:

Teacher's Travel Service
21 St. Claire Avenue East
Toronto, ON M4T 1L9

If paying by credit card, there is a 3% surcharge. Please call Jill Sanderson (Mon- Fri : 9:00 and 5:00) at 1 800 268 7229 to provide your credit card information. If Jill is not available, you may leave information with Cathy or Betty.

Final Payment: We will notify you about the date when final payment is due, and if there is an adjustment to the final pricing. Final cheque will be payable to Teachers Travel. If paying by credit card, contact Jill at 1 800 268 7229.

CANCELLATION

Deposits are non-refundable. However, in the event that you need to cancel, the club will look for a suitable replacement from the club waiting list. If a replacement can be made without incurring costs to the club or the travel agency, then you may be refunded. If using a replacement incurs some costs, the cancelling party will be responsible and may only receive a partial refund. If a replacement cannot be found, the cancelling party will be responsible to cover all costs the club has incurred on your behalf up to the point of cancellation.

If the entire trip has to be cancelled by the club for any reason, you will receive a refund.

INSURANCE

The Halton Outdoor Club strongly recommends you have adequate cancellation and requires that you have out of province medical insurance. Coverage for your trip may be purchased through Teachers Travel or your own provider. Call Jill Sanderson at 1 800 268-7229.

Feel free to contact either Stephen or Loraine Walter if you have further questions.

Walter@mcmaster.ca arctic.lorie@gmail.com