

# Chasing

# Aurora



**D**EEP IN THE WILDS OF ARCTIC FINLAND, surrounded by evergreen trees as old as the Sámi tribal tales that echo through the tipi-like Lavvu tents that dot the snowy forests, I sought out my nirvana. The [Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort](#) is far from civilization, in an area of protected open skies, and one of the best places in the world to see the much-coveted northern lights.

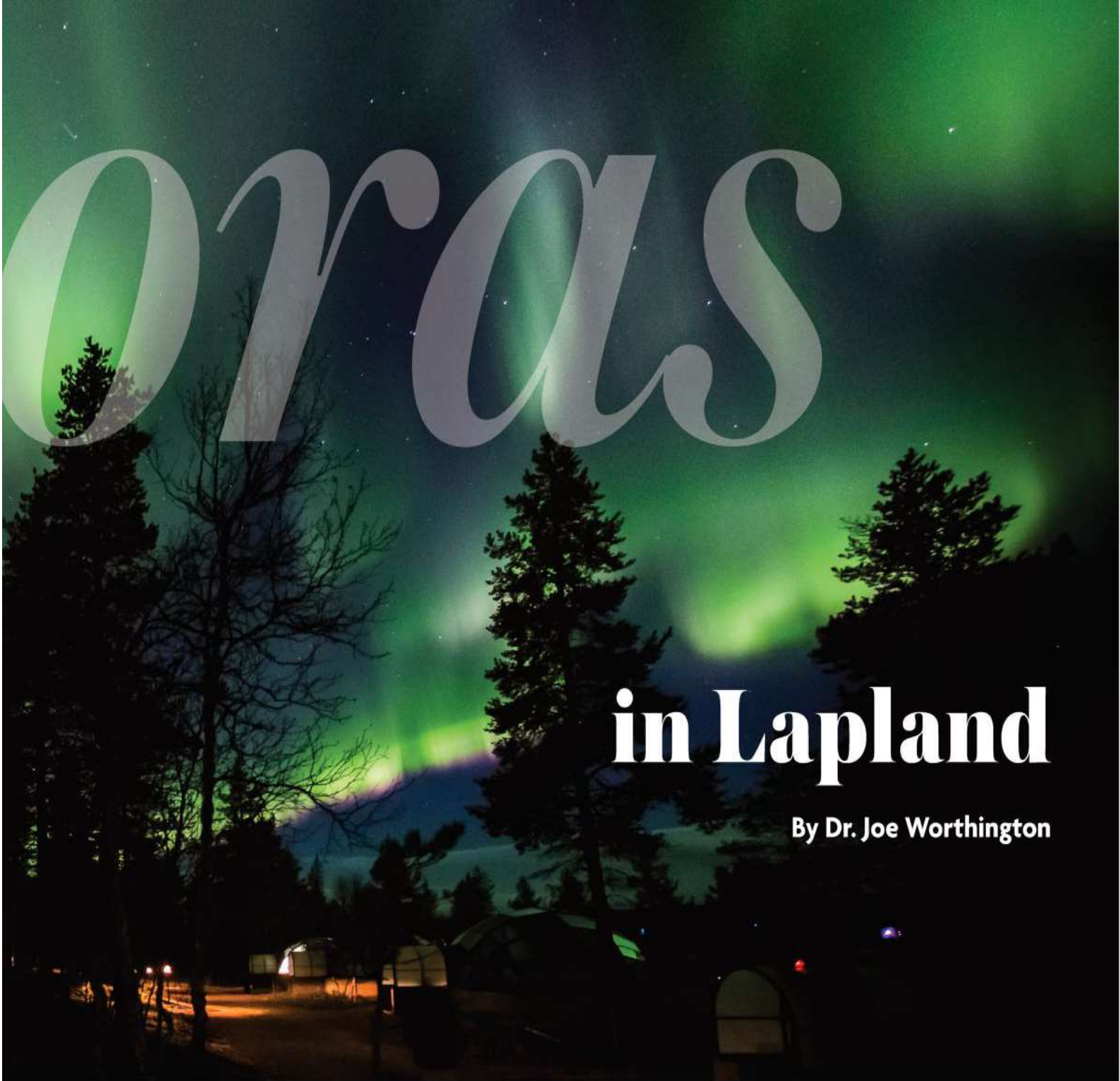
I stepped off the bus into ankle-deep powdery snow and made my way to the glowing lights of the welcome centre. Passing snow-topped log cabins, the bright glow of the moon's reflection caught my eyes from the sunken glass igloos that make the resort so famous. As I was tramping

through the powdery whiteness with my bag gliding behind me on a wooden sleigh, a flash of green appeared overhead, followed by a fleck of red, streak of yellow and a touch of white. The aurora was welcoming me. The receptionist told me that some indigenous Sámi believe the northern lights are the spirits of ancestors welcoming you to their homeland. Other tribes believe the lights are caused by a magical fox leading you along a path through nature, its tail swishing in the snow causing flashes of colourful lights in its wake. I had already checked off a bucket list experience that had eluded me on countless previous trips across Scandinavia.

We stopped at the door of my two-person glass igloo,

PHOTOGRAPHY, KAKSLAUTTANEN ARCTIC RESORT





# orás

## in Lapland

By Dr. Joe Worthington

and swept some snow from underfoot. I was surprised that I could stand upright without banging my head on the curved 360-degree glass dome. It was late and the skies were darker than black. Twinkling stars glowed between towering green pine trees cloaked in white. I lay in my cosy bed, wrapped tightly in a blanket, taking in the silence of my surroundings. The only sound came from the chilly Arctic wind blowing snow onto my igloo; the quiet echo repeating within my temporary transparent home. I drifted off to a sound sleep, the vibrant glow of the earlier aurora playing out in my mind.

Safaris are a major feature of a stay at Kakslauttanen. The call of the wild beckoned, so I signed up for a rein-

deer safari led by traditional Sámi reindeer herders who know how to communicate with their semi-wild friends. Wrapped in a woollen blanket, I sat on the wooden sleigh and off we went. The freezing winds brushed against my face while powdered snow caressed me as it gently floated from the clear sky. After an hour of riding, the guide let out a loud “whoa” and we came to a sudden stop at a traditional *kota*, a timber-framed tent covered in white fabric. I was welcomed inside to sit with a herding family around an open fire, smoke engulfing me. They handed me a hot cup of dark brew coffee and a slice of *Leipäjuusto*, a pungent baked reindeer cheese drizzled with a sweet dark red cloudberry jam. The head of the family told a tale ➤





The appearance of the northern lights was brief, lasting only a few minutes, but it did not disappoint.

On my final day at Kakslauttanen, knowing that I would have to be dragged away from my new favourite winter home, I decided to spend my time exploring the resort. I had heard about the Finnish sauna tradition. Little did I know that I would have to jump into a hole cut into the frozen Kakslauttanen River! I braced myself, held my breath and slowly lowered myself into the chilly spring water. The hairs stood up all over my body. I quickly pulled myself out and ran across the frozen ground into the world's largest smoke sauna. The smoke cloaked me as I opened the sauna door, sat down and embraced the warmth.

Before leaving for the airport, I went for one last unforgettable meal in Kelo restaurant,

passed down through generations of herdsman chasing errant reindeer through thick forests and facing trials along the way. He followed with a joik song of shamanistic throat signing to the rhythm of a beating drum.

Back on the sleigh we glided across fresh snow toward the resort. As I walked back to my igloo, I was invited to help myself to bunches of berries dangling before me from the trees. Perfectly ripe red lingonberries released a slightly bitter burst in my mouth. Orange blackberry-shaped cloudberry offered a welcome sweetness, and black tart bilberries rounded off my taste exploration of Finnish nature. Darkness quickly took over the skies, replacing the blue daylight of Finnish winter when the sun never fully rises. I jumped on a snowmobile and, with an aurora guide, roared through the forests in pursuit of mother nature's finest lightshow. The echo of the snowmobile thundered between the towering trees as the skies began to glow. We pulled over and my guide started a small fire to warm up some coffee, the smoky scent lingering as I craned my neck to watch the flashes of neon green, white and pink merging and casting their glow down onto the snowy landscape.

a traditional wooden hut decorated in reindeer antlers and Sámi carvings, with a roaring wood fire in the corner. Traditional Lappish cuisine is plentiful on the menu. I opted for a fragrant soup of locally sourced almond potatoes, swede and parsnip. I followed this with a strong reindeer stew with crunchy celeriac and spices, and a vibrant pink, tart lingonberry and cranberry semolina pudding called *Vispipuuro*.

The time came for me to leave Kakslauttanen. I took one last look at the snow-covered glass igloos and wooden cabins, turned and walked away, vowing to return one day. **D**



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