

# SOUTH KOLA

A travel guide to the southern part of Murmansk oblast



**Jussi Konttinen**

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Murmansk oblast

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2008

This book was produced in the EU-funded Interreg-Tacis joint project, “LapKola 2 – Development of cross-border tourism business between Lapland and South Kola”. The project belongs to the Interreg III A Northern Kolarctic Neighbourhood Programme. The project is managed by Finnarents, a joint project unit of Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences and the University of Lapland.

Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences publication series C, no. 19

ISSN: 1239-7741

ISBN: 978-952-5153-76-7

Translated from the Finnish publication by BSF / Keith Kosola

Cover design: Milla Hirvaskari & Suvi Kuusniemi

Cover photos: Milla Hirvaskari, Jussi Konttinen & Jaakko Ikävalko (front cover), Nikolai Maximov, Jussi Konttinen & Ilkka Kauppinen (back cover) Photos:

Jaakko Ikävalko, Ilkka Kauppinen, Nadežda Kolupajeva, Jussi Konttinen, Nikolai Maksimov, Niko Väistö

Maps: Mark Kalinin & Jussi Konttinen

Rovaniemi 2008

Kalevaprint, Oulu

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## FOREWORD

This is the third travel guide I have written. The two previous books, *Sankarimatkailijan Arkangeli* ('Heroic Traveller in Archangel' (Like, Finland, 2005)) and *Sankarimatkailijan Komi* ('Heroic Traveller in Komi' (Like, Finland, 2007)), also explored the Russian North. Now it's time to end the trilogy. Although I have travelled widely in Russia, all the way to Siberia, I had never visited Kola before writing this guide. It turned out I had been carrying coals to Newcastle in vain. The Kola Peninsula offers exquisitely beautiful northern scenery and wide expanses of uninhabited wilderness right across the EU's eastern border. There are reasonably good traffic connections to the region. Its dismal industrial reputation is exaggerated; there is plenty of pristine nature outside of the cities.

The material for this guide was collected on two expeditions I made to South Kola with some of my friends. The first three-week trip in March and April 2007 headed towards the Lovozero Fells and the Khibiny Mountains, Kirovsk, Apatity, Polyarnye Zori, Monchegorsk and Lovozero. During the trip we made a skiing trek to the fell highlands of Lovozero and Khibiny, did alpine skiing in Kirovsk and went by snowmobile to visit some Sami reindeer breeders in Lovozero and the wilderness village of Krasnoshchelye. The second three-week trip in August and September of the same year began with our shooting the rapids on the Umba River. On that trip we also visited the settlement of Umba and villages on the Ter Coast of the White Sea, Kandalaksha and its surroundings, Alakurtti and the Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve. We climbed the fells on the coast of the White Sea and attempted to bike along the coast eastward from Varzuga with varying success.

The journey was made with various means ranging from a car and a train to bicycles and rubber pontoon catamarans. We were supposed to leave for the first trip by train from St. Petersburg. However, I forgot the tickets home so we had to jump in a car and make the entire journey by road. In Kola the worst

stretches were covered with local drivers' off-road vehicles, the most impressive being a six-wheel-drive Zil truck from the 1960s. The bike trip along the coast of the White Sea ended in an unexpected way when we packed ourselves and our bikes into a helicopter that transported schoolchildren to school. We lodged at hotels, in homes and in a tent. In Kuzomen's home lodgings we were able to tumble onto leopard-print sheets. One of the most extraordinary accommodations was in the culture centre of a small fishing village, where we crawled into the attic to sleep as soon as the young people's disco ended. The best tenting place was in the valley of the Lovozero Fells, surrounded in May by ice-falls and snow ledges and illuminated by blazing green northern lights. The little vacation village of Tonya Tetrina on the coast of the White Sea proved to be a real paradise. In an authentic White Sea fisherman's yard we were able to taste purse seine, listen to wartime hits played on a hand-cranked gramophone and gaze at the sea while relaxing in a sea plant bath concocted by our host.

The clear, snowy tops of the Lovozero Fells, the base camp of reindeer breeders on the wide-open tundra, the steep rock cliffs of the Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve, the friendly salmon fishing village of Chavanga on the coast of the White Sea – these are a few of the top places on my own trips to Kola. Memorable cultural sites include the sieidi sacrificial rocks on the Kandalaksha coastal fells and the ancient rock drawings near the wilderness Kanozero Lake. The trip did not go without difficulties. On the coast of the White Sea we came down with such a dramatic case of the heaves that one of us had to be transported to a hospital in Finland for intravenous treatment. When I was skiing in the Khibiny Mountains a crazy, drunken tracked motor vehicle driver "joked around" and nearly ran over me twice. Nevertheless, most of our adventures were positive. Meeting up with animals, in particular, created titillating situations. While biking along the coast of the White Sea in the September dusk we saw five bears within two hours. On the second day of biking we almost bumped into a seal lounging on the sand at low tide. While on a snowmobile safari on the tundra north of Lovozero we suddenly noticed a wolverine racing along with us a hundred metres away.

Thanks to my travel friends for sharing these experiences with me:

Slava "The Brain" Zaytsev led us through the snowy Lovozero Fells and entertained us with his guitar and voice. Dasha "Tatska" Zaytseva threw her skis over her shoulder when there was no longer any sense in skiing. Kolya "Perpetuum mobile" Maximov rolled his backpack and captured the unforgettable northern lights. Leea "Lezya" Parhiala learned new methods on the slopes of Kirovsk and tamed the raging rapids of Padun. Ilkka "Ilkki" Kauppinen gave us avalanche instructions and grabbed the ladies into his car. Veera "Vaisto" Väistö got enthused over neoprene and made discoveries on the seashore. Niko "The Guerilla" Väistö lounged on leopard-print sheets and fixed the Evinrude in a tent. Anni "Anny" Hassi noticed the wolverine and also proved to be an Evinrude genius. Jussi "The Sandman" Toivanen brought the travellers sweet dreams and got the alcohol burner to burn cheerfully. Hansu "Hanzu" Luukkanen charmed us with her bikini photos and ended up getting intravenous treatment. Jaakko "Needles in the seat" Ikävälko was treated by the Soviet Union's Ministry of Health and caught the largest pink salmon in Kola.

Thanks to the people who helped me compile this guide:

Kandalaksha: Igor, Olga and David Latayev

Luvenga: Boris Gureyev

Umba: Olga Anisimova

Chavanga: Pavel Kozhin, Vera the storekeeper, Vera Kozhina, the directress of the culture centre, Lyosha Kuznetsov, the sauna attendant, the doctor – actually, the whole village!

Tetrino: grandma

Polyarnye Zori: Vladimir Komarov

Apatity: Elena Kruglikova, Vadim Lihachov, Anna Bykova, Alexandr Sibrin

Kirovsk: Evgeniy Lysyi

Monchegorsk: Nikolai Kozhin, Nadya Kolupayeva and the entire crew at the Sariola recreational club, Jan Popov and Viktoria Frolova

Lovozero: Seman and Galina Galkin

Finland: Tuomo Wallenius

Travelling in Kola would be even more pleasant if it were not hindered by various ghosts from the past. A large part of Murmansk oblast is still more or less closed. This guide does not include a chapter on the Kovdor district. The city is located in the border zone, and we were not given permission to visit there (see Kovdor). After years of openness the settlement of Umba is also again closed to travellers. In Alakurtti the Russian border zone extends over 60 km from the border, while in the same locality on the Finnish side the border zone is only a little more than 3 km wide at its widest. Supervision of military sites does not mean wide areas must be kept closed. This guide is a statement in behalf of free travel!

Nevertheless, the reader should not remain waiting for the bureaucrats to wise up. Kola and its friendly residents invite you to adventure already now. In 1887 six Finnish scientists made the legendary "great Kola expedition." Led by Lappish guides, they tramped into the inner parts of the peninsula, "where no naturalist had been before". One hundred twenty years later Kola is still largely terra incognita, an unknown land that awaits its discoverer. Hopefully this guide will make you drool. The Salla-Alakurtti road is hot!

Have a good trip!

St. Petersburg, 20.1.2008

Jussi Kontinen

Comments are welcome by e-mail at [sekeenoit@yahoo.com](mailto:sekeenoit@yahoo.com).

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# I. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## WHY GO TO SOUTH KOLA?

Right around the corner from the EU is one of Europe's last large wildernesses: the Kola Peninsula. Its central and eastern areas are still roadless hinterlands in their natural state, a land of endless pine forests, bogs, winding wilderness rivers, bears, birds of prey and mosquitoes, where people travel rarely and with difficulty. In Kola a person can still feel like a small weakling left to defend for himself in the midst of the forces of nature. It is a rare, fine and even frightening experience. The Kola Peninsula is nearby, yet at the same time amazingly far away – at least from everyday city life.

Nature and related activities are the main reason to go to the Kola Peninsula. The region is best known for its fishing possibilities. Kola's rivers are spawning grounds for Atlantic salmon, and the waters also contain many other fish: trout, grayling and Arctic char. Extremely expensive helicopter trips are arranged to the salmon rivers, but this guide describes less expensive ways to reach Kola's fishing waters.

The Khibiny Mountains and the Lovozero Fells are easily accessible high fell highlands where one can trek all year round. The Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve near the Finnish border contains rugged canyons and waterfalls. Kandalaksha on the coast of the White Sea again offers extraordinary scenery: high fells border the sea. You can go canoeing in the beautiful archipelago of the White Sea, in Pirenga's maze of lakes or down the well known white-water Umba, Varzuga, Tuntsajoki and Kutsajoki Rivers. Snowmobile safaris are popular ways to become familiar with the inland areas of Kola in winter from Kirovsk. The Khibiny Mountains also contain West Russia's highest ski slopes, with abundant possibilities for deep powder skiing, also.

Kola also has culture. Holy sacrificial stones or *sieidi* of the Sami people can be found here and there on the peninsula. Ancient rock drawings can be found at Kanozero Lake and Chalmnivarre. Today the Sami people, the

original inhabitants of the peninsula, live in the settlement of Lovozero, where there is a Sami culture centre and museum. Many of Kola's Sami and Komi people still practice their traditional livelihood, reindeer management. From Lovozero, especially in winter, it is possible to visit reindeer breeders in the taiga and tundra. Russian fishermen, or Pomors, have lived along the coast of the White Sea already since the 1500s. Traditional Pomor villages include Kovda, Kuzreka and Varzuga. Kovda and Varzuga have 300-year-old wooden churches. You can familiarise yourself with the secrets of Pomor coastal fishing in the excellent little vacation village of Tonya Tetrina.

Kola is known for its military sites and industry. Most of the military sites are located on the northern coast of the peninsula, which is not covered by this guide. Travellers need not balk at the industry, either, as the factories and environmental damage they have caused are luckily concentrated in limited areas around the cities.

Kola's cities are uninviting, but they offer the traveller necessary basic services and an interesting glimpse into urban life in the Russian North. Although people have moved away from the northern cities, Russia's economic growth and rising standard of living are apparent here, also. Kola's cities have new shopping centres, swimming halls and alpine ski slopes. Yet, the people of the North have more time for each other than do those who live in large cities. Visitors are treated with friendliness.

Kola has local tour operators, and it is also possible to travel to the region through Finnish travel agencies. Cities and district centres have hotels, but you can get closer to nature by lodging at vacation centres. You do not need to starve to death in Kola, although most of the restaurants will not make the traveller drool.

## **THE REGION AND ITS PEOPLE**

This guide covers the South Kola region. This means the southern and central parts of Murmansk oblast: the districts of Kandalaksha, Ter (with Uмба as its centre), Polyarnye Zori, Apatity, Kirovsk, Monchegorsk and Lovozero. Most of the people in South Kola live in the industrial cities, which in order of size are: Apatity (64,000), Monchegorsk (52,000), Kandalaksha (41,000),

Kirovsk (32,000) and Polyarnye Zori (16,000). Other large settlements are the district centres of Uмба and Lovozero and the settlements of Alakurtti and Revda.

Kola's main artery is the Murmansk railway, completed in 1916. Near the railway is a deteriorated main highway that follows the centuries-old travel route from Kandalaksha on the coast of the White Sea via the Niva River, Imandra Lake and the Kola River to the Murman coast. Kola's cities were built during the Soviet era in close proximity to the railway and they live off the mining and metal industries. Phosphorite, used in fertilizers, is mined in Kirovsk and refined in Apatity. Kandalaksha has an aluminium plant and Monchegorsk has a nickel smelting plant. Polyarnye Zori has a nuclear power plant.

Most of South Kola's residents are Russians, but many nationalities from the former Soviet Union can also be found there. Most of the residents are people who moved to the region during the Soviet era or their descendants. The Pomors who live in the coastal villages comprise the original Russian population. Kola's oldest residents are the Sami people, who number only about 1,500. Most of them live in Lovozero. Komi people live in Lovozero, Krasnoshchelye and Kanevka.

## **CLIMATE**

South Kola is situated on the Arctic Circle and the weather is accordant. The temperatures are similar to those in Finnish Lapland, except that the ocean has its own impact on Kola.

The climate in Kola varies depending on one's location. The northern coast is affected by the Gulf Stream, which keeps the ocean ice-free and winters milder. Summers again are cooler on the northern coast. The impact of the Gulf Stream is weaker at the White Sea and the sea freezes, but the coast still has an ocean climate, which is apparent in weather that is rainier and windier than it is inland. The climate further inland on the peninsula and closer to the Finnish border is more continental, which means the summers are warmer and the winters colder. However, it does not feel as cold here as it does near the sea.

It rains quite a bit in Kola. The number of rainy days varies in different parts of the region from 150 to 250. It rains more high in the fells and on the coast. It rains a lot especially in the summer and autumn.

Warm air flows from the Atlantic in the west and northwest, while cooling masses of arctic air flow from the north and east. The ocean makes the weather unstable. A strong wind can rise quickly, especially on the coast and in the fells.

The average temperature in January is -11 degrees near the White Sea and -13 inland. It is possible, but rare, for the temperature to drop to over 40 below. The first freezing temperatures usually arrive already in August, the last leave in early June. A permanent snow cover forms in October or November and it thaws in May.

The average temperature in July is 12 degrees near the White Sea and 11 inland. On warm days the temperature may rise to 25 degrees. Summer lasts from mid-June to mid-August.

Most of Kola is situated above the Arctic Circle, so in midwinter the sun doesn't rise and in midsummer it doesn't set.

## **NATURE**

Kola's nature resembles nature in the arctic region of the Nordic countries. The climate, terrain and species of the peninsula can be considered a continuum of Lapland.

The White Sea surrounds the Kola Peninsula in the south and changes into the Barents Sea at Svyatoi Nos ('The Holy Cape') in the northeast. The central and eastern parts of the peninsula consist of mainly plains or low rolling hills dissected by winding rivers. The Voronya, Litsa, Varzina and Yokanga Rivers flow north to the Barents Sea and the Strelna, Varzuga and Umba Rivers flow south to the White Sea. The longest river is the Ponoï River, whose catchment area includes a large part of the centre of the peninsula. The only significant highland in the central and eastern parts of Kola is the Keivy Fells, which pass through the peninsula as a 300-metre-high ridge from the northwest to the southeast.

The terrain changes near Kandalaksha on the coast of the White Sea,

where there are fells over 600 metres high. The Niva River, which flows towards Kandalaksha, is fed by Kola's largest lake, Imandra Lake. Imandra's lake system is comprised of three parts separated by straits: Babinskaya Imandra, Yekostrov Imandra and Great Imandra. The tattered water area of Pirenga Lake empties into Imandra through a narrow strait. Imandra is surrounded by the high fell highlands of the Chuna and Monche Fells and Khibiny, where Kola's highest peak, at 1200 metres, is located. East of Khibiny is Kola's second largest lake, Umba Lake, behind which is the fell highland of the Lovozero Fells, or Luyavrurt. The range of fells ends in the east at Lovozero.

The Kovda River flows towards Kandalaksha on the coast of the White Sea from Kovdozero Lake in the west. The river receives some of its water from Finland. The area between Kandalaksha and the Finnish border is rolling fell and watershed terrain that resembles Lapland. Near the border the land rises towards Salla Fell, which is over 600 metres high.

Kola is often thought of as an arctic region, but in reality a large part of it is forest-covered. Closer to the Finnish border are pine forests, further east spruce becomes dominant. The spruce trees are the long, narrow Siberian spruce familiar from Lapland. They grow slowly and reach a height of 12-18 metres. One-fifth of the area is covered by bogs.

Further north the trees thin out and become shorter, comprising a transitional forest. Alpine birch dominates the fells and the border of the tundra. The forest line in the fells is at an altitude of about 400 metres. Bushes, twigs and lichen grow on the slopes of the fells. Higher up are stone fields.

Only about 20 percent of Kola is covered by actual treeless tundra. The tundra zone travels from the northwest to the southeast, following the northern coast of the peninsula. At its narrowest point the tundra extends only 30 kilometres from the coast, but further east it widens to 120 kilometres. Low bushes, twigs and lichen grow on the tundra.

Birches and willows begin leafing in South Kola in May or June. Cloudberries ripen in July or August and then blueberries. Fall colours appear by the second half of September.

Most of the animals in Kola are familiar species of northern coniferous forests. The only arctic species is the Norway lemming. Predators include bears, wolverines, foxes and weasels. There are said to be about 350 bears on the peninsula, but at least according to our own non-scientific observations there could be a lot more (we saw five within a couple of hours). Wolves have been decimated by hunting. Cloven-hoofed animals that live here are elk and reindeer. The only hares are Arctic hares, which change colour. The only bat is the small northern bat.

One-third of the birds are migrating species that begin to arrive in Kola in April. There are very many species of marsh birds and waterfowl on the peninsula. Many of them, such as the greater swan, breed in the tundra zone. There are 16 species of birds of prey and 9 owl species. Forest fowl include willow grouse, rock ptarmigan, hazel grouse, black grouse and capercaillie, which fly in large flocks. Some eiders that nest on arctic islands fly to Kola for the winter.

Fish and marine mammals are covered in the chapters on fishing and the White Sea.

Seven percent of the region is protected. There are two extensive, strictly protected areas in South Kola where trespassing is forbidden: the Lapland and Kandalaksha Nature Reserves. There are also less strictly regulated regional conservation areas, of which the most significant are the Kutsajoki River, Kolvitsa, Kanozero, Seidyavr Lake, Varzuga and Ponoj Nature Reserves.

Kola's rapid industrialisation during the Soviet era caused environmental damage that is still visible today. As recently as the 1980s Kola's sulphur emissions were nearly twice as great as those of all of Finland. Fortunately, reductions in production and better technology have ended forest deaths caused by sulphur deposition around Monchegorsk. Monchegorsk's nickel smelting plant has also contaminated the catchment area of Imandra Lake. Pollution has been caused by Kandalaksha's aluminium plant and the Apatity-Kirovsk refineries. Polyarnye Zori has a nuclear power plant, but no radioactive fallout has been detected in South Kola. Mining has destroyed areas in the Khibiny Mountains and to a lesser degree in the Lovozero Fells. There are plans to expand mining in the Khibiny Mountains and Fedorova

Tundra Fell. Fortunately the contaminated areas are limited to a relatively small area near the Murmansk railway.

During the Soviet era Kola's forests were overharvested, especially in the Kandalaksha-Alakurtti area. The northern forest has renewed itself slowly.

Power economy has changed the region's waterway. The Niva River has three power plants, and Imandra Lake functions as their reservoir. The Kovda River's power plants take their water from the Kovdozero and Yova reservoirs. The northern Voronya River, which flows into Lovozero Lake, is harnessed.

## HOW SHOULD I GO?

You can go to South Kola with the help of a Finnish or Russian travel agency or independently. Much depends on what you are going to do there. For example, salmon fishing in Kola is its own type of business in which many foreign and Russian companies are specialised. You can very well spend an alpine skiing vacation in Kirovsk or make a car trip to the White Sea coast by yourself. On the other hand, a longer nature excursion or trek may require a local guide.

Finnish travel agencies specialised in Russia, like Lähialuematkat, Finnsov Tours, Turun Neva Tours and Matka-Karjala, can make hotel reservations and order plane and train tickets.

The following Finnish tourism companies participating in the LapKola 2 project arrange trips to Kola:

**Eräsetti Safaris.** Rovaniemi, Santa Claus' Village, 016 362811, rovaniemi@erasetti.fi, www.erasetti.fi. For example, seven-day ATV safaris from Salla to Khibiny.

**Pyhä Safaris.** Pyhä Fell, Pyhäntie 3030 A, 0400 696338, 040 7789106, info@pyhasafaris.com, www.pyhasafaris.com. Bus tours to South Kola and snowmobile safaris to Khibiny.

**Taxari Travel.** Kemi, Kauppakatu 29, 016 259667, 040 7220595, taxari.travel@pp.inet.fi, www.taxari.com. Winter sightseeing trips around Kola by bus.

**Snowsafaris.** 045 6713062, timo.loponen@netti.fi, www.snowsafaris.com. Snowmobile safaris in Khibiny.

Other Finnish companies that arrange trips to Kola include:

**Kola Extreme.** Salla, Kuusamontie 39, 016 837791, office@kolaextreme.com, www.kolaextreme.com. Extensive experience in Kola tours and snowmobile safaris.

**Matka-Lahtinen.** Yli-Ii, Kirkkotie 5, 0400 381867, matka.lahtinen@co.inet.fi, www.matka-lahtinen.fi. Bus trips to Kirovsk.

**Rukan Lomapalvelu.** Kuusamo, Ruskareitti 10, 0400 695516, info@rukanlomapalvelu.com, www.lomarengasruka.com. Bus trips to Kirovsk.

**Turun Neva Tours.** Turku, Anikaistentie 12, 02 2504655, nevatours@co.inet.fi, www.turunnevatours.fi. Bus trips.

**Vihdin Liikenne.** Helsinki, Albertinkatu 22-24 A 2, 09 444774, vihdin.liikenne@clarinet.fi, www.vihdinliikenne.fi. War history-related bus trips.

**Japi-matkat.** Hamina, Helsingintie 1 B 14, 05 355 9365, 355 9345, myynti@japi-matkat.fi, www.japi-matkat.fi. Bus trips.

Travel agencies, transport arrangers and guides operating in South Kola, listed by locality:

### **Alakurtti**

**Sozidaniye & Skaidi.** Sozidaniye: (81533) 52427, (911) 3228877, Director Alexey Vladimirov. Skaidi: (81533) 52487, (911) 3187485, voita@alakurtti.ru, Director Oleg Shevtshenko. More about these extraordinary travel agencies in the chapter on Alakurtti. Skaidi has a sauna and five-person cabin in Vuorijärvi, which it rents for €100. The companies say they can arrange cross-country transports to the Kutsajoki and Tuntsajoki Rivers and Salla Fell (€100/75 km) and assist in purchasing border permits.

**Other alternatives.** In principle, all off-road vehicle drivers in Alakurtti can arrange transports in the Alakurtti-Kutsajoki River area. Our driver to the Kutsajoki River was Vladimir Seben, who has a five-passenger UAZ. His phone number is (81533) 52487. You can obtain a border permit yourself. You can also ask for help from Alakurtti's local administration (see Alakurtti).

## Kandalaksha

**Kanda-Tur.** 50 let Oktyabrya 8 ofis 3, (81533) 92328, kanda\_tour@com.mels.ru.

**Region nedvizhimost.** (81533) 92205, (921) 2836341.

**Hotel Pomorskaya Zvezda.** See Kandalaksha: Lodging. The hotel owner arranges boat rides on the White Sea and says he can also arrange rapids shooting and fishing. A three-hour cruise with a small boat for a few passengers is €150.

**Hotel Spolokhi.** See Kandalaksha: Lodging.

**Boris Gureyev.** (921) 7244712, ohotnik56@mail.ru, guboris@rambler.ru. Easy-going Gureyev arranges tours to sieidi sacrificial rocks and fells, off-road vehicle trips, fishing and bear hunting.

**Vladimir Mintshenkov.** (81533) 94372, (921) 1641168, info@kolvica.ru, kanda@mail.ru, kolvica@yandex.ru, www.kolvica.ru. Mintshenkov specialises in fishing. He offers salmon fishing and sea, lake and winter fishing. Boat rides on Kolvitsa Lake, snowmobile and off-road vehicle transports.

**Diving Centre Gandvik.** See Kandalaksha: White Sea diving. Diving trips, sea excursions, snowmobiles for deep powder skiers.

## Umba

**Umba Discovery.** Belomorskaya 100, (81559) 51629, (921) 1566412, irinaumba@com.mels.ru, www.umba-discovery.ru. Seaside vacation centre near Umba. Umba Discovery arranges snowmobile safaris, fishing, countryside tours and lodging in White Sea villages, ocean boat trips, labyrinth rock garden and mineral excursions.

## **Chavanga**

**Pavel Kozhin.** Contact person tel. (8152) 447841, (921) 2721119. Fishing trips to Chavanga and transports by six-wheel-drive truck and boat.

## **Polyarnye Zori**

**Salma-Tur.** Sivko 1, (81532) 71677, 70979. The firm specialises in trips abroad, but can also provide assistance to a tourist who has found his/her way to Polyarnye Zori.

## **Apatity**

**Team 51.** www.team51.ru, 51@nm.ru, (81555) 73716, (921) 2890814. This company managed by young Alexandr Sibrin arranges snowmobile and off-road vehicle transports and safaris and guides for backpacking, skiing and biking treks and deep powder skiers in the Khibiny Mountains, the Lovozero Fells and Central and East Kola. Lake fishing and lodging in small cabins. The team also rents trekking skis and equipment.

**Hotel Amethyst's travel office.** See Apatity: Lodging. Room 216.

**Apatity's recreational federation.** (81555) 76794, (921) 2755392. Chairman Sergey Sergeevich Potshivalov. Provides assistance in planning trips to Khibiny.

**Recreational Club Zelyonaya Milya.** (921) 2856011, abyk16@mail.ru. Arranges trips to Khibiny. Chairperson Anna Bykova.

**City administration's tourism co-ordinator.** (921) 2886941. Maria Safonova.

**Magazin goryashchih putyovok.** Lenina 9a, (81555) 74747, 77363, mgp@khibiny.ru, www.khibiny.ru. Fishing, snowmobile safaris, alpine skiing vacations, excursions to Kirovsk, Umba and Lovozero.

**Yug-Kola.** Lenina 3, ofis 107, (81555) 74178, (921) 2815363, southkola@com.mels.ru, www.kolaklub.com. Snowmobiles, mineral excursions, fishing.

**Avers.** Dzerzhinskogo 19, (81555) 73122, 64480, 44894.

**Evrikom.** Lenina 27, (81555) 62841, 61355, evricom@com.mels.ru.

**Fishing.** (81555) 63965. Alexandr.

## Kirovsk

**Ramzay-Sever.** Parkovaja 4-1, (81531) 56513, (921) 2876006, info@ramzay-sever.com, aselan@ramzay-sever.com, www.ramzay-sever.com. Ramzay-Sever's best known product is Khibiny, as the company owns a hostel in the middle of the fell area. Snowmobile safaris, skiing, canoeing and backpacking treks, fishing, deep powder skiing with the help of snowmobiles.

**Fortuna.** Dzerzhinskogo 19 (Hotel Gornitsa), (81531) 59113, fortunatour@mail.ru, www.fortuna-tour.com. Hotel reservations in Kirovsk. Arranges snowmobile trips, in summer canoe, bike and backpacking treks. Fortuna collaborates with the Finnish Snowsafaris company (see Finnish tour operators).

**Snowmobiles.** (921) 2891545.

**Snowmobiles.** (921) 5147555, www.snowtracker.ru.

## Monchegorsk

**Odinoki strannik.** (81536) 51613, 72643, (921) 2709003, solitary\_wanderer@monch.mels.ru, www.solitary-wanderer.ru. Treks to Khibiny, trips to the White Sea coast, off-road vehicle safaris, kiting, fishing, snowmobiles.

**Recreational Club Sariola.** (81536) 70876, (921) 2866331, (921) 2786662, sariolateam@monch.mels.ru. Monchegorsk's active recreational club is not a travel agency, but it can assist in getting to the Voltshe Fells, the waterfalls of the Chuna Fells, Khibiny, Lovozero and kayaking routes.

## Lovozero

**Arctic Land.** (921) 2855501, arcticland@murmansk.net. Travel agency in conjunction with Hotel Koavas. Alexey Koshchelnik. Fly fishing and winter fishing, snowmobile safaris to the tundra.

**Tundra Reindeer Herding Cooperative.** Yuryeva 4, (81538) 30378, 31432. Reindeer farming director Vladimir Filippov (921) 1597637. Tundra arranges visits to reindeer breeders. The best time is in winter, when the herds are near Lovozero and they are accessible by snowmobile. In the

summer expensive tracked motor vehicles are needed for transports.

**Piras.** Andrey and Tatyana Yulin. (81538) 31610, (921) 1694451, andrei\_piras@mail.ru. The Yulins have a house on a Lovozero strait and the Afanasiya River. Snowmobile safaris and transports of snowboarders to the Lovozero Fells.

**Alexandr Kuzmenko.** (81538) 30109, (921) 2732880, elov-ostrov@yandex.ru. Visits to Seidyavr Lake by boat or snowmobile.

**Lovozero.** (81538) 31704, (921) 2863380, info@lovozero.ru, www.lovozero.ru. Viktor Barakovsky. Trekking, fishing, snowmobiling, Sami tours and photography trips. Trips to Lovozero's Sami festivals.

**Interpreters.** (921) 2855501 Alexey. (921) 2785697 Evgeniy Luzhkov. (921) 2785386 Svetlana Sednyeva. (911) 1555558 Alexandr Skosyrev.

## **Murmansk**

**NordmorService Travel.** Lenina 94, (8152) 428175, 424600, 422164, info@nmstour.ru, www.nmstour.ru. Fishing, hunting, deep powder skiing, canoeing, climbing on the Khibiny Mountains, diving, nature trips, mineral excursions and trips to the Northern festival and Lovozero.

Firms specialised in salmon fly fishing trips are listed in the chapter on salmon rivers.

## **Tourism information**

Tourism information points will be established in Kandalaksha, Umba and Kirovsk within the framework of the LapKola 2 project.

**Kandalaksha tourism information.** 50 let Oktyabrya 8, (81533) 96943.

**Umba tourism information.** Dzerzhinskogo 40, (81559) 51360.

**Kirovsk tourism information.** Lenina 7, (921) 1676747.

## **WHEN SHOULD I GO?**

The best time to make a winter trip is in March and April. Kola's summer lasts from the beginning of June to the end of August. Thawing of the

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snow lasts well into May, and the night time temperature may drop below freezing as late as early June. However, by then it is light 24 hours a day. It is warmest at the end of July and the beginning of August. Mosquitoes and gnats become troublesome from mid-June onward. Towards the end of summer biting midges join the fray. After mid-August the problem begins to ease up, but the weather also turns towards autumn and becomes rainier. The arrival of fall colours varies from year to year, but it takes place in September.

## **VISA AND REGISTRATION**

Most foreigners travelling to Russia need a visa. You can obtain it from a travel agency that sells trips to Russia in your home country.

You need to remember two things when crossing the border: a migration card and a customs declaration. A migration card is required from everyone who spends over three days in Russia. Regardless of this, the passport official may not offer it to you automatically, so you need to ask for it. Enter your personal data on the card and have the passport official stamp it. The customs declaration form is not mandatory unless you are driving a car or bringing special equipment like canoes or bicycles into the country. Fill out the form if you are carrying over €2000 in cash. The form must be stamped and you must keep it with you during the entire trip. When you return you'll fill out a new form and return the old one. You must not have more money upon returning than you had when you went.

Upon arriving in Russia you must register your visa and migration card within three days. In practice, you can only register at a hotel if you stay at one. Only the largest hotels in the locality will register foreigners. Because of this registration you should spend at least the first night at a hotel. Lack of registration is not the end of the world, but the militia or border officials can impose a fine or in extreme cases ask you to leave the locality.

## **TRAVEL LIMITATIONS**

Parts of South Kola have closed areas that require a special permit for tourism.

The area from the Finnish border to Alakurtti comprises the border zone, which is described in conjunction with Alakurtti.

The settlement of Umba is a closed military area. However, you can travel on the Kandalaksha-Varzuga road that passes through Umba and you can stop at a service station in Umba. As this is written, a foreigner can get a permit to visit Umba only in winter. Permits can be obtained from the security service in Umba, e.g. from Umba's local administration, or with the help of a local tour operator.

You should not stray from the road to Lovozero into the surrounding military sites, and in Polyarnye Zori you may not turn to the road leading to the nuclear power plant. The closed areas on the eastern and northern coasts of Kola are outside the region covered in this guide. They are mentioned in the chapter on Lovozero: Ostrovnoi.

Trespassing in the Kandalaksha and Lapland Nature Reserve areas is forbidden.

Fishing supervisors can impose fines for even trespassing near salmon rivers even though you have no intention to fish. It is most likely easier to pay the fine than to obtain the required permit.

## **TIME**

Kola is on Moscow time, which is three hours ahead of Greenwich time. Normal time and daylight savings time change as they do in most European countries.

## **LANGUAGE**

The language spoken in Murmansk oblast is Russian, and the people mostly do not understand foreign languages. However, it is possible to find English-speaking guides through travel agencies.

## **CURRENCY AND EXPENSES**

Payment in stores, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants and ticket booths is in roubles. Private guides and drivers will probably also accept dollars and euros.

Every city or settlement has at least a national savings bank, Sberbank, where euros can be exchanged for roubles and vice versa. The exchange rate is better than in Finland.

Russia is still a cash country, and credit cards are rarely acceptable. You should estimate your need for money beforehand and carry a sufficient amount of cash with you. It is better to have too much than not enough cash in your pocket. The prices of trips, lodging and services are given in the respective chapters.

Cities have automatic teller machines.

The prices in this guide are given according to an exchange rate of €1=35 RUB.

## **WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ALONG?**

It's best to take a first aid kit, medication, medical syringes, sanitary pads and condoms along with you. Toilet paper will come in handy more often than you would expect. A flashlight and folding knife will also make life easier. Raingear and rubber boots are necessary on countryside tours, and hip boots are worth considering on nature trips.

A nature traveller should take along gear suitable for the season, without forgetting mosquito spray and netting in the summer as well as sun lotion and warm, windproof clothing. It may get cold even in the summer in Kola, and rarely will you have too much clothing along - except for shorts and T-shirts. You'll appreciate a three-season sleeping back in the summer, also.

In winter an outdoor traveller should take along ice-fishing overalls and warm boots. If you sleep outdoors you'll need a winter tent, winter sleeping bag, air mattress and space blanket. You should use winter gas that contains butane and propane in your cooking burner. Melting snow for water consumes a lot of gas.

A GPS unit and satellite phone are good security devices in the wilderness, not to mention maps and a compass.

## **WHERE WILL I STAY THE NIGHT?**

There are hotels in all the cities and in Uмба, Lovozero and Revda. You

shouldn't expect too much in terms of quality. For example, a hot shower is not always a given. An advance reservation gives a feeling of security, but hotels usually have room for unannounced guests, unless a large group is in question. This does not hold true in Kirovsk during the alpine skiing season.

There are vacation villages or cabins in Zarechensk, near Kandalaksha, in Umba, in Pirenga and on Imandra Lake's Yekostrov Strait. In small localities you can also ask about home lodging. There are some vacant huts along the coast of the White Sea and elsewhere, but their condition varies considerably. Elsewhere the only lodging is provided by your own tent.

## **WHERE WILL I EAT?**

This is a good question. Kola is not a cradle of culinary delicacies; in many cities the hot dogs and hamburgers served at the Norwegian Statoil service stations beat the mush served in restaurants coming and going.

Every city and settlement in Kola has restaurants. Some of them are even pretty good, like Kofeinya in Monchegorsk, Yantar in Apatity, Hotel Severnaya's restaurant in Kirovsk and Otshag in Polyarnye Zori. Local specialties, salmon, reindeer and cloudberries, are sometimes available.

Nevertheless, you can get the best food in homes. Sami cook Galina Galkina offered us excellent smoked reindeer stew flavoured with cloudberry juice at a reindeer management station on the tundra. In the coastal village of Kuzomen we were able to sit a banquet table loaded with salmon: salmon medallions, salmon soup, raw spiced salmon, salmon prepared with citric acid and of course, washed down with vodka.

## **SAUNA**

Russians enjoy saunas (banya in Russian) at least as much as Finns do. Hotels usually have dry electric saunas, but the large public saunas offer the best steam baths. Every city has them. Women and men usually have their own sauna days.

Of course, the best alternative is to be able to take a sauna in a private wooden sauna in the country. It is worth boldly asking about the possibility

of heating one for a suitable fee. We usually paid 500 roubles (€15). Saunas are sure to be heated on Saturdays.

## **PURCHASES**

Sami souvenirs are sold at the Lovozero culture centre and museum. In Apatity souvenirs can be purchased from the Salma art gallery and in Kandalaksha from stores near the central square or Hotel Spolokhi. The cities' market squares have mainly inexpensive Chinese or Turkish copies of name brand clothes. You can buy cloudberry in the summer and mushrooms in the autumn in Kola.

## **REGIONAL MAPS**

The most accurate terrain map of Kola sold in Russia is an atlas of Murmansk oblast published by Aerogeodeziya, which contains a 1:200,000 map of West Kola and a 1:500,000 map of the area east of the Uмба-Uмба Lake-Kildin line. As this is written, the map is available at Aerogeodezija's map store in St. Petersburg, Nevsky prospekt 34, Mon-Thu 11:00-19:00, Fri 12:00-18:00. By chance you may find it in Kola's bookstores or fishing and hunting stores and in Moscow's Atlas store, Kuznetsky most 9/10. Akateeminen Kirjakauppa in Helsinki also sells maps of Russia.

The Kola road map (Atlas avtodorog Murmanskoy oblasti) covers the area of Kola that has a road network. The scale is 1:200,000, but the maps are approximate. As this is written, the road map is available at Statoil's service stations.

The condition of the road network is exaggerated in both atlases. For example, the Oktyabrsky-Uмба cross-country road is marked as a normal highway. The maps also contain absurdities such as a missile radar station, which is marked as "hay barns".

More accurate 1:100,000 recreational maps of the Khibiny Mountains and the Lovozero Fells are available in Russia. The East Salla area is included on a very approximate Salla-Alakurtti recreational map published in Finland by Karttakeskus in 2000. There are probably old Finnish maps of East Salla in the archives.

There are even 1:50,000 topographical maps of the entire Kola Peninsula, but they are for military use only. Nevertheless, some maps can be found on the Internet, for example at [topmap.narod.ru](http://topmap.narod.ru), <http://www.water-mir.spb.ru/gps-map/russia/51-01-reg.shtml> and [www.poechali.org](http://www.poechali.org). Your tour operator in Kola may also have maps.

As this is written, 1:200,000 maps suitable for GPS navigators are marketed on the Internet in St. Petersburg: Adrenalin, Bolshoi prospekt Vasilyevskogo ostrova 87, (812) 7777701, [www.adrenalin.ru](http://www.adrenalin.ru), Mon-Fri 10:00-20:00, Sat-Sun 10:00-16:00 and Lesvoda, (812) 7023372, [www.lesvoda.ru](http://www.lesvoda.ru). In Finland they are sold by Ruslania, Helsinki, Lapinlahdenkatu 1 C, [customerservice@ruslania.com](mailto:customerservice@ruslania.com), [www.ruslania.com](http://www.ruslania.com), Mon-Fri 9:00-18:00, Sat 10:00-16:00.

Best of all is to try to get a hold of a sufficiently accurate satellite map. It shows actual current roads, for example, more reliably than do compiled maps.

## **TELEPHONE AND THE INTERNET**

Many foreign GSM operators' cards function in Kola with Russian companies' roaming. The best coverage is provided by MTS and Megafon, which operate as this is written in all cities, Lovozero, Revda, Uмба, Zarechensk, and along nearly the entire Kola main highway. MTS also operates in Alakurtti. It is expensive to call using roaming, but SMS messages are normally priced.

In cities and district centres you can call from a telephone office, and in small villages, from the post office. Calls are usually connected manually, so the desired number is written on a slip of paper for the official. The call duration must be estimated and paid in advance. There are card phones, also, and cards are sold at telephone offices and post offices. The phone system in the remote little village of Chavanga was so peculiar, that the desired call was paid at the post office and the call was made at the kolkhoz with a crank-type phone.

When a long-distance call is made from Russia with a fixed line phone, you must first dial 8, then wait for a signal, and then dial the area code and

phone number. For example, to call from Kandalaksha to Kirovsk, dial 8 and after the signal dial Kirovsk's area code 81531 and the phone number. Three-digit area codes beginning with 9 (e.g. 921 and 911) are reserved for Russian GSM operators. When calling from a mobile phone, you can also dial +7 instead of 8 for a long-distance call, and you don't need to wait for the signal.

<b>District</b>	<b>Area code</b>
Apatity	81555
Kandalaksha	81533
Kirovsk	81531
Lovozero	81538
Monchegorsk	81536
Polyarnye Zori	81532
Umba (Ter district)	81559

When calling abroad with a fixed line phone, dial 8 and after the signal dial the foreign call code 10, country code, the area code without the first zero and then the phone number. When calling from abroad to Kirovsk, for example, dial the foreign code, Russia's code 7, the city's area code 81531 and the phone number.

In this guide Kola's phone numbers are written in the form: (city area code) phone number.

Internet coffee shops are mentioned in the chapters on the cities. In the country the Internet is often available at the post office and the telephone office.

The only mode of communication in the wilderness is a satellite phone. If you take one along, we suggest taking an Iridium standard unit, which functions the best in the northern latitudes.

## **DANGERS**

Statistically, traffic is the traveller's greatest threat in Kola as it is elsewhere in the world. The roads may be in poor condition and the driver's

understanding of traffic safety may be limited to the icon affixed to the dashboard. Be careful about who's ride you accept and try to make it clear you're not in a hurry to the hereafter (in Russian: na tot svet vseгда uspeyem).

Otherwise travel in Kola is quite safe. The type of banditry found in big cities is rare in Kola. Drunks and youth gangs may potentially cause problems, so it is best to avoid large gangs after dark.

Tap water must be boiled before drinking. Travellers to Russia do not need special vaccinations. An A-hepatitis vaccination is recommended if you plan to stay in the country longer.

In Russia, call the number 03 for an ambulance and 02 for the militia.

## **FISHING AND HUNTING**

Kola is a fisherman's paradise. The region is best known for its famous salmon rivers, which are described in more detail in the chapter on salmon rivers. Nevertheless, Kola's numerous rivers, lakes and the sea also offer other prey.

After salmon, the next most valuable fish is trout, which can be found in two populations, one that migrates and one that lives in the rivers. Migrating trout may grow to 8-12 kilos. Freshwater fish also include grayling, Arctic char, whitefish, perch, pike and burbot. Grayling stay near rapids in the summer and swim in deep places in the river in winter. In the spring they enter creeks to spawn. White Sea fish species are described in the chapter on the White Sea.

Even in Kola, it is not worth making a big deal about going fishing, because you cannot get prey everywhere. The fish populations of easily accessible lakes like Imandra have been decimated by overfishing and pollution.

Permits are required only for red fish (salmon, trout and pink salmon) and net fishing. Many of the tour operators mentioned in the chapter How should I go? can arrange fishing. Salmon companies and places that sell salmon permits are listed in the chapter on salmon rivers. Fishing is supervised by the Rosselkhoz nadzor office; the phone number in

Murmansk is (8152) 252592.

In Kola you can hunt elk, bears, hares, wildfowl and waterfowl. A license is required to hunt elk and large predators; it can be obtained through a travel agency. You can independently inquire about a license from the hunting supervisory office in Murmansk, (8152) 543407, 543406, 543404.

## ACTIVE VACATION

South Kola offers a wealth of possibilities for outdoor activities. The most popular and easily accessible *trekking sites* are the rugged fell highlands of the Khibiny Mountains and the Lovozero Fells, where you can go backpacking in the summer and skiing in winter. From Monchegorsk it is possible to make a trek to Volchi tundry, or "Wolf Fells". The steep canyons and falls of the Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve are also accessible on foot, although the labyrinth of forest roads is not the most uplifting trekking terrain. If you succeed in getting a special permit, you can climb Salla Fell right near the border. The White Sea coast is also a natural, clear-cut route, for example east of Kashkarantsy or Kuzomen. But, trekking in the central and eastern parts of the peninsula requires character, as the terrain is mainly roadless and pathless wilderness. The beautiful fells along the coast of the White Sea near Kandalaksha are best suited for one or two-day hikes.

You can also view South Kola from a *bicycle seat*. The main highway is not the most pleasant for biking, but for example the route from Kandalaksha to Varzuga is better. Off-road bikers ride in the Khibiny Mountains and on cross-country roads, which indeed may be covered with soft sand. Downhill biking competitions are arranged in Kandalaksha.

Several cities in Kola have *alpine ski centres*, but only Kirovsk's slopes are worth coming from far to see. Kirovsk's surroundings also offer possibilities for deep powder skiing, in which case the fells are ascended on foot or by snowmobile.

*Mountain and rock climbers* head for the Khibiny Mountains, which also have cleaned climbing surfaces.

The body of water best suited for peaceful *canoeing* is probably beautiful Pirenga Lake with its many inlets. Another good option is Lovozero, from

which you can get to the Voronya River. Canoeing is also possible on Imandra Lake and Uмба Lake, but these large, open lakes may have large waves. A potential canoeing site in the south is Kovdozero Lake, which indeed is a reservoir. The bottom of the bay of Kandalaksha offers sea kayakers beautiful island and fell scenery. However, the problem is that you cannot go to shore on the islands because they belong to the Kandalaksha Nature Reserve.

South Kola offers an abundance of white-water rivers where rafters can shoot the rapids. We tested Uмба, which is described in more detail in its own chapter. Other possibilities include Varzuga, Kolvitsa, Kutsajoki and Tuntsajoki. All the rapids are demanding and previous experience is necessary. Most kayaking routes require about a week on the river. There are many white-water rivers in East Kola, like Kharlovka, Yokanga, Ponoj, Chapoma and Strelna, but it difficult to arrange transports in this roadless area. Kayaking is possible from mid-June to mid-September.

You can go *diving* in the clear waters of the White Sea. Kandalaksha has a diving centre that rents equipment and provides transports.

In Kirovsk you can try *hang gliding*. Kola also has ice sailors and surfboarders.

Some travel agencies in Kola can arrange special *thematic excursions*, for example for someone interested in geology or botany.

Kola is a promised land of *snowmobile safaris*. Snowmobiling is the number one product of most tour operators. You can ride as a passenger or drive yourself – the choice of trails is nearly endless. The most popular directions are Khibiny, where you can drive in steep fell surroundings, and the trails leading east from Kirovsk and Lovozero towards the centre of the peninsula, where you can become familiar with the life of reindeer breeders and the wilderness village of Krasnoshchelye. Safaris are also arranged closer to the Finnish border.

*Off-road vehicle and ATV safaris* are also becoming popular. We met a party from Holland who had driven their off-road vehicles all the way from the land of tulips to the Arctic Circle in Kola. Routes suitable for off-road vehicles include the Kirovsk-Uмба road, the Kutsajoki River area's forest

roads and many others. Every summer an Arctic Trophy off-road vehicle marathon is arranged in Kola, which also draws Finnish and Norwegian off-road drivers. They say Russian off-road vehicles make it through without problems, while every year it is necessary to lift expensive western off-road vehicles out of Kola's bogs. Contact information: Murmansk, Starostina 45, (8152) 274928, 274900, info@at4x4.ru, www.at4x4.ru.

## HOW DO I GET TO SOUTH KOLA?

### By plane

There are several flights a day to Murmansk from Moscow and St. Petersburg, but in that case you have to go to South Kola from Murmansk by train or bus. Murmansk has Kola's only international airport – from there you can fly to Kirkenes in Northern Norway.

Aeroflot flies from Moscow and St. Petersburg to Apatity twice a week, more often during the alpine skiing season. The plane from St. Petersburg is a prop-driven Antonov-24. A one-way ticket starts at €143 and a round-trip ticket is double.

Plane tickets are sold in Russia by airline companies, plane ticket booths (aviakassa) and travel agencies. Abroad you can order tickets from a travel agency specialised in Russia. If you need to cancel your trip you get your money back if you return the ticket at least 24 hours before departure time. If you return the ticket 3-24 hours before departure, you lose 10 %. If you return it less than 3 hours before departure, you lose 25 % of the price. The ticket must be returned to the place of purchase personally or with a letter of proxy certified by a Russian notary.

**Khibiny airport** is located halfway between Apatity and Kirovsk.

Phone (81555) 70344.

**Murmansk airport.** (8152) 281331, 281431,

www.airport-murmansk.ru.

**St. Petersburg central aviation booth.** Nevsky prospekt 7/9,

(812) 7178093. Metro station Nevsky prospekt.

### **St. Petersburg Pulkovo main airport.** (812) 7043822.

Minibuses to the airport from Moskovskaya metro station.

### **By train**

If you are coming from Karelia, St. Petersburg or Moscow, a good way to approach Kola is by train. Several trains a day travel from St. Petersburg and Moscow to Murmansk. They stop along the way at stations like Petrozavodsk, Louhi, Kandalaksha, Polyarnye Zori, Apatity and Olenegorsk. The train trip from St. Petersburg to Kola lasts about 24 hours. A ticket from St. Petersburg to Apatity costs €44 in a four-bed sleeping cabin (kupe) and €17 in an open sleeping compartment (platskarta).

You should buy the tickets a couple of weeks in advance, as it's possible there'll be none available a few days before departure. You can buy the tickets at the station or order them in Finland from a travel agency specialised in Russia. The trains leave from St. Petersburg's Ladoga station (metro Ladozhskaja).

You'll find the latest schedules on Russia's railway Internet pages from the Russian language search engine [www.rzd.ru](http://www.rzd.ru). The German railway search engine [reiseauskunft.bahn.de](http://reiseauskunft.bahn.de) also displays Russia's schedules, but they may contain errors.

### **By bus**

The easiest way to get from Finland to Kola using public transport is by bus. There is regular bus traffic between Rovaniemi and Kandalaksha. As this is written, there are two runs a week, on Monday and Thursday. The bus departs from Rovaniemi at 14:45 and arrives in Kandalaksha at 22.20. The bus from Kandalaksha leaves at seven in the morning and arrives in Rovaniemi at 12:35. Up-to-date information can be found with Matkahuolto's schedule search at [www.matkahuolto.fi](http://www.matkahuolto.fi). The ticket costs €47. Tickets can only be purchased from the driver or Kandalaksha's bus station, but usually there is room on the bus.

Our test group took the ride in the autumn of 2007. Apparently, the Volkswagen minibus we rode in didn't have any springs. Between Alakurtti

and Kandalaksha the bus also served many local passengers.

The buses arrive at and depart from the square next to the railway station in Kandalaksha. The ticket booth is on the ground floor of an apartment building off to the side.

Another possibility is to ride the Ivalo-Murmansk bus, which runs three times a week ([www.goldline.fi](http://www.goldline.fi)). You can get to Murmansk from Norway by bus or plane from Kirkenes.

**Kandalaksha bus station.** Kirovskaya 24a, (81533) 31730, 95095. Next to the railway station.

### **With your own car**

From Finland the simplest way to travel to South Kola by car is to drive to the border crossing in Salla (see the chapter on the border). There's no sense in going via Raja-Jooseppi further north unless you intend to also visit Murmansk on the same trip.

Correspondingly, coming from the south it is not worth chugging along the deteriorated main highway from St. Petersburg to Murmansk unless you want to visit Karelia. When we tested this route, we were able to drive only 10 km/h on the worst 10-km stretch, even though this is Murmansk's most important highway link to the rest of Russia.

Mandatory traffic insurance required in Russia is most easily purchased at Russia's border station. Vehicle data are entered on the customs declaration form at the border. One problem that may arise on a longer trip is the written engagement to return the car, which is compiled at the border. As this is written, Russian customs granted it for a maximum of two weeks. It is possible to extend the engagement at the inland customs office in Murmansk, address Shevtshenko 40. We were able to convince the customs officials at the border to grant us a three-week permit for the car.

A foreign driver's license is usually OK for driving in Russia. If someone other than the owner drives the car, the driver must have a free-form letter of proxy (*doverennost*) from the owner, written in Russian, containing the owner's, driver's and car's data. The letter of proxy is not needed if the owner is in the car.

Nowadays all of Kola's service stations have 95 octane gasoline. There are gasoline pumps right after the Russian border station in both Salla and Raja-Jooseppi. It is worth filling the tank there, as you will have no possibility to do so before Alakurtti and near Murmansk.

## HOW DO I GET AROUND IN SOUTH KOLA?

### By plane

The easiest way to cover distance in the roadless central and eastern parts of the peninsula is by plane. The downside is cost: a one-hour chartered helicopter flight nowadays costs close to €1500. It is slightly cheaper to rent a small An-2 airplane.

Especially when the ground is thawed, there are regular flights from Lovozero to Krasnoshchelye, Kanevka and Sosnovka. The plane is a prop-driven Antonov-2 biplane, or "Annushka", which lands on skis in winter. It seats 12 people. The flight to Krasnoshchelye takes three-quarters of an hour.

Correspondingly, a helicopter flies from Varzuga to the White Sea coastal villages of Chavanga and Chapoma. The flight is supposed to be flown every Tuesday, but it's worth checking beforehand with Varzuga's Vskhody Kommunizma kolkhoz, which runs the flight.

**Vskhody Kommunizma.** Helicopter flights from Varzuga.

Contact information, see Lovozero: Salmon rivers.

**Lovozero airport.** (81538) 31505. Ticket booth (81538) 31499.

**Krasnoshchelye airport.** (81538) 37140.

### By train

A train is an excellent way to travel between localities along the main track. All the trains stop in Kandalaksha, Polyarnye Zori, Apatity and Olenegorsk, many also at smaller stations. As this is written, there are seven trains daily in both directions. The northernmost station is Murmansk.

Especially in the vicinity of Kandalaksha and Apatity the scenery along the railway is very beautiful. North of Kandalaksha the tracks follow the

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Niva River and the fells. North of Apatity the train travels between the Khibiny Mountains and Imandra Lake.

The Murmansk railway was constructed under the pressure of the British during WWI in 1915-16. It was used to transport war supplies to tsarist Russia, who was fighting against Germany. Altogether 40,000 workers, including Finns and Chinese, participated in the construction work. German prisoners of war were also brought there to work. The railway was again put to military use during WWII, when it was used to transport allied assistance from the USA and Great Britain to the Soviet Union. The Germans' attempt to cut the railway was unsuccessful when their offensive from Finland stopped at the Verman River 60 km away.

### **By bus**

Buses go where trains don't. The most important destinations are Umba, Kirovsk, Monchegorsk and Lovozero.

Buses from Kandalaksha go to Alakurtti, Zarechensk, Zelenoborsk and Umba. From Umba you can go to Varzuga and Kuzomen, and from Zelenoborsk to Kovda.

There is a bus connection to Monchegorsk from every train at the Olenegorsk railway station 27 km away. You can also get from the Olenegorsk station to Revda and Lovozero.

It's easy to get to Kirovsk. Local buses from Apatity run to the city continuously.

Buses also travel between the cities along Kola's main road, meaning you can go from Kandalaksha to Polyarnye Zori, Monchegorsk and Murmansk. You can get to Apatity from Kandalaksha, Polyarnye Zori and Monchegorsk.

Murmansk has bus connections to all cities.

Contact information for bus stations and local schedules are given in conjunction with each locality under the heading Transports.

### **With your own car**

Car owners have access to South Kola's entire highway network, which indeed isn't very big. In addition to the St. Petersburg-Murmansk main highway, other roads passable with a passenger car are the road from the Salla border, the road to Zarechensk, the Kandalaksha-Umba-Varzuga road, the Kovdor road, the road to Apatity, Kirovsk and Oktyabrsky and the road to Revda and Lovozero. All other lines marked on maps are fiction from the standpoint of ordinary two-wheel-drive cars.

The roads are not in excellent condition. Amazingly, the worst road is the main highway in Kola, whose poor-quality asphalt has been pounded to ruin by heavy vehicles along many stretches. In 2007 there were slow stretches especially between Kandalaksha and Monchegorsk. The Salla-Kandalaksha road is partly paved with asphalt, partly with gravel. The side roads from the main highway to Umba, Apatity and Lovozero are paved and in surprisingly good condition. The Umba-Varzuga route is still mostly gravel road, whose condition is good according to Russian standards. There isn't much traffic on Kola's roads, especially off the main highway.

Eastward from the ends of the roads at Varzuga, Oktanborsk, Lovozero and Tumanyi there are only roads passable with off-road vehicles or no roads at all. Also the road from Oktyabrsky to Umba is passable only with an off-road vehicle.

There is no problem getting 95-octane gasoline or diesel fuel at Kola's service stations. Practically the only service stations are located in large settlements or near them in Alakurtti, Zelenoborsk, Kandalaksha, Umba, Polyarnye Zori, Kovdor's junction, Apatity, Kirovsk, Monchegorsk, Revda and Lovozero, and at border stations near Finland. The nearest pump station at the Norwegian border is in Nikel. The locations of service stations are given in the chapters dealing with each road.

A car offers freedom of mobility, but it also causes worries. In the cities the car should be parked at night in a guarded parking area, and even in the country it should be parked in a supervised place like someone's yard.

TABLE OF DISTANCES

	Salla's border station	Alakurtti	Zarechensk	Kandalaksha	Kovda	Umba	Varzuga	Polyarnye Zori	Apatity	Kirovsk	Monchegorsk	Revda	Lovozero	Murmansk	Raja-Jooseppi's border station
Salla's border station		77	166	182	257	283	422	211	287	302	293	385	397	425	645
Alakurtti	77		97	113	188	214	353	142	218	233	224	316	328	356	576
Zarechensk	166	97		102	177	203	342	131	207	222	213	305	317	345	565
Kandalaksha	182	113	102		97	101	240	42	118	133	124	216	228	256	476
Kovda	257	188	177	97		198	337	126	202	217	208	300	312	340	560
Umba	283	214	203	101	198		139	143	219	234	225	317	329	357	477
Varzuga	422	353	342	240	337	139		282	358	373	364	456	468	496	616
Polyarnye Zori	211	142	131	42	126	143	282		82	97	88	180	192	220	440
Apatity	287	218	207	118	202	219	358	82		15	66	162	174	202	422
Kirovsk	302	233	222	133	217	234	373	97	15		81	177	189	217	437
Monchegorsk	293	224	213	124	208	225	364	88	66	81		96	108	136	356
Revda	385	316	305	216	300	317	456	180	162	177	96		26	178	398
Lovozero	397	328	317	228	312	329	468	192	174	189	108	26		190	410
Murmansk	425	356	345	256	340	357	496	220	202	217	136	178	190		260
Raja-Jooseppi's border station	645	576	565	476	560	477	616	440	422	437	356	398	410	260	

### By off-road vehicle

Kola's highways end in the north at Tumannyi, in the centre at Lovozero and Oktyabrskiy and in the south at Varzuga. Further east travel becomes significantly more difficult, especially in the summer.

East of Kirovsk there is a cross-country road from Oktyabrskiy towards the Pana Fells (Panskiye tundry). It is unclear how far the road is drivable. The road going south from Oktyabrskiy to Umba is passable with an off-road vehicle.

Likewise, down south on the coast of the White Sea it is possible to travel along an off-road vehicle road from the mouth of the Varzuga River

to Chapoma. However, you have to use local vehicles on the east side of the Varzuga River because the river cannot be crossed by car in the summer.

An off-road vehicle is necessary elsewhere, also, for example to get to the Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve.

If you are not travelling with your own four-wheel-drive vehicle, you can find transportation by inquiring on site. There is a lot of suitable equipment in Kola. Many of the tour operators mentioned in the chapter How should I go? are able to arrange off-road vehicle transports.

The dark green UAZ jeep also used by the Finnish army is a tamer of muddy roads that carries four passengers in addition to the driver. The UAZ van, also called a "buhanka", is roomier. It holds close to ten passengers in back. The heaviest vehicles are big six-wheel-drive trucks. However, high prices are charged for their use. For example, a 50 km trip in a truck taxi would have cost €440 in Chavanga.

The only motor vehicle that is capable of travelling in the tundra or going to Krasnoshchelye in the summer is a tracked vehicle, or *vezdekhod*. Both of Kola's reindeer sovkhoses have *vezdekhods* (see Reindeer herding).

### **By reindeer team**

It is possible to travel on the tundra by reindeer team in the summer, also. You must arrange the ride with the reindeer sovkhos or directly with the reindeer breeders (see Reindeer herding).

### **By snowmobile**

Travelling in the Kola wilderness is significantly easier in winter. There is a snowmobile trail from Lovozero to Krasnoshchelye, and from there to Kanevka and Sosnovka. You can also get to Krasnoshchelye by snowmobile from Oktyabrsky via Urmavarka Fell. There is a Tundra sovkhos reindeer management station near Urmavarka where it is possible to arrange to spend the night. In addition, there are snowmobile trails in the north-south direction used by reindeer breeders, for example northward from Lovozero. It is also easy to drive a snowmobile in the tundra area and along rivers outside the trails. There are snowmobile trails along the coast of the White

Sea. The Salla-Alakurtti trail project is building a snowmobile trail from the Salla border station via Kairala (Kuolajärvi) and Vuorijärvi to Alakurtti. The trail is about 80 km long. [http://personal.inet.fi/koti/kari.saariniemi/snowmobile\\_index.html](http://personal.inet.fi/koti/kari.saariniemi/snowmobile_index.html)

In the spring of 2007 the going price for snowmobile transports was €150/day.

### **By boat**

The Klavdiya Jelanskaya ferry operates from Murmansk from the beginning of June to the beginning of September. It stops at the Ostrovnoi military base, in Sosnovka and in Chapoma. The trip is made twice a month. The boat has four-person cabins. The trip to Sosnovka costs €16 and lasts 29 hours. The trip to Chapoma takes 3-5 hours longer. (8152) 481188, 481049. The boat departs from the passenger dock (*Morskoï vokzal*), *Portovyi proyезд*, where you can purchase tickets.

It is possible to travel by boat along the coast of the White Sea, for example between Kuzomen and Chapoma, where a boat trip is cheaper than transports by truck or tracked vehicle. You can inquire about a boat from Pavel Kozhin in Chavanga, for example (see How should I go?).

Boating is more difficult on the Barents Sea because the water area belongs to the border zone.

In principle, it is possible to travel from Lovozero to Krasnoshchelye by boat. However, this involves a five-kilometre tow between the Afanasiya River, which flows into Lovozero Lake, and the Koiniyok River, a headwater of the Ponoï River. Finnish naturalists Tuomo Wallenius and Antti Lavikainen explored this route on their "great Kola expedition" in 1998 and have described the trip in their excellent report. The tow took them four days. They pulled the boat over bogs and hills, blazing the trail and placing birch logs under the boat for skids.

### On foot and on skis

Travelling by foot is difficult because of the lack of clear-cut paths. There are some snowmobile and tractor trails that are used in winter, but not every line drawn on the map can be found in the terrain. It is easiest to walk along the coast, for example eastward from the mouth of the Varzuga River. An off-road vehicle road goes at least to Chapoma, and it may be possible to walk even further. The Varzuga and Strelna Rivers have to be crossed by boat, but there are villages at their mouths. There is a footbridge across the Chavanga River, and the other rivers can be forded.

The same routes can be skied in winter. They say it is possible to ski from Lovozero to Krasnoshchelye (150 km) in a couple of days when there is a crust on the snow. Orienteering should be backed up with a GPS device.

### MAP OF SOUTHERN KOLA REGION



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## 2. ALAKURTTI

### THE BORDER

The trip from Finland to South Kola is quickest via Salla's border station. It is located 23 km from Salla's municipal centre and 77 km from Alakurtti on the Russian side. The border and customs are open daily 7:00-21:00 Finnish time (8:00-22:00 Russian time). The border was opened to all travellers in 2002, when the customs station on the Russian side, paid by the EU, was completed.

The border at Salla is an experience. Congestion and lines of trucks are unknown here. Here they have time for customers. The service is friendly, albeit strict. Both the passport inspector and the customs official on the Russian side spoke Finnish to us. The Russians scrutinised the car down to the eyeglass cases and spare tire. The Finnish customs officials examined our tax free papers and inquired about our destination.

Norway's D'n B bank has a currency exchange point at the Russian customs station. There is a tax free store in the yard, which had unfriendly service.

Right after Russian customs is a service station popular with Salla residents, where you can get 92 and 95-octane gasoline and diesel fuel. The service station is open daily from 9:00-21:00 Russian time. The gasoline is nearly one-third more expensive than in Kandalaksha, but still only a little over half of Finland's price. It's worth filling up here, as the next service station is in Alakurtti.

You can cross the border in Salla by snowmobile. Permission to walk or bike across must be obtained beforehand.

### THE BORDER ZONE

The Russian border zone extends all the way from the national frontier to Alakurtti, and special permission is required to be there. The Kutsajoki

River Nature Reserve also belongs to the border zone.

The border zone is divided into a zone with strict supervision near the national frontier and the rest of the border zone. The zone with strict supervision extends 11 km from the border to a checkpoint on the highway. Both zones are supervised, but travel in the strictly supervised part without permission is more difficult and incriminating than being in the rest of the border zone. The furthest checkpoint in the border zone is 2.4 km eastward from the Alakurtti junction.

Because people in Alakurtti are used to travellers and hikers, it is possible to obtain a border zone permit. Access to the supervised zone is, however, significantly more difficult to obtain. It is easier to obtain a permit with the help of the local administration, a local tour operator or the Salla Society in Finland, but you can also apply for a permit yourself.

You must apply for a permit from Alakurtti's frontier guard no later than one month before the intended trip. The Russian application should be addressed to the commander of detachment 2001 of the frontier guard service of Russia's security service, and it must indicate the date, route and purpose of the trip. The full name, date and place of birth, passport data (number, issuing authority, date granted and period of validity), address, profession, workplace and phone number of a contact person of all passengers must be given. The registration number, type, make and serial number of the vehicle must be mentioned. The application must be faxed to the number (81533) 52292, where you can also ask for instructions. You can inquire about the permit at the number 52240. A third phone number is 52321.

## **FROM THE BORDER TO ALAKURTTI**

A good asphalt road paved by the Finns reaches 20 km east of the border. Less than 11 km from the border is a frontier guard checkpoint where you have to show your passport. The area between the checkpoint and the border is the most closed area of the border zone, where you shouldn't tarry.

The rest of the way to Alakurtti is a less pleasant but nevertheless drivable gravel road that passes through the drainage divide between the Gulf of Bothnia and the White Sea.

## SALLA FELL

When Stalin redrew the eastern border of Finland after the Winter War, the border near Salla was moved so far west that the region's highest chain of fells, over 600 m Salla Fell, got left on the Soviet Union's side.

Salla Fell is visible far into Finland. It also dominates the scenery along the road to Alakurtti on the Russian side. In September the fell rose majestically beyond the bogs that glowed in their autumn colours.

Although Salla Fell is situated in the most strictly closed border zone, it is possible to visit it with a special permit. Treks to the fell have been arranged from Finland at least by the Salla Society, a home area association operating in Salla ([personal.inet.fi/yhdistys/martti.niskala](http://personal.inet.fi/yhdistys/martti.niskala)). You can also apply for a permit yourself (see Border zone) or with the help of a Russian tour operator or driver.

A road passable with an off-road vehicle leads to the foot of Salla Fell, from where you can trek to the highest peak, Rohmoiva (658 m). One of Finland's oldest alpine ski centres operated on the fell, where the first Finnish championships in alpine skiing were arranged in 1937. It is said that the path of the ski slope is still visible in the terrain. The treeless peak of the massive fell is probably a good place to observe what is happening on the Finnish side.

## FORMER SALLANSUU PARISH VILLAGE AND CEMETERIES

Up to the Winter War the parish village of Salla was located in Sallansuu, along the road 9 km east of the present border. Nothing but foundations are left of the parish village, because the Finns burned it as they retreated on 8.12.1939. The Empire style log church designed by C. L. Engel in 1840 also burned.

Today all you can find in Sallansuu are the civilian and military cemeteries of the Finns and German and Russian military gravesites. All the cemeteries are located near the highway. The Finnish military cemetery and the cross memorial designed by Ensio Seppänen are visible from the road. There are 220 soldiers from the civil war and WWII buried in the military cemetery. Over a thousand people have been buried in the civilian cemetery since the 1800s. The ruins of the Salla church lie between the cemeteries. There are

as many as 12,000 soldiers buried in the German cemetery. There is a sign along the road indicating the cemetery. A memorial for over 1000 Russian soldiers is located a little further east along the road.

The cemeteries are located in the most strictly closed part of the border zone, and a special permit is definitely required to visit them. Warnings about this are also posted at the Russian border station. You can inquire about permits through the Salla Society in Finland. In the worst cases visitors to the cemeteries have been turned back to Finland. The author of this guide feels it must be possible to visit the cemeteries without needing to ask for special permission. Civil disobedience is in order, but everyone has to face the consequences him or herself.

Finland lost half of the then municipality of Salla to the Soviet Union during WWII, a 6000 km<sup>2</sup> area from the current border station to the east side of Alakurtti. Salla, which until 1936 was called Kuolajärvi, was one of Finland's broadest parishes. Its residents earned their livelihood from cattle raising, farming and reindeer herding, later also from forestry.

East Salla's population was entirely Sami until the late 1600s, when Finnish settlers began to move to the area. The Sami people were probably pushed northward, and the Finnish and Sami people also intermixed. The East Salla area was defined a part of Sweden in 1595. Dealings across the border were always brisk in Salla. Finns went to the Russian side to work in log floating and sawmill jobs in Kandalaksha and Knyazhaya Guba. Correspondingly, Russian Karelian merchants came to Salla.

When Finland gained her independence in 1917, the border was closed. A more restless time began. Civil wars raged in both Finland and Russia. Red Guards and White Guards were established and there was fighting in Salla. When the Whites drove the Reds out of Salla, the latter formed the so-called Murman legion, which was situated in Knyazhaya Guba to assist the surrounding powers in their fight against the white patrols in the northern part of Russian Karelia. The legionnaires were returned to Finland by sea in 1919. The fringe leftists received strong support in the municipality of Kuolajärvi, which belonged to independent Finland. In the 1920s and 30s Finnish defectors passed through Salla on their way to Soviet Russia. The

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flow was reversed in the mid-1930s, when disappointed movers returned.

When the Winter War broke out on 30.11.1939 Salla was defended by only one battalion and the frontier guard. The civilians were not evacuated in time, and the people living in the border area escaped any way they could. The Soviet army manoeuvred its heavy equipment across the Tunttajoki River. Already by 11.12.1939 the superior troops of the Red Army had pushed across the current border. The retreating Finns burned the villages, and nothing was left of the original building stock.

Finland lost East Salla to the Soviet Union in the 1940 Treaty of Moscow. When the Continuation War began in June 1941 the Germans advanced to East Salla from the West and the Finns from the south. The Germans captured the parish village in a bloody battle already in late June and early July. However, the Soviet army held a strong position at the strait of Kairala, which the Germans were able to conquer only after the Finns arrived to provide assistance. The Red Army's position at the Tunttajoki River crumbled in the beginning of September, when it lost 2,500 men in a couple of weeks. The German troops crossed the old border, but the offensive stopped on 19.9.1941 at the Verma River twenty kilometres east of Alakurtti. The Soviet troops received a replenishment of 5,000 men, and local residents were commanded to build fortifications. The Red Army could no longer give in, as the Murman railway was only 60 km away. The Germans did not receive additional troops, and they suspended the offensive. The situation was locked into a three-year trench war at the Verma River. When Finland entered a separate treaty with the Soviet Union, Germany began to withdraw on 6.9.1944, destroying along the way new Finnish buildings that had been erected during the Continuation War. The Soviet Army attacked the retreating German troops. The last Germans crossed Salla's current border on 24.9.1944.

In the peace negotiations Salla's border was drawn according to the 1940 line. Finland had lost ten villages: the parish village of Sallansuu, Ylikurtti and Alakurtti, Kairala, Kuolajärvi, Lampela, Korja, Vuorijärvi, Vuosnajärvi, Sovajärvi and Tuutijärvi. East Salla's 3,700 residents were situated in West Salla, where a new municipal centre was established in Märkäjärvi.

## **KAIRALA AND KUOLAJÄRVI VILLAGES**

Further east the highway passes the former villages of Kairala and Kuolajärvi. There is no building stock from the Finnish period. Kuolajärvi Lake, 28 km from the border, is formed from two lakes joined by a short river. The highway crosses the river between the lakes. Near Kuolajärvi there are traces of cornfields from the 1950s, which were cleared as a result of Party Leader Nikita Hrushchov's enthusiasm over corn, which he got from his visit to America.

In Kairala, 27 km from the border, there is an unpretentious snack bar that is said to be open daily from 10:00 to 22:00.

## **VUORIJÄRVI VILLAGE**

The former Finnish village of Vuorijärvi is located 19 km south of the highway on the shore of Vuorijärvi Lake. There are no Finnish buildings in today's Vuorijärvi, instead there are summer cottages of the cream of Alakurtti: the manager of a timber product firm, the director of the road district, etc. At least one cabin is rented out (see How should I go: Alakurtti).

Vuorijärvi Lake is a forest lake with no high fells nearby. There are meadows from the Finnish period along the shore.

If you want to go to Vuorijärvi, you should turn south from the main road 7 km from the Tuntsajoki River bridge at 66°55'6 and 30°12'3. The locals also drive passenger cars along the road, but if you pity your vehicle, an off-road vehicle is preferable. It's 19 km to the destination. There is a T intersection just before the lake (66°47'8 and 30° 08'5). Both branches follow the shoreline. The left branch goes to the summer cottage village, the right branch continues west as a forest road.

## **KUTSAJOKI RIVER NATURE RESERVE**

The most scenic places in Old Salla are found at the Kutsajoki River, whose rugged scenery is familiar in Finland from I. K. Inha's photographs. After long disputation the Kutsajoki River was preserved as a nature reserve during the Finnish period in 1938. The area was not preserved in the Soviet Union, and extensive forestry was done there. Russia established a lower-level nature

reserve with a surface area of 500 km<sup>2</sup> at the Kutsajoki River in 1994.

The Kutsajoki River's best known scenic sight is the magnificent falls of Jänisköngäs, which are over 14 metres high. Jänisköngäs is situated in a narrow valley surrounded by rock walls tens of metres high. The water masses fall down in two branches. The left branch is comprised of dainty little showers, while the main branch flows into a misty stopper. There are still waters in both sides of the falls. There is a tenting place below the falls.

The nature reserve also contains impressive canyons and gorges. The Kutsajoki River flows a long distance in a deep valley gorge that occasionally widens into lakes with rocky shores. The most well known rocks are at Niva Lake, where over 100-metre Hirveäkallio, photographed by Inha, towers above the lake. Niva Lake is located only about five kilometres upriver from Jänisköngäs, but due to the rocky terrain it is difficult to walk along the river. The rock walls of Ruskeakuru branch out from Niva Lake. There are supposed to be rock walls around Pyhäjärvi Lake as well, above Nivajärvi Lake.

A rugged rock valley can also be found below Jänisköngäs. The canyon begins four kilometres downriver from the falls and continues for several kilometres.

The nature reserve's best known gorge, 10 km long Pyhäkuru, is situated along a small creek that flows into Vuorijärvi Lake from the west. It is apparently possible to go to the gorge on foot from Vuorijärvi Lake or try to get there from the road between Vuorijärvi Lake and Pyhäjärvi Lake. Endangered plants can be found in the wilderness groves at the bottoms of the gorges.

Most of the forests in the nature reserve were logged during the Soviet era. The forest areas, which grow underbrush, are not particularly attractive, so a trek to the Kutsajoki River should be expressly directed towards the scenic places along the river.

Jänisköngäs and the Kutsajoki River's other sights can be reached only with a several days' trek or an off-road vehicle. With an off-road vehicle you drive first to Vuorijärvi (see above). Turn left at the big T intersection just before the lake (66°47'8 and 30° 08'5). Drive a couple of kilometres along the road that follows the shoreline until you come to a bridge on the right.

Turn right on the road over the bridge, drive ahead to 66°47'2 and 30°09'4 and turn left. Note! Just before this intersection another road also turns to the left. Turn left on the second road. Drive 3.3 km, until you come to a Y intersection. Go left. Continue along this track, recommended for Russian off-road vehicles only, at least an hour, although the distance is not far. The road ends at 66°42'6 and 30°02'1, from where a kilometre-long clear path goes down to Jänisköngäs (66°42'4 and 30°01'1).

The cross-country track from Vuorijärvi Lake to Jänisköngäs can be traversed on foot to the junction of the Kutsajoki and Javarusjoki Rivers. Then you turn off the road at 66°43'1 and 29°58'7 and follow a path for ten minutes to 66°43'0 and 29°58'2. We spent the night here, but it was hard to find a level place for the tent. From here you can try to go upriver to Nivajärvi Lake and Ruskeakuru.

Another possible way to visit the gorges is to drive to the shore of Pyhäjärvi Lake along the bigger forest road that circles from the north. This is the road that goes right towards the west at the T intersection just before Vuorijärvi Lake (66°47'8 and 30° 08'5). From Pyhäjärvi Lake you can most likely follow the river on foot to Nivajärvi Lake. The Pyhäjärvi-Nivajärvi chain of rock-walled lakes is called *Golubye ozyora* (“Blue lakes”) in Russian.

Recreational travel in the Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve requires a border zone permit and most often also cross-country transportation, which can be arranged with the tour operators in Alakurtti.

It is said that live wartime mines can still be found in the Alakurtti area, so recreational travellers have reason to be careful.

The Kutsajoki River is the most demanding white-water kayaking route in Kola, where people drown every year. The route contains many class four and five rapids for rubber rafts. Upriver there are two passable falls: Jänisköngäs and Pieni Jänisköngäs a few hundred metres further upriver.

The route is recommendable only for very experienced white-water kayakers. At least a week must be reserved for the trip. Possible points of departure are the Kutsajoki and Javarusjoki River bridges along the road leading west from Vuorijärvi Lake. In that case the route goes via the Jänisköngäs Falls, which must be portaged. If you take off from the Kutsajoki

River bridge, you'll pass through the Pyhäjärvi Lake-Nivajärvi Lake rock canyons. You can also depart downriver below the falls, which accessible via at least two off-road routes. The Kutsajoki River flows into the Tuntsajoki River (see Tuntsajoki River).

The river trout, grayling, Arctic char and other northern fish.

The Kutsajoki and Salla Fell nature tourism development project is creating a base for good, sustainable nature tourism in the Salla Fell and Kutsajoki areas and prerequisites for cross-border tourism. [www.salla.fi/kutsa](http://www.salla.fi/kutsa).

## **TUNTSAJOKI RIVER (TUMCHA)**

The fast-flowing Tuntsajoki (Tumcha) River flows under the highway just before Alakurtti. The river is a popular, demanding white-water kayaking route. The Tuntsajoki River contains grayling and trout, and during the Finnish period it was also recognised as a salmon river.

The river's headwaters are on the Finnish side. You can begin kayaking from the upper reaches of the river, but then you'll need a border zone permit to the city Kovdor, which is hard to get, and off-road transportation from there to the headwaters. An easier option is to set out from near Alakurtti, with off-road transportation from upriver of the settlement or from the settlement itself. You need to reserve at least a week for the trip.

The Tuntsajoki River is suitable only for experienced white-water rafters. There are 30 rapids along a 50 km stretch of the river, of which nine are classified as class 4-5 rapids that are very demanding for kayaks. The worst rapids can be portaged.

The remainder of the trip consists of tens of kilometres of lakes, which you can pass more quickly by ordering motorboat transportation in advance from the mouth of the Tuntsajoki River from the Yova Reservoir to Zarechensk. Transports can be arranged by the Iova Vacation Centre, for example (see Zarechensk).

## **ALAKURTTI**

Alakurtti puts a frown on your face. This military village is one of Kola's

most dismal settlements. Here you'll find dismal apartment buildings and decaying garrisons. When we arrived in Alakurtti in a September hailstorm we were welcomed by a row of tanks loaded on tens of railway cars. To make sure the residents do not forget war, a tank has been placed in the central square of the township as a decoration and a memorial.

Nowadays the Salla-Kandalaksha road bypasses Alakurtti, so it is not necessary to visit the concrete ghetto unless you want to. However, you cannot avoid Alakurtti if you intend to become familiar with East Salla's scenic sights or fishing rivers. Here you'll find stores, a bank and transportation, as well as the Defence Ministry's rooming house, which operates as a hotel. The settlement has a market square.

There are no sights in Alakurtti - unless you consider military sites to be sights. The settlement has tank and helicopter troops and a frontier guard. The tank division is supposed to be closed down by the end of 2007, which probably explains the impressive transport of equipment by railway. There are a few thousand residents in Alakurtti. Russian soldiers demobilised from East Germany in the early 1990s were transported here. Finnish Puolimatka Group constructed houses for them, paid for by the Germans. This so-called new Alakurtti is situated at the edge of the settlement. The old, narrow, high bridge across the Tuntsajoki River, which does not have railings, is a terrific experience.

The former Finnish village of Alakurtti was located on the other side of the Tuntsajoki River a couple of kilometres southwest of the current settlement. The village of Ylikurtti again was a few kilometres upriver. The first settlers in the late 1600s were Iisak and Anna Kurtti. Iisak was from Ala-Kitka in Kuusamo and Anna was from Vuostimo in Kemijärvi. The residents earned their livelihood from reindeer herding and cattle raising, hunting and fishing. When Finland gained her independence, the frontier guard was situated in Kurtti and a road was constructed to Kuolajärvi.

Alakurtti's tourism is monopoly of two men and two companies (see How should I go: Alakurtti). The young director of the Sozidaniye firm proudly announced that the Kutsajoki River Nature Reserve is their personal property. The owner-director of Skaidi (Voita) arranged off-road transportation to

Kutsajoki for us, but he demanded a higher price than agreed. He said directly that he doesn't have a bit of interest in serving us. Skaidi's director is a local big businessman who owns a sawmill and ships logs and dead standing trees to Finland. He drove a fancy off-road vehicle to our first meeting and blew the horn in a rage at us and a truck that clogged the road. Condescending to shake hands with us seemed to be very difficult for him.

It is 73 km from the border to the Alakurtti junction and another 4 km from there to the destination. There is a railway from Alakurtti to Kandalaksha, built by the Soviet Union in 1940, but it does not have passenger traffic. The section of railway from Alakurtti to the border has been dismantled.

**Defence Ministry's rooming house.** (911) 3222601. The only official lodging alternative. A double room in the Soviet-spirited rooming house costs no less than €52. There was no heating when we were there. The staff was friendly.

**Kafe 12 chairs.** Danilova 7, (81533) 52456. Mon-Sun 16:00-22:00.

**Kafe Kapriz.** Danilova, (81533) 52389. Thu-Sun, Mon-Tue 12:00-03:00. Along the main street.

**Administration.** Mayor Stepan Mikhailovitsh Olenitsh (81533) 52291, (911) 3021716. Olenitsh is very familiar with the area's Finnish history and has co-operated with the Finns in repairing Sallansuu's cemeteries. Olenitsh speaks only Russian, but his aide Valery Nazarov speaks Finnish and can help with travel arrangements; tel. (81533) 52318, (911) 3021630.

## FROM ALAKURTTI TO KANDALAKSHA

The road from Alakurtti to Kandalaksha is paved completely. The last frontier guard checkpoint is situated a good two kilometres east of the Alakurtti junction. This is the beginning of the sector of unrestricted tourism! The former national frontier is 11 km east of the Alakurtti junction. After that the road passes through beautifully undulating fell landscape. In early September the forests were turning yellow with fall colours. The bogs glowed in magnificent colours. At times the road passes through valleys, crossing

white-water rivers. Then the terrain drops towards the White Sea.

The first route here was constructed in 1915-16 to enable neighbouring countries to deliver military aid to Russia to be used against Germany.

The only major junction is 51 km from Alakurtti. The road to Kandalaksha continues to the left, while the right branch goes to Zarechensk.

## VERMAN

For three years (1941-44, see Sallansuu), the front lines of the trench war between the German and Soviet troops ran along the Verman River a little over twenty kilometres east of Alakurtti. There is a war memorial alongside the road and you can find trenches in the terrain. The locals warn about live ammunition that can still be found in the forests.

## ZARECHENSK

Zarechensk is a power plant and forestry settlement 43 km south of the Alakurtti-Kandalaksha road. There are no sights here, but you'll find quality lodging at the new Iova vacation centre.

Zarechensk is located by the Yova River south of the Kovdozero reservoir. There is a power plant constructed in the 1950s on the river. A bus goes to Zarechensk from Kandalaksha.

The easiest way to get to the shore of Kovdozero Lake is to drive to the old village of Kovdozero. The road there heads west from the road to Zarechensk about 12 km before Zarechensk. It is about four kilometres to the destination.

**Iova vacation centre.** (921) 0385848, (921) 7254680, (921) 2870760, mail@iova.ru, www.iova.ru. The vacation centre, completed in 2005, is among the best in Kola. The log fortress-type main building has 11 double rooms. Lodging for two costs €94, which includes three meals and a sauna. It is cheaper without the food and sauna. The bar is open 8:00-22:00. Drive past Zarechensk and turn right after 4 km. Fishing, cruises and motorboat rentals on the Yova reservoir. Transports of kayakers from the mouth of the Tuntsajoki to Zarechensk costs €206.

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## 3. KANDALAKSHA

### ST. PETERSBURG-MURMANSK ROAD

The nearly 1400 kilometre main highway from St. Petersburg to Murmansk bisects the Kola Peninsula in the north-south direction, following the ancient route from Kandalaksha via the Imandra lakes to the Kola Fjord.

Even though the route is the only road link between Murmansk oblast and the rest of Russia, it is in unbelievably poor condition in places. The worst stretches are situated in the Republic of Karelia, but also in Kola in many places the asphalt is full of gaping holes and at times it is easier to drive along the shoulder than on the asphalt.

The old villages of Kovda and Knyazhaya Guba in the south are located in the vicinity of the road. Closer to Kandalaksha the bald peaks of fells begin to rise in the landscape. The White Sea with its many islands is periodically visible on the right. The road crosses a bridge at the bottom of Kandalaksha Bay.

The road from Salla, Finland, joins the main highway five kilometres before the Kandalaksha junction. Soon after the junction the road passes a service station and arrives at a traffic militia checkpoint. Be ready to present your driver's license and the car's registration, customs papers and insurance papers. At night the point is patrolled by the Ministry of the Interior's special Omon men armed with assault rifles.

The main highway has junctions to Kandalaksha from the south and the north. The distance to the centre is slightly longer, about eight kilometres, from the southern junction.

The Polyarnye Zori junction is 28 km north of the northern Kandalaksha junction. The Apatity junction is located 78 km north of the northern Kandalaksha junction. Monchegorsk is 34 km north along the main highway from the Apatity junction. The city can be seen from the road.

There are service stations along the main highway in Knyazhaya Guba,

on the south side of Kandalaksha, at Polyarnye Zori, at the Kovdor junction and in Monchegorsk.

### **KANDA-VIKING VACATION VILLAGE**

The Kanda-Viking vacation village is a reasonably priced lodging along the St. Petersburg-Murmansk main highway near Kandalaksha. The cabins are fundamentally equipped and the staff is friendly. The place is suitable for lodging, but is not an attractive place to spend a longer vacation: its location next to a bog lake is nothing spectacular.

Kanda-Viking does not have a restaurant but it is possible to arrange eating in advance. The vacation village's sauna is too Finnish: the steam from the continuously heated stove is too hot and the bath lacks the softness and moisture of a Russian banya.

To get to Kanda-Viking, drive to the Beloye More junction 6.5 km from the Alakurtti junction and 0.5 km south of the bridge over Kandalaksha Bay. Do not turn towards Beloye More, turn in the opposite direction onto a small road that will take you to your destination in a couple of minutes.

**Kanda-Viking.** (81533) 95070, (921) 1598222. Four 5-person cabins, €59/day each. Cabins for two cost €35/day. Half a day costs half as much. The large cabins are equipped with a TV, refrigerator, microwave oven, WC and shower. Open all year round. There are Lapp hut structures in the yard. Sauna costs €10/hr.

### **VITINO**

Vitino, or Beloye More, is a White Sea oil harbour and a thorn in the side of environmental organisations. Oil is brought here by train and transported abroad by tanker. The harbour has been in operation already since 1970, but it has been expanded considerably during the past ten years.

Vitino is located at the end of a side road that turns east from the main highway. Along the road on the shore of the bottom of Kandalaksha Bay are summer cabins of Kandalaksha residents.

## **KNYAZHAYA GUBA AND ZELENOBORSK**

Knyazhaya Guba is a village on an ancient route along the White Sea coast that is familiar from old literature about Kola. Even today the village, located along the St. Petersburg-Murmansk main highway, pleases the eye with a view of the bay lined with grey houses and boathouses. When we stopped by the men of the village swarmed on the bay, fishing in the light of the evening sun.

The story is that Knyazhaya Guba (“Prince Bay”) got its name when the Russian princes beat the Swedish conquerors here. The village was a significant marketplace and a centre of the grain trade. Finnish immigrants once lived in Knyazhaya Guba. Finnish Red soldiers from the so-called Murman legion were located here during the Russian civil war.

The mainland end of the main highway bridge is no longer Knyazhaya Guba, it is the less pleasant forestry and power plant settlement of Zelenoborsk. There is a service station, car repair shops and a 24-hour canteen alongside the road. The Kovda River hydropower plant is located in Zelenoborsk. Large Kovdozero Lake, which opens beyond the settlement, is spoiled by regulation.

Knyazhaya Guba is situated 52 km south of Kandalaksha.

## **LESOZAVODSKY**

Lesozavodsky, or ‘Sawmill village’ is a forestry community located on the White Sea coast. The settlement is nine kilometres from the main highway.

## **KOVDA**

It is worth stopping in Kovda, even for a picnic. The village located five kilometres from the main highway offers beautiful coast scenery and Kola’s second oldest wooden church.

Beautiful St. Nicholas Church greets visitors from behind a small bay. Built in 1705, the sanctuary is surrounded by a hexagonal log bell tower and a group of grey houses. The church has undergone restoration in recent years. The contents of the church have not been preserved. The dusky nave is supported by decorative timber posts.

There is an excellent view of the White Sea's Kovda Bay from the high rock cliffs of Kovda. An Orthodox cross has been erected on the highest hill. A picturesque metal bed also lay on the mound – perhaps forgotten by someone? Kovda's lower village is situated further from the church right on the seashore. In the summer the grey village is full of life, but in winter only about 30 people hang on here.

The road to Kovda is a drivable gravel road.

## **KANDALAKSHA**

Kandalaksha offers scenery not found in Finland: the sea bordered by fells. Here the coast of the White Sea rises to bald-peaked fells over 600 metres high, which offer an excellent view of the island-dotted Kandalaksha Bay.

Kandalaksha's surroundings are more pleasant than the city itself. The industrial city built at the bottom of the bay is quickly seen: the building stock mainly consists of poorly maintained Soviet-era apartment buildings. Smoke rises from two sources: the aluminium plant and the dump, which apparently burns continuously. The city with a population of 41,000 offers tourists necessary services: hotels, restaurants, Internet and telephone connections. True, the best restaurant is the Statoil service station.

The bayhead of the White Sea is one of Kola's oldest settlements, where archaeological finds dating back 7000 years have been made. The first mention of a Russian village at Kandalaksha is from 1526. A monastery was established here in 1532. In 1589 the village was burned by the Swedish army. The village was burned by the British during the Crimean War in the mid-1800s. The Murman railway was completed in 1916, and Kandalaksha became one of its stations. Soviet rule ended Kandalaksha's monastery. For a short period the area was a part of the Republic of Karelia, which granted Kandalaksha city rights in 1938. The aluminium plant was established after the war in 1951 and the city began to grow to its current size. The old churches were demolished in the 1950s.

The most important landmark in Kandalaksha's cityscape is the Murmansk railway, which bisects the city and spreads into a vast rail yard. To get to the city centre you must cross the railway via the one and only tunnel. After the

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tunnel you must either immediately turn left or drive straight ahead to the Statoil service station roundabout, turn slightly left and then left again at the next roundabout. Warning: Kandalaksha's traffic arrangements are Kola's most unclear: the city is full of oblique junctions and roundabouts that are difficult to conceptualise.

A square "decorated" with a T-34 tank can be considered the centre of the city. The memorial honours the defenders of Murmansk oblast. The tank is a favourite children's climbing apparatus. The square is surrounded by the city hall, identifiable by its Russian flag, the Niva culture centre and the seven-storey colossus, Hotel Belomorje.

If you bypass the hotel down Pervomaiskaya Street, you'll pass the post office and telephone building and a little later the Pogrebok Restaurant. At the next intersection the road to Umba turns left. If you continue straight ahead you arrive at the Kandalaksha harbour area and the old "Nizhnaya" neighbourhood of single-family houses on the shore, where there is a rather new church, Hotel Pomorskaya Zvezda and a nature reserve museum. There are old houses on the shore on the other side of the Niva River, also, in the so-called Yaponiya or "Japan" sector of the city. Behind Japan is Krestovaya Fell, which has a ski centre in winter. There is a cross on top of the fell.

If you follow Pervomaiskaya Street from the central square in the opposite direction past the city hall, you come the Kanda and Malakhit Restaurants and soon after back to the railway tunnel. Aeronavtov Street on the right goes down to Hotel Spolokhi on the Niva River.

The so-called Novaya ("New") residential area is a little off to the side near the shore on a street with the same name. The area contains Soviet-era apartment buildings.

The railway and bus stations are located side by side on the other side of the tracks. The wooden railway station is one of Kandalaksha's rare architectural pearls. Behind the railway station are Kandalaksha's garrison areas and military residences.

Kandalaksha's most beautiful residential area is Niva, constructed during Stalin's time and located three kilometres north of the railway station. Immediately upon arriving in Niva visitors are impressed by the massive

culture centre (Kandalakshkoye shosse 1a) that rises on the right, decorated with a classic colonnade on its end. The Kirovskaya alleya boulevard turns left. There are also small pleasant-looking Stalin-era apartment buildings along Chkalova Street.

The reason for Kandalaksha's existence is found behind the Niva residential area: a smoking aluminium plant. It is owned by a Russian company, Sual, which has planned to build a new plant here. The project probably will not be realised unless Russia's nuclear power agency decides to replace Polyarnye Zori's reactors with new ones.

There are three hydropower plants along the Niva River between Kandalaksha and Imandra Lake, which use Imandra as a reservoir. The power plants were built in 1934-1952. One of them is located in the Kandalaksha city area. The old road to Polyarnye Zori along the Niva River passes the power plants.

The aluminium plant and the railway are Kandalaksha's most important employers. Work is also provided by the engineering regiment and a rather small freight harbour whose operation is difficult because the White Sea is frozen in winter.

A Russia-Finland friendship society operates in Kandalaksha. The Norwegians co-operated in establishing an SOS children's village in the city, one of four in Russia, which provides a home to orphans and children taken into custody.

### **Tourist information**

50 let Oktyabrya 8, (81533) 96943.

### **Museums**

**Museum.** Pervomaiskaya 40, (81533) 94407. The bottom floor of an ordinary residential apartment building. Peasant and fishing articles (e.g. a fine long line) and furnishings from the old Kovda church. A separate hall for war history. The museum director said not much is known about the Winter War and the capture of Salla in Kola. However, an exhibit on the topic is being jointly planned by the Finns and Russians. There is a

separate hall for changing exhibits.

**Nature Reserve Museum.** See Kandalaksha Nature Reserve.

**Exhibit Hall.** Pervomaiskaya 32. In the culture centre of the central square (ex-movie theatre Niva).

### Lodging

**Hotel Belomorje.** 50 let Oktyabrya 1 (central square), (81533) 93100. Belomorje operates in a seven-storey colossus in the centre of the city. Despite its prices for foreigners, it is the cheaper of the two hotels in the city centre. Belomorje's eccentric owner drives a new Mitsubishi, but he claims he is a Communist. We had an absurd discussion with him about the double pricing. According to the owner, foreigners pay more because they "are richer". He also accused foreigners of "stealing Russia's raw materials" and complained about the quality of free lodging he had tried in Salla. The man is known for his stinginess – he repaired the lifts, which were out of order by turn, himself.

**Hotel Spolokhi.** Naberezhnaya 130, (81533) 55768. This other concrete hotel has a little better quality and much higher prices than Belomorje. Double rooms for foreigners start at €62, and at €41 for Russians. The restaurant is open 13:00-01:00.

**Hotel Pomorskaya Zvezda.** Rechnaya 1, (81533) 94835, 94375, (921) 2785139, pomor\_tur@com.mels.ru. Located near the harbour in downtown Kandalaksha. The hotel is shabby in appearance. Double room, €29. There is a six-bed cabin in the yard, €15/person. Electric sauna or Russian banya to order. Travel agency services (see How should I go? Kandalaksha).

### Food

**Zadvorki.** Pervomaiskaya 54. Mon-Sun 10:00-01:00. In the basement of the Kanda Restaurant, entrance via the back yard. Available salads and servings are on display; they are among the best food available in Kandalaksha. Bar atmosphere in the evening. Upon seeing a group of foreigners the clientele burst out laughing.

**Pogrebok Restaurant.** Pervomaiskaya 19, (81533) 95039. Pogrebok is considered one of the best restaurants in the city, which says much about the

quality in general. We waited an hour for our blin servings, even though we were the restaurant's only customers. When we got our food it was cold. "It can't be, they were just taken out the microwave," the waitress said. The menu has oranges priced by the kilogram.

**Cafe Belomorje.** Pervomaiskaya 31, (81533) 94444. Mon-Thu, Sun 11:00-16:00 and 18:00-01:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-16:00 and 19:00-03:00. At the end of the hotel building in the central square. Dark interior, post-Soviet atmosphere. Live dance music and an admission fee in the evening.

**Kanda Restaurant/Nightclub.** Pervomaiskaya 54, (81533) 31418, 94260. Fri-Sat 19:00-04:00. Centre of Kandalaksha's night life.

**Cafe Uyut (Skazka).** Pervomaiskaya 44, (81533) 94464, 94481. Mon-Thu 12:00-19:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-23:00.

**Shashlychnaya.** Komsomolskaya 28a, (81533) 93304, (921) 1595533. Kebab place.

**Statoil service station.** At the intersection of Gorkogo and Pronina Streets. Statoil's hot dogs are the best that Kandalaksha has to offer. See Statoil Oasis.

**Stolovaya (Canteen).** Pronina 17a. Mon-Fri 11:00-15:00. Cheap simple food. There is a harshly beautiful view of the railway from the gigantic hall.

**Stolovaya (Canteen).** Pervomaiskaya 44. Mon-Sat 10:00-17:00. Next to the Uyut/Skazka Restaurant near the central square.

**Cafe Malakhit.** Pervomaiskaya 69, (81533) 30875. Billiard tables and night life in the restaurant area of Pervomaiskaya Street.

**Dvorik Restaurant.** Shevtshuka 26, (81533) 72282. Mon-Sun 12:00-20:00, at other times to order. In the Niva suburb.

## Services

**City administration.** Central square, (81533) 22286.

**Post office.** Pervomaiskaya 29. Mon-Fri 8:00-13:00 and 14:00-20:00, Sat 8:00-13:00 and 14:00-19:00. Internet. Near the central square.

**Telephone and the Internet.** Pervomaiskaya 29. Mon-Sat 10:00-21:00, Sun 12:30-18:00. Near the central square.

**Sberbank and currency exchange.** Novaya 8. Mon-Fri 9:00-14:00 and 15:00-19:00, Sat-Sun 10:30-14:00 and 14:30-17:00. Also an automatic teller machine.

**Yevronord 24-hr supermarket.** Komsomolskaya 16.

**Fishing equipment store.** Naberezhnaya 133, (81533) 943 69, (921) 7251462.

**Souvenirs** are sold in stores around the central square and in the basement of Hotel Spolokhi. Spolokhi sells good-looking clothes designed locally by Valentina Semyonova. They can also be ordered from her directly (911) 3013979, [semonova@yandex.ru](mailto:semonova@yandex.ru).

**Ski centre** On Krestovaya Fell east of the Niva River.

Drive along the road to Umba.

**Guarded parking area.** Challenging location. Cross the intersection at the Pronina Street canteen building towards the railway. Continue along a small sandy road until you see cars between the bushes.

**Public sauna.** Pervomaiskaya 66. Women's sauna Tue and Sat 8:00-20:00, Men's sauna Wed and Sun 8:00-20:00. Situated in an extraordinary building decorated with stones.

**Laundry.** Partizanskaya 6, (81533) 92188. Mon-Fri 8:00-12:00 and 13:00-16:00. Entrance from the left end.

**Hospital.** (81533) 71197. In the Niva suburb. Here you begin feeling healthy just by looking at the other patients.

## Events

**Northern festival** held in March.

**Atlanty rock concert** held in April.

Kandalaksha's **skiing event** with the main distance of 70 km is arranged in late winter.

**Metalworkers' day** is celebrated on the third Sunday in July.

**A downhill biking competition** is held in the summer.

**A Sun City hippie event** with troubadours and handicraft people is arranged in August on the shore of the White Sea.

**A snowmobile competition** is arranged in winter.

Information about these events at (81533) 93011.

### **Transportation**

**Bus station.** (81533) 31730, 95095. Buses run to Rovaniemi in Finland (see How do I get to South Kola), Alakurtti (once a day, 16:20), Zarechensk (Mon, Wed, Fri 16:30), Zelenoborsk (twice a day) and Umba (twice a day). On certain days there are connections from Zelenoborsk to Kovda, information (81533) 66894.

**Railway station.** (81533) 30425.

### **STATOIL OASIS**

Are you tired of salad saturated with jar mayonnaise, greasy Russian fish soup and dry steaks? Are you repelled by scallops and breaded codfish? Luckily, there's Statoil, Norway's state-owned oil company.

Many feel Statoil's service stations are like oases in the culinary desert of Kola. Even if you don't eat junk food elsewhere, Statoil's excellent hot dogs and hamburgers are a must in Kola.

Statoil is located in the centre of the biggest cities in Kola: Kandalaksha, Polyarnye Zori, Apatity and Monchegorsk. They all serve hot dogs with Tulip's sausage and real hamburgers 24 hours a day. For some reason, they always seem to be out of the best sausage, bratwurst... You can have beer or wine with your food. They also serve refrigerator-cold juice, which is remarkable in Russia. The service stations serve the only hot chocolate in Kola.

Food is only one reason to go to Statoil. You can buy almost anything at the service stations. For example, we bought a non-spilling coffee mug and a waterproof camera package. The service is usually happy and spontaneous. You just can spend time at Statoil. It is extraordinary to be able to buy Norwegian fuel in Russia that is much cheaper than in Norway.

Is there anything negative about Statoil? Perhaps they could install chairs. Now you have to gulp down your hot dog at a stand-up bar. The vegetarian hot dog needs development: it is just a bun without sausage. And the restrooms are surprisingly untidy for Norwegian restrooms.

## KANDALAKSHA NATURE RESERVE

The entire Kandalaksha archipelago in the White Sea belongs to the Kandalaksha Nature Reserve, which was established in 1932 to protect the eider duck. The nature reserve is intended for conservation and research, not tourism. Trespassing is forbidden in the area.

The reserve includes over 350 islands in the White Sea and Barents Sea. Two-thirds of its 700 km<sup>2</sup> area is water. Ten endangered bird species nest in the reserve. The area is visited by 160,000 migratory birds a year. Two plant species can be found only on the protected islands. The White Sea islands in the reserve grow primarily pine forests. They are inhabited by typical taiga animals. The reserve also include treeless islands.

In the White Sea the reserve also includes coastal areas of Porya Bay, the tip of the Ter Peninsula near Umba and the Titov Peninsula near Kovda. Biology students may visit the reserve on practical training and research trips. The nature reserve owns rather old boats.

**Nature Reserve Museum.** Kandalaksha, Lineinaya 35, (81533) 55842, 93250, kand\_reserve@com.mels.ru. Mon-Fri 8:00-12:00 and 13:00-16:00. Stuffed animals and information in Russian. At the end of the road in the Nizhnaya sector.

## WHITE SEA

The White Sea (Beloye More) is a bay of the Arctic Ocean that passes around the Kola Peninsula and ends in narrow Kandalaksha. Its Russian name is thought to originate from its cleanness. The Barents Sea is considered to change into the White Sea at Svyatoi Nos, or the "Holy Cape" in Northeast Kola. In the east the sea narrows into the 50 km wide White Sea Strait. Kandalaksha, with its islands and surrounded by fells, is one of the largest bays in the White Sea.

The White Sea is mostly shallow, with average depth of 60 metres. The Gulf Stream has little effect on the sea, and except for its outer reaches, it freezes in winter. In the summer the surface water temperature along the coast is 16-18 degrees.

Salmon, flounder, herring, capelin, cod and its relatives haddock and

navaga are fished from the sea. At sea it is possible to see various species of seal, like harp seal, bearded seal and ringed seal. Harp seal are hunted in the village of Chapoma. With a little luck you may see a beluga whale from shore. About a thousand live in the sea. Beluga whales arrive to the warm waters of the White Sea at the end of June to give birth and return to the Barents Sea in late August.

On the shore of the White Sea it is possible to experience the effect of the tide. The sea level varies from tens of centimetres to a few metres. The tide comes in 48 minutes later every day. The receding tide reveals all kinds of interesting things on the beach: seaweed, rocks, medusas, sea urchins and starfish.

## **WHITE SEA DIVING**

Transparent waters, colourful water plants, starfish, a friendly seal! All this you can see if you go diving in the White Sea. Kandalaksha has an active diving centre, whose members have taken photographs that present the underwater world in all its splendour.

The diving club has its own boat with which tourists are transported on diving trips. You can either rent equipment or bring your own. The club also arranges water skiing, sail boarding, sea kayaking and fishing. In winter it rents snowmobiles and arranges deep powder skiing. The centre's Finnish brochure also advertises "active rest", "dunking under the ice" and "underwater swimming 2-5 days".

**Gandvik Diving Centre.** Vostochnaya 12, (81533) 94059, (921) 2750171, kanddive@mail.ru. Director Alexandr Sergeyeovich Vinyukov. Eight-passenger boat rental, €50/hr.

## **THE ROAD FROM KANDALAKSHA TO VARZUGA**

One of the most pleasant drives in Kola is along the 240 km road that follows the White Sea coast from Kandalaksha via Uмба to the village of Varzuga. The first 140 kilometres are paved with asphalt and in better condition than the main highway from St. Petersburg to Murmansk. The

last stretch is a reasonably good gravel road with dusty red sand. The Kandalaksha-Umba road was built in the 1980s and the connection to Varzuga, in the 1990s.

As usual in Kola, the beginning of the road is mysterious: there is no sense in searching for a sign. Drive down Pervomaiskaya Street from Kandalaksha's central square past Hotel Belomor'ye and turn left at the big intersection. After Kandalaksha the only service station is in Umba.

Four kilometres from Kandalaksha is a parking place with a view of the White Sea. From here it is possible to hike to the *sieidi* fell (see Sacrificial stones) or the labyrinth (see Labyrinths). Twenty kilometres from Kandalaksha the road goes down to Kolvitsa Bay. Ten kilometres later it passes Kolvitsa Lake. After Umba the terrain becomes lower.

Especially in the evening there is not much traffic on the road. The few cars may drive all the faster. For example, on the gravel road after Kuzreka we met an off-road vehicle towing a boat about 120 km/h that threw a rock at our windshield. We saw two other cars between Kuzreka and Kashkarantsy, both with their hood up.

## **KANDALAKSHA AREA FELS**

The most important sight around Kandalaksha is the scenery. There are several bald-topped fells nearby, which offer magnificent views of island-dotted Kandalaksha.

It is relatively easy to climb the fells in one day. The easiest option is to climb Volosyanaya Fell just five kilometres from the city, where you can admire the sea and ancient sacrificial stones. Volosyanaya is described under Sacrificial stones.

About twenty kilometres east of the city are the Domashnye Fells, which are easy to climb from the nearby Kandalaksha-Umba road. The fells are located in the shore of Kolvitsa Bay. You can make a one-day trip or a several days' trek to Kolvitsa Fell on the side of Kolvitsa Bay (see Kolvitsa). The chain of fells continues to the southwest and then drops to the old forests along the Porya River.

## SIEDI SACRIFICIAL STONES

Ancient holy places or *sieidi* (*seita* in Finnish, *seid* in Russian) of the Sami people have been found in various parts of Kola. Although a *sieidi* may be a lake, stone, cave or other natural site, most often it is a stone formation. A classic *sieidi* is comprised of a large rock placed on top of smaller stones. Sacrifices were brought to the *sieidi* in the hope of better luck hunting or fishing. Some *sieidi* were personal, others were used by the entire community. If the *sieidi* didn't bring the desired results, it was sometimes rejected.

An excellent place to see *sieidi* is on Volosyanaya Fell near Kandalaksha, where there are several of them. We climbed Volosyanaya with a local *sieidi* fan, Boris Gureyev. According to Gureyev, Volosyanaya was a significant *sieidi* fell, since there are numerous *sieidi* there. According to him there are only a few such concentrations in the entire arctic region of the Nordic countries. The *sieidi* are situated all around the bald top of the fell. It may be hard to see them at first glance, but if you look carefully all the rocks don't exactly look like ordinary stones. Many large rocks are skilfully placed on top of smaller stones. One can only guess how. There are also other rock formations on the fell, like circles and lines made of stones, which may be more recent. Some of the stones on Volosyanaya Fell are so-called 'ringing stones' - a hollow sound is made when they are struck. The sound is caused by a different type of stone inside.

Even if *sieidi* do not interest you, it is worth climbing Volosyanaya for the views alone. A magnificent panorama of the White Sea's Kandalaksha and its archipelago opens. The seascape blends in beautifully with a small fell lake. The view inland is also beautiful. Only the city of Kandalaksha with its factory smokestacks on the north side spoil the scenery. Lingonberries and crowberries grow abundantly on top of the fell.

The trip to Volosyanaya Fell lasts 2-4 hours, depending on how much time you want to spend there. Go from Kandalaksha by car or taxi along the road to Umba. Drive 3.5 km from the Niva River bridge to the parking place with flagpoles on the ridge. Leave the car there. Return a little way along the road towards Kandalaksha to a cross-country road that turns

right. Walk about 100 m along the steep bank of this road and then follow the first path to the right into the forest. The path goes straight up the fell. The lower part of the path is used as a downhill biking trail - you can see jumps along the rocky breakneck trail.

Nowadays the wildest theories are connected to the *sieidi* in Russia. For example, according to 'sieidi researcher' Vladislav Troshin from Murmansk, the Nazis used the *sieidi* during World War II and launched UFOs with them. Anyone interested in Troshin's theories can contact him at (921) 2737115 or his student, Oksana, from Uмба at (921) 1706677.

## LABYRINTHS

Several spiral formations or labyrinths laid out with stones have been found along the shores of the Kola Peninsula. There are labyrinths on the northern coast at the mouth of the Varzina River, in the east at the mouth of the Ponoï River and in the south near Uмба and in Kandalaksha. The Kandalaksha labyrinth is the easiest to find - although it isn't even very easy to find it, either.

There are labyrinths in different parts of Europe and also along Finland's coast. Their ages vary. For example, the White Sea labyrinths are dated to around 2000 B.C., but some are only a few hundred years old. The purpose of the formations is also unknown. Almost without exception the stone mazes are situated on the seashore, and it is assumed they were made near seal hunting areas. According to one theory the labyrinths are connected to fertility rites.

Kandalaksha's labyrinth is located on a small peninsula a few metres from the seashore. The maze laid out with stones forms over ten parallel paths along which it is possible to enter and exit from the labyrinth.

It is worth visiting the labyrinth for the beautiful seashore scenery alone. The shore of the White Sea is bordered by forested fells, which were cloaked in picturesque fog when we were there. Islands belonging to the Kandalaksha Nature Reserve are visible in the bay. Low tide revealed sea bottom stones and seaweed. There are sandy coves along the shore. The recent Russian movie *Kukushka* (The Cuckoo), which was shown in

Finland, also, was filmed near Kandalaksha's labyrinth.

Kandalaksha's labyrinth (labirint in Russian) is located only a few kilometres from the city. We didn't find it until our second try with the help of a local guide. You can try to find the labyrinth yourself with the help of the following instructions. First go to the parking place 3.5 km from the Niva River bridge in the city along the road to Umba (see *Sieidi* Sacrificial stones). From there go down towards the sea along the steep, undrivable cross-country road that is used in winter as a bobsleigh trail. When you get down the slope, turn right at the T junction. Continue along this road, always choosing the bigger road at junctions. The road ends just 700 m from the T junction. Follow the path, which crosses two creeks. After three minutes the path rises slightly and the sea becomes visible on the left. Go directly towards the shore and then to the closest little island connected to the mainland by a narrow grassy neck of land. The labyrinth is at the end of the island. It's about two kilometres from the parking place.

It's also possible to hike to the site from the "Japan" sector of the city along the seashore from the mouth of the Niva River. The third alternative is to drive an off-road vehicle. In that case continue along the Kandalaksha-Umba road another 4.6 km from the ridge top parking place towards Umba. Then turn right on the small road and right again after 200 m. Continue along the bad cross-country road until you reach the end of the road described in the previous chapter.

Actually, it seems the maze of roads leading to Kandalaksha's labyrinth in itself forms a labyrinth that the traveller has to negotiate to get to the destination - and back again.

## **LUVENGA**

Luvenga is an agricultural settlement 15 km from Kandalaksha in the direction of Umba. The apartment house village situated on a high hill doesn't offer anything special to see, but the surroundings are beautiful. There is a hotel in Luvenga, but its operation is unsure. Hotel Belomorskaya Zhemtshuzhina's phone number is (81533) 92116 or (911) 3045006.

## KOLVITSA

About twenty kilometres from Kandalaksha in the direction of Umba the road dips down into the fjord-like bay of Kolvitsa. Domashnye Fells rise on the west side of the bay (see Kandalaksha area fells). The fast-flowing Kolvitsa River empties into the sea at the bottom of the bay. The village of Kolvitsa is located along the river.

Today Kolvitsa has more summer cabin dwellers than permanent residents. Here you'll find grey houses and sympathetic scarecrows. A bridge with nothing between the tire tracks crosses the river. In the autumn there were many berry purchasing points in the village to which the elderly brought their summer harvest.

Kolvitsa's most important sight is the Kolvitsa River waterfall, which is a ten-minute walk from the bridge. After crossing the bridge go left along the path that follows the shore. There is one creek crossing along the way. The falls, known as Chornyi, are divided into two branches. With less water, the right branch is daintier, while the left branch consists of three foaming steps. The drop is six metres. The falls are visible from very high on the riverbank. The bank itself is a sight to see, as it has eroded in places and taken entire pines with it into the river.

The Kolvitsa River is a fast-flowing, rapid-filled river only 12 km long. During that distance the river drops all of 60 metres. The river is a kayaking route, but only very experienced, skilled rafters should try it. There are ten rapids along the way. The Belyi rapids drop three metres, and they are class four rapids. The Chornyi rapids at the end drop six metres and they are class six rapids, or impassable with a kayak. Kolvitsa is a salmon river, but the stock has been decimated by overfishing.

It is possible to climb nearby Kolvitsa Fells from the village of Kolvitsa. Leave the village across the Kolvitsa River bridge and turn right at the junction. Continue along the small road past the summer cabins a couple of kilometres to a small lake. From there head directly towards the bald top of the fell. The slope is steep and it grows trees, junipers and abundant berries. At the top there is lichen, more berries and rocky places. There are tiny fell ponds along the ridge. It is possible to make

a several days' trek and continue east along the chain of fells to the old forests of the Porya River.

Boris Gureyev (see How should I go? Kandalaksha) can arrange a sauna in the village of Kolvitsa. He is building lodging there.

Ten kilometres from the bay of Kolvitsa a large lake can be seen on the left side of the road. Kolvitsa Lake comprises an over 400 km<sup>2</sup> conservation area. There are fells and long peninsulas along the shore of the lake. There is a swimming beach on the lake 43 kilometres from Kandalaksha.



WHITE SEA

## KANDALAKSHA



TOURIST INFORMATION



POST OR TELEPHONE OFFICE



RESTAURANT, CAFE



RAILWAY STATION



PETROL STATION



HOTEL OR HOSTEL



INTERNET



BAR, NIGHT CLUB



BUS STATION



SAUNA



MONEY EXCHANGE



SHOP



SIGHT



SUPERVISED CAR PARK



OTHER





Photo: Nikolai Maksimov



Seidyavr Lake valley in the Lovozero Fells.  
Photo: Ilkka Kauppinen.



Ramsay's pass in the Khibiny Mountains.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Snow ledges.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Kuivchorr in the Lovozero Fells.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Snow covers our ski trail in a moment in the fell highland. Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Hostel in a valley of the Khibiny Mountains.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



On the road to Lovozero.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Reindeer herders' Lapp hut in the Lovozero Fells.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Lapland Biosphere Reserve.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Team reindeer and a dog take a break.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Reindeer breeders at their lodging place.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Seman Gallin dressed in traditional Sami clothing.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Karnasurt's mine train.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Equipment at the 25th kilometre mine in Kirovsk.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



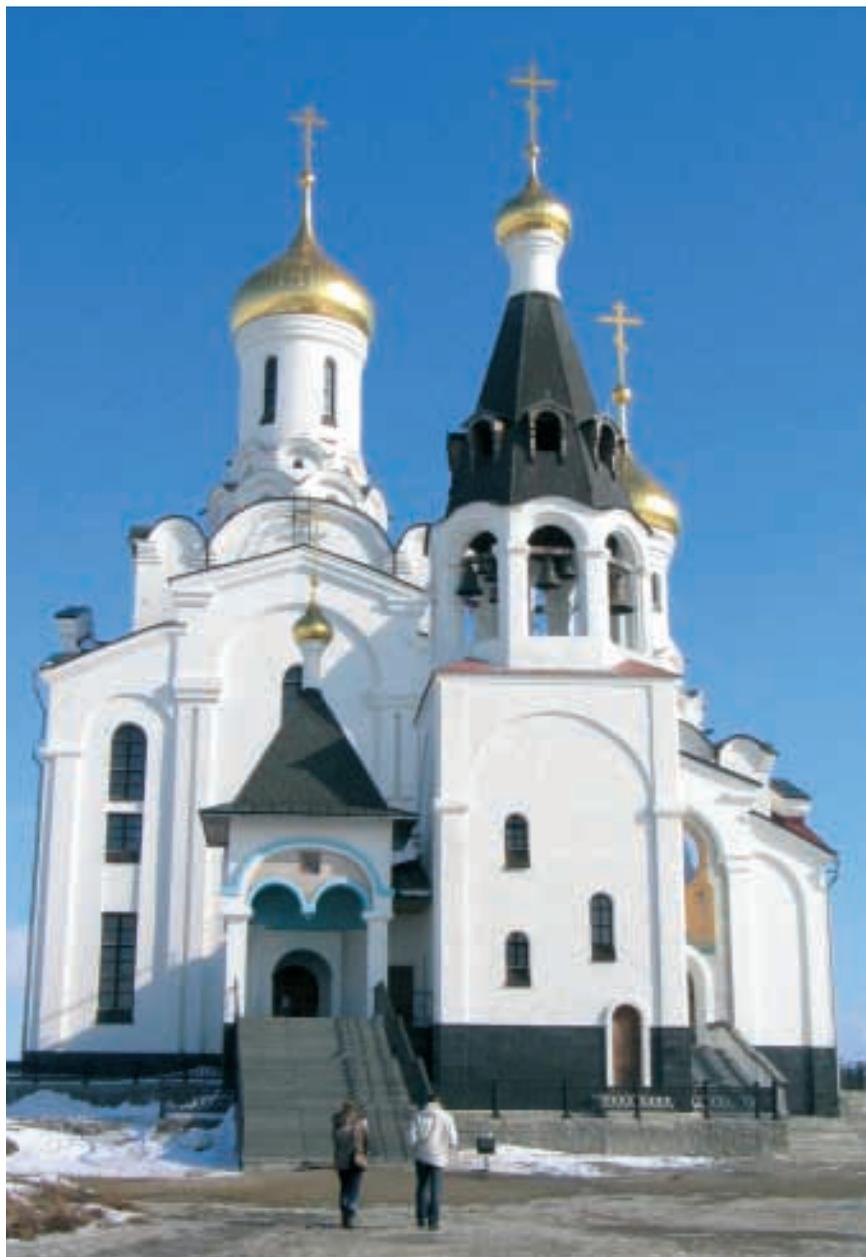
The nickel smelter has destroyed the environment in Monchegorsk.  
Photo: Jussi Kontinen.



The ski slope offers a view of the city of Kirovsk.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



Kirovsk's botanical garden has a tropical climate in the winter, too.  
Photo: Nikolai Maksimov.



The Church of Christ's Ascension in Monchegorsk is Kola's finest sanctuary.  
Photo: Jussi Kontinen.



Monchegorsk in winter.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



The elk statue is a symbol of Monchegorsk.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Lovozero's kings.  
Photo: Jussi Kontinen



Dejection in Alakurtti.  
Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko



The guards at Karnasurt's mine welcome us to the Lovozero Fells.  
Photo: Ilkka Kauppinen



Alakurtti's market alleys.  
Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



Kandalaksha's tank memorial is a favourite of children.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



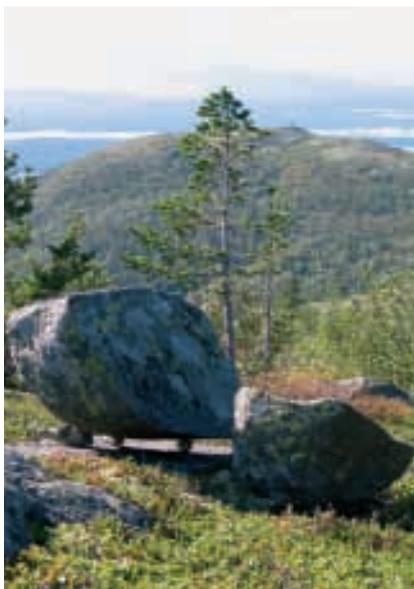
Hotel Belomorje invites you to stay in Kandalaksha. Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



An object in the Kandalaksha museum.  
Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



Kandalaksha's fells offer a view of the White Sea.  
Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



Sieidi sacrificial stones near Kandalaksha.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Kolvitsa Fells.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Labyrinth near Kandalaksha.  
Photo: Niko Väistö.



You can find amethysts among the rocks along the shore on the White Sea's Korabl Peninsula.  
Photo: Jussi Kontinen.



The beach near Kandalaksha at low tide.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



At its best you can ride a bike along the White Sea shore at low tide. Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Kuzomen's sand desert.  
Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



The site of the village of Kuzreka is perhaps Kola's most beautiful. Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Fish drying on strings in the village of Chavanga.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



A helicopter has landed in the remote village of Chavanga. Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



Quilted jackets and a motor-bike in Chavanga.  
Photo: Jaakko Ikävalko.



Old Umba.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



A bed in the village of Kovda.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Kovda's church was built in 1705.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Dima Komarov plays a gramophone in the vacation village of Tonya Tetrina.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Relaxation in Tonya Tetrina.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Evening on Kanozero Lake.  
Photo: Jussi Konttinen.



Photo: Nadežda Kolupajeva.



Padun, the wildest rapids on the Uмба River.  
Photo: Nadežda Kolupajeva.



Uмба River.  
Photo Nadežda Kolupajeva.



Kutsajoki River's magnificent Jänisköngäs.  
Photo: Jussi Kontinen.

## 4. UMBA AND THE TER COAST

### **PORYA BAY**

The road to Umba bypasses the wilderness Porya Bay at a distance of about 15 km. It is possible to reach the bay along a path that passes through the deserted village of Lev-Guba. Porya Bay's landscape consists of ragged islands and peninsulas that belong to the closed Kandalaksha Nature Reserve. Silver has been mined in Medvezhi ostrov. The mining tunnels still exist and they are full of water. The so-called Porya Forest (Pori les) wilderness area, a preserved natural forest, is located on the northwest side of Porya Bay.

### **KANOZERO LAKE ROCK DRAWINGS**

Kanozero is a beautiful, low-banked lake in the middle of the wilderness. It is special because of its Stone Age rock drawings, which were discovered on an island in 1998. Some of them were visible, some were hidden under lichen. The drawings are estimated to be 4000-5000 years old. Most of the nearly 300 drawings have been cut with stone, but some of the later drawings may have been made with a metal object. The drawings contain stylised images of people, deer, mixtures of animals and humans, boats, hunting and fishing scenes, a skiing adventure, a pregnant mother and many other things. Some of the drawings have been spoiled with scribbles like "Vasya was here".

Most of the drawings are located on a small island six kilometres south of the place where the Umba River flows into the lake. There are drawings on the northwest end of the island on a high rock wall seven metres above water level and lower down about one metre above water level. Further south are two islands, and the one farthest east contains some rock drawings. According to researchers, rock drawings were usually made in especially esteemed places far from settlements.

The rock drawings are protected, and they are guarded by Kanozero's gold-toothed forest ranger, Vereshchagin. Camping near the drawings is

not allowed, but you can camp on the east end of the island. There is a good view from the highest rocks. Forest ranger Vereshchagin's base camp is located on the mainland behind the islands, where he'll heat the sauna if you pay him. They say the sauna is bad.

It is easiest to visit Kanozero's rock drawings in while rafting on the Umba River (see Shooting the rapids on the Umba River). Another alternative is motorboat transportation from the south along the Umba River, in which case the boat has to be pulled past the rapids. The third possibility is to hike about 15 kilometres along the Umba-Oktyabrsky cross-country road through bogs and try to get a boat ride to the island from forest ranger Vereshchagin.

In addition to Kanozero, there are rock drawings along the Ponoï River in Chalmnivarre in Central Kola (see Chalmnivarre).

## **THE ROAD FROM UMBA TO KIROVSK**

Three kilometres before Umba a cross-country road turns north to Oktyabrsky near Kirovsk. The route marked on many maps is not drivable by car, but off-road vehicles can get through. Along the 139 km road is wilderness, lakes and villages that are either deserted or inhabited in the summer. There are several deteriorated bridges along the way. The road is not ploughed in winter. The first 9 km from Umba to Pogost can be driven with a passenger car. Pogost has houses that are inhabited in the summer and the Vskhody Kommunistizma kolkhoz salmon fishing camp.

There is a side road from the Umba-Oktyabrsky road to the Umba River and the strait between Verkhneye and Sredneye Kapustnoye. At the former village of Ingozero 57 km north of Pogost an 11 km side road turns west to the Umba River and Dedkova Lambina. Deteriorated cross-country roads go east to Polisaraskoye Lake, Indel Lake and Pana River.

## **UMBA**

Welcome to Umba, jokes the English information sign at the Umba junction. Umba, which is a submarine testing site, has again become a closed zone, and foreign tourists are not allowed there. The 6000-inhabitant

settlement 101 kilometres from Kandalaksha is the largest centre on the southern coast of Kola. Umba is one of the oldest settlements of Kola's southern coast Russians, or Pomors. The current settlement was born in the 1800s, when two sawmills were established here. Umba has a sawmill today, also. There are some apartment buildings in the centre, but elsewhere the neighbourhoods of single-family houses are splintered by bays and rocky areas. The township offers basic services: a hotel, a restaurant, Internet and telephone. There are vacation centres nearby.

The coast at Umba is comprised of long, rocky peninsulas and fjord-like bays. Umba's oldest sector is called Old Umba, which today is a small village accessed from the road on the west side of the bridge over the Umba River. Old Umba can also be accessed from the settlement of Umba. Old Umba still has grey Russian farmhouses, some of which are lopsided due to frost heaving. Raspberry bushes grow between the houses. The village has a new church and a TV tower. Here a small but drivable bridge crosses rapids in the Umba River. You can walk a couple of kilometres from Old Umba to the open seashore. The sea is visible to the village. The mouth of the river has rugged rocky terrain that resembles Lake Ladoga.

Umba is overseen by the navy's security service. Visitor's permits may be granted in winter, and they must be applied for from the local FSB department through a local tour operator or the local administration. Russia trusts her own citizens, as they are not required to have permits. If you do not have a permit to visit Umba, you have to travel through the township in transit. The road to Varzuga turns left at Umba's main intersection. The right branch goes to the centre of Umba. The handsome log house at the intersection is the road administration office.

In principle, stopping is allowed only at the service station on the left side of the road from Kandalaksha before Umba's main intersection. You should fill your tank here, because there are no filling stations further east. We witnessed a funny sight in the yard of the service station: two pension-aged grandpas drove into the yard in Samara sports utility vehicles. The ugly looking vehicles were sold in the Soviet Union only to agricultural workers.

A side road turns to the right at the service station. About 800 metres down the road is the notorious pink salmon fishery (see Pink salmon), where it is possible to stay without a special permit.

East of Umba you can see hayfields, which are rare in Kola. Cattle are grown here.

There is a prehistoric stone spiral, or labyrinth (see Labyrinths) 13 kilometres west of Umba on the tip of a peninsula called Anin Krest. The assistance of a local guide is probably needed to find the place.

### **Tourism information**

Dzerzhinskogo 40, (81559) 51360.

### **Sights**

**Pomor Museum.** Dzerzhinskogo 78, (81559) 51532. Sun-Fri 9:00-17:00.

**Pomor Handicraft Centre.** Belomorskaya 1B, (81559) 52385, 50586.

Doll-making, cloth-weaving and bark products.

### **Lodging**

**Fishery rooming house.** (81559) 51227. Umba's only lodging where foreigners are allowed. Driving instructions, see above. Lodging, €12/person.

**Municipal hotel.** Sovetskaya 7, (81559) 50240.

**Umba Discovery.** Belomorskaya 100, (81559) 51629. Vacation centre on the seashore off of Umba. Two six-person year-round cabins and two five-person summer cabins. The year-round cabins have a shower, WC and hot water. Sauna, Russian kitchen. Through Umba Discovery you can also rent a three-room apartment in the settlement of Umba. The travel agency arranges snowmobile safaris, fishing and visits to villages.

**Rentable house.** Dzerzhinskogo 17, (81559) 51413, (921) 1642988.

### **Food**

**Canteen.** Kirova 5, (81559) 50527, 51683.

## Services

**District administration.** (81559) 50445. Inquire about the regatta and folklore festival from the culture office (81559) 51360 or 50668.

**Hospital.** Belomorskaya 23, (81559) 52909.

## Events

The **Pomors' rowing regatta**, where all kinds of boats sail on the White Sea and the settlement holds a general public festival, is arranged in Umba on the second Saturday in June. Every third year a folklore festival is arranged in conjunction with the regatta (the next time in 2008).

Also other **traditional festivities**, like Christmas, Shrovetide and St. Nicholas' Day, are held in Umba.

A Rybya Morda **ice fishing competition** is held in late winter.

## Transportation

**Bus station.** Belomorskaya 1, (81559) 52385. Buses to Kandalaksha leave at 10:30 and 19:00 arrive from Kandalaksha at 8:00 and 16:10. There is a bus to Varzuga and Kuzomen on Tuesdays.

**Off-road UAZ minibus.** (81559) 50878, (921) 1739447.

Vladimir Belyayev.

**Minibus.** (81559) 51745, (921) 2707232, (921) 7091638. Igor Pirogov.

**Umba taxi.** (921) 1655500.

## THE POMORS

The Russians are believed to have travelled to the Kola Peninsula since the 1100s - 1300s. They were settled in the region permanently by the 1500s, when there is mention of Kandalaksha and Varzuga, among others. The Russians of the coastal areas of the White Sea have been called Pomors since the 1500s - 1600s (pomorye = sea area).

The Pomors were differentiated from other northern Russians above all by their seafaring culture. Their livelihoods included fishing, seal hunting and cattle growing. The Pomors traded with both southern Russians and Norwegians. Because Novgorod river boats could not be used at sea, the

Pomors developed the iceworthy twin-mast *koch* by reinforcing the sides and shaping the bottom of the river boat. They made seal, whale and walrus hunting trips as well as hunting trips to Novaya Zemlya already in the 1400s, and to Spitzbergen in the 1600s. The Pomors traded along the coast of Norway since the 1600s, selling flour, hulled grain, bread, boards and rope, and buying fish and colonial goods. Many Pomors became recognised seafarers, explorers, naval soldiers and officers.

Contrary to the southernmost Russians, the Pomors did not end up under the harshest large landowner form of serfdom. Although some of the area's peasants belonged to the boyars, the church and the court, a large part were independent yeomen who paid taxes to the state and collectively decided on matters in a *mir*. This is considered to have made the Pomors independent and lovers of freedom. Differences in income were smaller among the Pomors than they were elsewhere in Russia, as there were few members of the nobility in the area. Women's status was good, as they were responsible for things when the men were away at sea and they were allowed to attend school.

## **TONYA TETRINA AND THE TURIY PENINSULA**

The microscopic vacation village of Tonya Tetrina is a paradise on the coast of the White Sea. Historian Alexandr Komarov from Umba has constructed an authentic Pomor fisherman's traditional courtyard (tonya in Russian) on the Turiy Peninsula. Here you'll find a pleasant log farmhouse, handsome storage buildings, an ice cellar and a chapel. There are enormous fishnets hanging on the shore drying. Amazingly delicious water gushes from an old well only twenty metres from the sea. Everything is constructed with feeling and with respect for tradition. Light comes from kerosene lamps, not electric.

You can truly rest in Tonya Tetrina. The sauna is heated immediately. Between steam baths you can enjoy a kelp bath concocted by your host. A small Lapp hut has a bathtub that is filled with seawater and kelp water plants gathered from the shore at low tide. According to Komarov the bath relieves stressed joints and is good for the skin. Be it as it may, it feels good

to relax in the hot kelp bath and gaze at the sparkling sea. You can also cool off among the waves.

Komarov fishes with a purse seine, and tourists can go along with him to examine it. The seine is lifted into the boat on both sides so the fish are forced into the pound. We caught a seven-kilo salmon and flounder. A black-headed seal hung around the seine waiting for easy prey.

An important part of the atmosphere at Tonya Tetrina is due to Komarov's 12-year-old son, Dima. Dima carries reindeer skins to the easy chairs on the beach. Then he offers tea and cranks an old gramophone that plays an old Soviet hit, *Dark Night*. Dima is an endless source of information who presents the sights of the place, including its lemming paths. He can tell about the customs of the Pomors and Lapps. And also the customs of today's tourists - the sharp little boy sees a lot at the vacation village.

Alexandr Komarov has erected a Lapp hut yard and a small "war museum" outside the vacation village, which displays the motor of an American bomber, among other things. A sea chart of Uмба, taken from the Kursk submarine that sank in 2000, hangs on the wall in the farmhouse.

Only six lodgers at a time fit in the vacation village, so you should reserve your visit well in advance. Weekends are reserved more than weekdays. Four people fit in the pleasant room in the main building. Two have to sleep in a dismal barrack off to the side. Our host served salted herring, potatoes and salmon soup whenever he had time, but it's worth taking some of your own food along, too. No food supplies or beverages are sold in Tonya Tetrina.

Tonya Tetrina is part of Uмба's closed area, which begins at the small Nosok Peninsula between the road and the vacation village. The host family doesn't pay much attention to this. We relaxed a day at the place without any problems.

Transportation to Tonya Tetrina has to be arranged in advance. If Komarov is not able to arrange a ride, you can order one from Uмба's taxis (see Uмба: Transportation). An off-road vehicle is needed to get to the destination. The road to Turiy Peninsula turns off at the place where the road from Uмба approaches the White Sea. It is 30 km from Uмба to

the junction and 7 km from there to the village, partly along a rough cross-country road and partly along the seashore. It is easier to get there during low tide. A mobile phone did not work in the summer of 2007.

Another lodging place is being constructed in a ship visible at the tip of the next peninsula from Tonya Tetrina. The tip of the Turiy Peninsula, which has high rock walls and rare plants, belongs to the closed area of the Kandalaksha Nature Reserve. The inland parts of the peninsula were logged during the Soviet era.

**Tonya Tetrina vacation village.** Alexandr Borisovich Komarov.  
(81559) 50933, (921) 1508397, (921) 0330269.

## **KUZREKA**

Kuzreka, 28 km from Umba, is probably the most beautiful village on the southern coast of Kola. The houses are grouped along the shore of a sheltered bay. The entire area can be seen from the road. The village mainly has summer inhabitants.

Near Kuzreka the White Sea coast changes. The shoreline gets straighter and lower. Here is where the White Sea's Ter Coast (Tersky bereg) begins, to continue eastward hundreds of kilometres. A large portion of the Ter Coast is sandy beaches, whose surface area is multiplied by low tide. In places the shore is more rocky.

The paved road ends after Kuzreka. In the future the asphalt will extend further east, as there was roadwork underway in the autumn of 2007. The gravel road has dusty red sand. It approaches the south side of the Arctic Circle. The road follows the coast, but the sea is visible only in places.

## **OLENITSA**

The village of Olenitsa 60 km east of Umba doesn't offer anything special to see. During low tide you can find glendonite stone on the beach, on which packed clay and seawater have formed figures of stars and clamshells. The stones are gathered by Vasily Nikitich Kozhin, who lives in the village, tel. (81559) 51934.

## **KASHKARANTSY**

The village of Kashkarantsy rises jovially on a small peninsula 95 km east of Umba: log houses, a new church and a red-and-white lighthouse. The village is more beautiful viewed from a distance than it is up close. It has a store and a post office with a phone. It still says "Soviet savings bank" on the wall of the bank.

After Kashkarantsy the road leaves the coast and heads inland towards the village of Varzuga. At the 108 km post (from Umba) there is a chapel on the right side a five-minute walk from the road and a spring that is considered holy on the left side of the road.

## **AMETHYST ROCKS**

The Korabl Peninsula (mys Korabl) is a fascinating place. Here steep red sandstone walls with traces of rock cutting and blasting rise from the shore of the White Sea. The place is known for its amethysts. Although the rock walls have been scoured, it is still easy to find rough amethyst crystals there. The rocks also contain violet fluorite. You can visit the Korabl Peninsula even if you aren't interested in stones: the extraordinary, lonely rock shore is beautiful. We camped overnight there. A rainbow appeared in the sky above the sea at sunrise.

You can reach Korabl by car along a quite deteriorated small road. The junction is at the 23/117 km post a little over 16 km east of Kashkarantsy. The road goes directly to the shore via a rocky field and a high embankment. The distance from the junction is 2.5 km.

## **VARZUGA**

Varzuga is at the end of the road. It is one of Kola's oldest villages on a river of the same name. Here, 240 km from Kandalaksha, is where the peninsula's uninhabited, roadless eastern part begins.

The village of Varzuga is mentioned in documents already in 1466. It used to belong to Novgorod's female ruler, Marpha Boretskaya, and later it was a fief of a monastery. Kola's oldest preserved building, the church of the Virgin Mary's sleep of death dating to 1674, reminds of this history. Unfortunately,

the wooden onion-domed sanctum has been dismantled for restoration. However, the other sites in the churchyard are in place: a duplicate of the church of Afanas, Savvat and Zosima, reconditioned after the Soviet era in an old wooden building, a new bell tower and an unfinished parish house. The duplicate church is rich in atmosphere inside. The iconostasis is new, but there are some interesting old icons from the village churches of the Ter Coast on the walls. You can get in the church by knocking on the right-hand window in the northern wall of the adjoining parish building.

Life in Varzuga isn't the worst. After the Soviet era a road, church, school and new houses have been built in the village. Cuckoo clock-type houses, which energetic kolkhoz director Svyatoslav Kalyuzhin had built for the kolkhoz employees, rise on both sides of the main street. There is a store next to the church and an unfinished restaurant and hotel building along the main road. Two kiosks have been rigged up in trailers, and an air rifle range operated in a shipping container. The village school, completed in 2004, stands proudly on a ridge to the left. There is a well near the row of houses on the ridge.

The older part of the village of Varzuga is situated on the opposite side of the river, and it is accessible only by boat. The view from the bank towards the old village is idyllic. There were swans in the river preparing to migrate. Four kilometres from the village on the opposite bank is a spring that is considered holy. The Yulitsa River flows in the wilderness 30 km east of Varzuga. It flows through a gorge surrounded by rock walls 50 metres high.

The mouth of the Varzuga River is twenty kilometres from the village. The 250 km Varzuga River (Vuersiyok in Sami) is Kola's second longest river and a protected fishing area. There is salmon in the Varzuga River and its tributary, the Pana River. You can fish with a permit purchased from the local Vskhody Kommunizma kolkhoz. Permits are only sold in season. The kolkhoz arranges salmon fishing on the Varzuga, Pana, Strelna and Umbla Rivers, and it maintains camping places along the rivers (see Salmon fishing).

The Varzuga River is a kayaking route. You can start from Polisarka Lake, continue to the tributary Pana River and then to the Varzuga River. The route

is altogether 190 km long. The starting point can be reached with an off-road vehicle. Varzuga River kayaking has been arranged by the Ramzay-Sever travel agency in Kirovsk, for one.

Because Varzuga's hotel is not in use, the only lodging available is in homes. For example, Irina Suryadova in the first cuckoo clock house on the left can help. We paid her €12/person for lodging and €15 for a sauna. Irina is the cook at the village school and the mother of a large family: in addition to her own children she has foster children. Suryadova's tel. (81559) 62433 home, 62469 work.

The home field of the Vskhody Kommunizma kolkhoz's helicopter is in Varzuga. In principle, the copter makes a regular flight to Chavanga and Chapoma every Tuesday (see How do I get around in South Kola?). You can arrange charter flights with walrus-moustached kolkhoz director Svyatoslav Kalyuzhin.

## **KUZOMEN AND THE DESERT**

Kuzomen is a wild sight: the grey log village is surrounded by a few-kilometre-wide "technogenic sand desert". This arctic Sahara was created by mistake when the forests surrounding the village were logged. The wind carried in sand, and more keeps coming. Only the vultures are missing.

Kuzomen is visible beyond the desert like a mirage. The sand penetrates everywhere in the village. The residents say there are sandstorms here. The cemetery crosses sticking up on a nearby dune bring to mind pictures from the Wild West. Former kolkhoz horses that have turned wild wander around outside the village.

Despite its barrenness Kuzomen is a lively village with a school with four classes. The village lives from sea salmon fishing. We lodged in Kuzomen in a private home where a little dog rocked a little child on a swing in the yard. Our host family served an unforgettable supper: salmon medallions, salmon soup, raw spiced salmon and salmon prepared with citric acid. Of course, all washed down with vodka. At night we slept on leopard-print sheets.

The road to Kuzomen turns off the Umba-Varzuga road five kilometres before Varzuga. It's 18 km to the village. The beginning looked promising.

The end, however, is softer and softer sand that is passable only with an off-road vehicle. Moped trails bypass the road on both sides. The pine forest gradually gives way to the sand desert, which continues for a few kilometres. A power line leads the way to the village.

A bus goes to the village from Umba on Tuesdays. It's easiest to inquire about off-road vehicle transports in Varzuga. It's worth bypassing the sand desert along the seashore to the right, where it's easier to travel. There is a one-kilometre road from the seashore to the village through the desert. Another possibility is to drive to Kuzomen from Kashkarantsy along the seashore with an off-road vehicle.

You can ask about lodging in Kuzomen from Valery Dvinin, tel. (81559) 63318, or Gennady Veshnyakov, for example. We paid Dvinin €10/person for lodging.

There is a labyrinth near the mouth of the Varzuga River (see Kandalaksha: Labyrinths), which is nevertheless difficult to find.

## **THE WHITE SEA COAST FROM USTYE-VARZUGI TO CHAVANGA**

If you wish to continue east from Kuzomen along the White Sea coast, you have to get in a boat and cross the mouth of the Varzuga River. You can ask about a boat ride in the village of Kuzomen.

On the opposite bank is the little village of Ustye-Varzugi, which has only a few small houses. The river mouth is decorated by a rusty hulk called Titanic. There is a wide tundra zone between the shore and the forest visible about a kilometre inland. It grew abundant berries in August-September.

From here it is possible to continue east to Chavanga (40 km) or all the way to Chapoma (95 km) on foot or with an off-road vehicle. It is nice to walk along the seashore, as there are barely no mosquitoes. If you want to drive, you must use vehicles in the village of Chavanga, because no vehicles can cross the Varzuga River in the summer. We travelled by bike with the intent of driving along the shore at low tide, but the bikes did not turn out to be suitable for the task (see The deepest essence of low tide biking).

A sandy beach extends from Ustye-Varzugi to Indera Creek. The beach

can be driven by car at low tide. The first part is soft, and it can be bypassed inland by following a path that follows the power line from Ustye-Varzugi to the first creek, and from there to the seashore.

Low tide exposes medusas, sea urchins and starfish on the beach. We almost drove over a seal lying on the beach with our bikes. The animal looked dead. However, when we stopped the bundle headed for the sea so quickly we didn't even have time to dig out a camera.

Salmon rise up Indera Creek, but when we were there the pink salmon were spawning and the water in the creek stank of rotten fish (see Pink salmon). At least at low tide the creek can be forded easily. There is a deteriorated fishing hut on the other side of the creek. Two men were fishing on foot farther out to sea and were just able to reach a sandbar when the tide started coming in.

From here on the shore is rocky and it's faster to travel along the "road" inland. This driving route is full of soft sand and at times rocks. Every now and then we saw bear droppings. Hulks laying on the shore indicate that the White Sea is difficult to travel. Orthodox crosses have been erected on mounds, perhaps in memory of unlucky seafarers.

Near Krivoi Creek there is a small usable fishing hut and later near the steep rock walls along Krutaya Creek there is a fishing cabin that is actively used. Driftwood can be used as firewood, as it is a long way to the forest. Drinking water can be taken from the creeks, except when the pink salmon are rising. There are supposed to be wells near the Krutaya cabin and the Indera River, but we couldn't find them. The creek beds have exposed red sandstone, which is found everywhere.

There is a small camping centre at the mouth of the Gremyaha River about 8 km before Chavanga, where devotees of eastern self-defence skills practice in the summer. It is possible to arrange a sauna at the camp centre. After the Gremyaha River bridge the road to Chavanga turns inland. The road passes through very sandy terrain with steep hills. There is one more bridge along the way.

A faint track also continues from Gremyaha directly along the shore to Chavanga. The terrain is hilly with open low-brush areas and bogs that grow cloudberries.

## CHAVANGA

Chavanga is a coastal village with friendly people. There is no road here - unless you call the cross-country trail from Ustye-Varzugi, occasionally used by six-wheel-drive trucks and tracked vehicles, a road. The means of transportation are a boat and randomly flying helicopters. Perhaps because of its isolation, Chavanga has an authentic Pomor village atmosphere hard to find elsewhere.

We were given a very friendly welcome in Chavanga. We reached the village by truck; a local driver gave us and our bikes a ride. We were invited to a sauna. The village store was closed, but the storekeeper opened it for us. There was no bread, but the storekeeper baked some for us. When one of us got sick, the village doctor took his treatment to heart and took a look at the patient several times a day, with a needle in hand. A young navy lieutenant adopted us to his house. To top it all off, the secretary of the kolkhoz arranged a return trip to Varzuga for us on a helicopter that transported schoolchildren. The price of the ticket came to eight euros.

The village is situated on a lovely peninsula. The buildings are mostly grey log houses - a couple of buildings painted bright lilac and green catch the eye. Doors aren't locked here. The houses are separated by alleys lined with long stacks of firewood. Fish hang in the yards drying. There are cute wooden double swings in the centre of the village. In Chavanga people travel on foot, by bike and moped, and also tracked vehicles. In addition to people there are a lot of dogs outside. The horses from the discontinued kolkhoz have turned wild and now fend for themselves all year round. They are said to feed off gardens and act aggressively towards moped drivers.

Coming from Varzuga, you first bypass the village airport and a disarming little air traffic control building. Then you cross the Chavanga River. Trucks drive right through the river, but there is a suspension bridge for pedestrians and mopeds over the fast-flowing rapids. There is a high rock at the base of the peninsula from which you can see the whole village - and which the whole village can see. As we sat on the rock for a picnic, it seemed half the villagers passed by to see who the newcomers were.

A kolkhoz called White Sea Fisherman (Belomorsky rybak) operates in

Chavanga, which practices salmon sea fishing. The kolkhoz office is in a brown log house in the centre of the village. At nine in the morning the men of the village gather in the kolkhoz hall, from where they set out to examine the nets near the shore. Chavanga has a four-class school; older students attend a boarding school in Umba. There are hundreds of residents in the village in the summer, but in midwinter only a few dozen hardy people stay here.

Chavanga has a food store and a post office. You can buy phone coupons at the post office with which you can call with the crank-type phone at the kolkhoz. There are no home phones. Electricity is produced with a diesel generator, that is turned off every day at midnight. Perhaps this is the reason there are so many children in the village.

Since we were travelling on Saturday, for fun we inquired if there happened to be a disco in the village. We received ironic-sounding replies: “Of course, every evening!” “Since we have Finnish guests, of course we’ll arrange dancing.” In the evening we realised they weren’t joking: there was a disco every evening at the culture centre until school started. True, there were only a few young people present, who calmly sipped a strong home-made brew from a pail. A strong beat echoed and one disco light blinked on the small dance floor. We had planned on sleeping in tents, but the director of the culture centre didn’t think it was a good idea. When the disco was over we crawled into the attic of the culture centre to sleep.

The Chavanga River is a salmon river, where you can fish with a permit purchased from the kolkhoz (they said there are no fishing supervisors). There are supposed to be good fishing places seven kilometres upriver. There are bogs along the way. There are falls 17 km upriver. Even if you don’t fish yourself, it’s worth tasting fish in Chavanga. We caught the aroma of smoked fish as soon as we arrived. We bought both fresh (€4/kg) and smoked salmon (€8/kg).

You can spend time in Chavanga watching the constantly changing White Sea – by turn it sparkles in the sun, is calm, is dark or threatening. With luck you can spot a beluga whale or a tanker far out at sea.

Local resident Pavel Kozhin (see *How should I go: Chavanga*) arranges fishing trips and boat and six-wheel-drive transports to Chavanga.

## **PINK SALMON (GORBUSHA)**

There's something rotten here! A nauseating stench rises from the Chavanga River even though the water is clear and flows through Kola's virgin wilderness. Piles of dead fish float belly up in the water. Some of the fish are alive but so tired they don't have the strength to swim in the rapids. Live fish can be lifted from the river with bare hands. "Some gather the roe, others feed the fish to their dogs," Chavanga's summer resident Alexey Kuznetsov explains the locals' attitude towards the ailing species, pink salmon.

This autumn Kola's salmon rivers stink: it is the year of the pink salmon again. The fish, which lives a year and a half, swims upriver to spawn and die in odd years. Pink salmon, i.e. *oncorhynchus gorbuscha*, or gorbusha in Russian, has a large hump on its back. Pink salmon is not valued as an edible fish, but its roe sells for €30 per kilo. No wonder there is a big pile of rotting fish in the riverside bushes with their bellies ripped open.

The pink salmon's story is the usual one: man though he was wiser than nature. Contrary to the Atlantic salmon, the pink salmon does not belong in the northern European environment. It was brought here from the Russian Far East during the Soviet era. Soviet researchers calculated that there is a lot of unused nutrition for the fish in the White Sea. Fisheries were established along the coast in the 1960s where pink salmon were grown from roe brought from the Pacific Ocean.

Now the pink salmon has become a blight. It is feared that it will take over the habitat of natural salmon. "There are no definite research data on the matter, but it is assumed the pink salmon hinders the Atlantic salmon," says researcher Maxim Alexeyev from Murmansk's fishery research centre, Pinro. According to Alexeyev the pink salmon is more aggressive in the river and takes over the habitat. The offspring compete for the same nutrition. "In addition, the mass deaths of the pink salmon after spawning bring parasites into the river and drive away the Atlantic salmon, which thrives in clean water."

Although the most pink salmon are found in rivers that empty into the White Sea, it also rises up the Ponoï and Varzina Rivers on Kola's northern coast, which are advertised as "the world's best salmon rivers", as well as Norway's waterways. Sport fishing is a big business in Murmansk oblast,

which depends on the preservation of natural salmon. The brochures that entice Western tourists do not mention a word about pink salmon.

NASCO, the international Atlantic salmon preservation organisation, has already given a death penalty to the Eastern visitor. According to the organisation, growing the foreign species in the rivers must end. However, Russia has not made a national decision on the matter. "We need to solve this one way or another. There are more minuses than plusses in growing pink salmon. If we want to get rid of the fish, it must be caught with dams," says Maxim Alexeyev.

As long as nothing is done, we can only wait for the pink salmon to die out naturally. Its roe has been harvested the last time in 2000. According to some estimates just one sufficiently cold winter is needed to prevent the roe from developing in natural conditions.

## **FROM CHAVANGA TO TETRINO**

Continuing east along the coast from Chavanga, it is possible to drive the first 7 kilometres along the beach at low tide. Then you have to cross the Rombach River, which is possible via the sea at low tide and carefully through the river above a small waterfall at high tide. From there on the road is much better and has a firmer base than the one between the Varzuga River and Chavanga. The road follows a moor-like open coast that grows juniper and undergrowth that glows in autumn colours. There are deteriorated fishing huts and a log tower along the way.

## **BEARS' HONEYMOON**

We were returning from Tetrino to Chavanga by bike at dusk when we spotted movement on the seashore.

A bear!

The bear first took a step towards us, but then became frightened by our babbling and turned to slowly saunter into the woods. After half an hour the same scene was repeated - except that this time the female bear had two cubs with her. The third bear no longer surprised anyone. This bear also padded away. Nevertheless, we were able to follow its fresh tracks a long way.

Only later we heard we had come across a dating place. Kola's bears arrive at the seashore in September to mate. Males left without a partner may be aggressive.

Happening upon the bears' honeymoon unawares was quite an experience. Apparently the bears didn't hear us because of the murmuring of the sea, and we pedalled right in front of them with our bikes. We tried to keep our heads cool and viciously rang the bells of the bikes, but the sea seemed to devour all sounds. The lights of the village of Chavanga that appeared on the horizon were a cheerful sign of civilisation.

## **TETRINO**

The village of Tetrino can be seen ten kilometres away: the shore rises into a steep, high embankment, with houses at its base right next to the sea. The atmosphere in Tetrino, 25 km from Chavanga, is exceptional. The old village is dying away. Half of the houses are deserted, half have summer residents. In winter only one man stays here. There is an old deteriorated church in the middle of the village.

We arrived in Tetrino in a dismal rain. We did not wander around long before an old woman appeared from somewhere and invited us to her home to warm up. The woman, who lived in Central Russia, said she returned every summer to Tetrino, where she was born. She served tea, excellent lingonberry jelly and the summer's last strawberries.

## **THE DEEPEST ESSENCE OF LOW TIDE BIKING**

We travelled from Varzuga to Tetrino by bike. We had been told that the route could be driven along the hard sea floor at low tide. However, low tide biking turned out to be a mistake.

First the bikes had to be transported 1000 kilometres through Finland on the roof of a car. In Rovaniemi we drove into a parking lot tunnel with the consequence that the bikes and roof rack flew off the roof of the car, but amazingly they were not damaged. Transporting the bikes in Kola was an inconvenience. In Kandalaksha we stored them in the checkroom of the city hall.

In Kuzomen the bikes had to be walked through the desert. Then they had to be transported by boat across the Varzuga River. The first five kilometres after the river mouth were soft mud that had to be bypassed inland. The next five kilometres we drove along the sea floor, enjoying the thrill of speed and the proximity of the sea. After the Inderka River, however, the beach became rocky. And the water rose. The inland “road” was the only alternative, but it was by turn soft sand and rocky. A deep ditch crossed the road every 50 metres.

Then we were saved by the arrival of a six-wheel-drive Zil off-road vehicle. Its driver, Pavel Kozhin, picked us up, bikes and all. We rode along in the old 1968 vehicle over moors and across rivers to the village of Chavanga. We made good use of the grab bar in the terribly rough ride.

We rode our bikes between Chavanga and Tetrino without a load. There the road is more bicycle-friendly, but it included a couple of difficult river crossings.

Back in Chavanga our trip had an unexpected ending. We and our bikes were given a ride in a helicopter that brought children to school. In about twenty minutes we covered the areas that we had struggled through with our bikes for three days. Spread out below us were white lichen grounds and bogs aglow in autumn colours. The ponds shone, the rivers gleamed in narrow bands and the White Sea sparkled white.

In conclusion we can say that when low tide biking is successful, it is a great experience. There is a feeling of freedom in biking in the sea. But, as only 10 % of the coast is passable with a bike, this form of travel can only be recommended for masochists. We transported our bikes thousands of kilometres and rode them one hundred. At the end of the trip the bikes needed thorough washing. The low tide rally left us with bicycle chains that were yellow with rust.

## **EAST OF TETRINO**

We did not continue east along the coast from Tetrino but a relatively good cross-country road is supposed to continue to Chapoma. Along the way the Strelna River has to be crossed, apparently by boat, at the village of Strelna.

It is supposed to be possible to continue on from Chapoma on foot to the village of Pyalitsa (35 km) and possible from there to Sosnovka (70 km) and beyond. However, the terrain is difficult to travel.

## **STRELNA**

The little village of Strelna is located 15 km east of Tetrino at the mouth of a river of the same name. As far as we know there are only summer residents in the village any more. The river has to be crossed with a boat. The Strelna River is a salmon river. It is a profusely flowing, peaceful plains river with forested banks. There is supposed to be a waterfall 7 km from the mouth.

## **CHAPOMA**

The village of Chapoma is situated 10 km from Strelna and 95 km east of the mouth of the Varzuga River. The village has quite a lot of inhabitants and a kolkhoz that practices seal hunting in winter. There is a cross-country road to Chapoma that runs along the shore. There is supposed to be a person named Cherkez in village who lodges tourists. Chapoma is located at the mouth of a river of the same name. There is a waterfall 12 km upriver.

## **PYALITSA**

The little village of Pyalitsa 30 km past Chapoma is the last inhabited point in the Ter district. The village does not have a store or telephone. The Pyalitsa River is a small, clear river with a waterfall 12 km from the mouth.

## **PULONGA, LIHODEYEVKA AND BABYA RIVERS**

The Pulonga River a good twenty kilometres east of Pyalitsa is a salmon river like the other coastal rivers. There is a two-stage waterfall 12 km from the mouth where the water drops 8 metres. The falls can be reached on foot in two hours. Salmon do not rise above the falls. No forests grow along the Pulonga River.

The Lihodeyevka and Babya Rivers are small tundra rivers that flow part of the way in gorges. There is a six-metre waterfall 4 km from the mouth of the Babya River.



# UMBA

WHITE SEA

- |  |                     |  |                          |  |                  |  |                     |  |                |
|--|---------------------|--|--------------------------|--|------------------|--|---------------------|--|----------------|
|  | TOURIST INFORMATION |  | POST OR TELEPHONE OFFICE |  | RESTAURANT, CAFE |  | RAILWAY STATION     |  | PETROL STATION |
|  | HOTEL OR HOSTEL     |  | INTERNET                 |  | BAR, NIGHT CLUB  |  | BUS STATION         |  | SALUNA         |
|  | MONEY EXCHANGE      |  | SHOP                     |  | SIGHT            |  | SUPERVISED CAR PARK |  | OTHER          |

## 5. POLYARNYE ZORI

The name Polyarnye Zori is poetic (“Arctic Circle’s dawns”), but the reason for the existence of the city is prosaic: here white light is produced by Kola’s well-known nuclear power plant. The power plant’s illuminated double towers are visible especially at night on the shore of Imandra Lake on the east side of Kola’s main highway.

Life in the city of 16,000 residents revolves closely around the nuclear power plant. The town was built at the same time as the power plant, which is still the city’s largest employer. You can still find slogans like “The nuclear city welcomes you” or “Safe energy – Kola’s nuclear power plant” along the streets. The residential centre comprised of white high-rise apartment buildings in the middle of the forest does not offer tourists anything special to see, but it does have urban services: hotels, restaurants and nightclubs. Polyarnye Zori differs from many other Russian nuclear power plant cities in that it can be visited freely.

When you drive to Polyarnye Zori from Murmansk’s main highway, you arrive at an intersection dominated a Statoil service station from which the city’s main streets, Energetikov and Nivsky prospekt, begin. Energetikov goes to the city’s railway station – the Kola railway bypasses the centre. Nivsky prospekt is an amusing street in that its name is similar to the main street of St. Petersburg, Nevsky prospekt. No wonder, then, that when Leningrad changed its name to St. Petersburg in the early 1990s, Polyarnye Zori offered to change its name to Leningrad. However, this Nivsky prospekt, or Niva Street, got its name from the Niva River, along which the waters of Imandra Lake flow into Kandalaksha Bay in the White Sea. Upon leaving Statoil, Nivsky prospekt climbs a high hill where the city hall, shopping centre and culture building are situated. It is worth stopping inside the culture building, in particular. When I visited it there was an disarming children’s dancing competition going on. There’s a small exhibition room on the second floor.

Pushkina, a boulevard reserved for pedestrians, goes down the hill from

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the city hall. Nivsky prospekt continues in the other direction past the Sivko stadium and swimming hall to Lomonosova Street. If you continue westward you arrive at the city's new wooden church. I visited Polyarnye Zori at Easter. During midnight worship the church was packed full of people who circled the church in a procession of the cross under a starry sky.

A little way off from the actual city is Pinozero Lake, which is a reservoir created by the regulation of the Niva River. Beautiful fell scenery is visible on the other side of the lake.

On the left along the main highway to Polyarnye Zori is the settlement of Zasheyek, whose residents get their livelihood from forestry and the railway. The settlement has wooden buildings but nothing special to see.

The most important sight in Polyarnye Zori cannot be seen – should a person want to – as visitors are not allowed in the nuclear power plant. The power plant, abbreviated KAES, is located ten kilometres north of the city. The road there turns east off the main highway, but a permit is needed to drive there, and we don't recommend breaking the law. Visiting the training centre of the power plant involves a couple months' worth of red tape, while the plant's information centre in the town can be visited with shorter notice. The power plant constructed in the 1970s consists of four reactors, of which only three are in operation at one time. Kola's industry no longer needs as much electricity as it did in the Soviet era, and the power cannot be transmitted further south. There have been plans to replace the reactors with new ones, but so far Russia's nuclear power agency has considered it unprofitable to build a new power plant. The reactors are water-moderated, and considered to be safer than Chernobyl's and Sosnovyi Bor's graphite-moderated power plants.

Among the peculiarities in the Polyarnye Zori area is the condensation water channel that flows from the nuclear power plant, under Murmansk's main highway, into Babinskaya Imandra Lake. In winter the condensation water keeps Babinskaya Imandra Lake on the west side of the highway thawed, while Yekostrov Imandra Lake on the east side freezes like it should. In the summer the warm channel is a popular swimming place, although swimming is forbidden because of underwater junk. There is a small fishery near the highway at the channel on the shore of Babinskaya Imandra Lake. The place

is favourable, because the condensation water keeps the water temperature at this spot at 11 degrees in winter, also, and the fish grow all year round and 24 hours a day. Rainbow trout and sturgeon are grown here. These "by-products" of the nuclear power plant end up in Polyarnye Zori's stores and restaurants, for example.

The Polyarnye Zori junction is 48 km south of the Apatity junction and 32 km north of the Kandalaksha junction. The old road to Kandalaksha leaves directly from the east side of the city and follows the Niva River. A small road goes from Polyarnye Zori to the settlement of Afrikanda 30 km further east, where there was an air base during the Soviet era. The road continues ten kilometres further east from Afrikanda to Khabozero.

**Kola's nuclear power plant.** (81532) 42641, 43493,  
kolanpp@kolatom.murmansk.ru.

### **Lodging**

All the hotels belong to the nuclear power plant.

**Nivskyje Berega.** Lomonosova 1 a, (81532) 64681. Well-renovated main hotel. Double rooms start at €65. There are rooms in a side building, also.

**Pirenga.** Lomonosova 35, (81532) 43700. A small, high-quality hotel on the edge of the city. Nine double rooms. €53.

**Nuclear power plant's sanatorium.** Pushkina 20, (81532) 74501. An advance reservation is needed to get in the sanatorium, which may be difficult to get. Nuclear power plant employees and guests are given various treatments here. A specialty is an "oxygen cocktail" served at the bar, which is supposed to make you feel good and cure ulcers and anaemia, for example. The cocktail is made of sweetened carbonated water prepared by foaming oxygen bubbles. The sanatorium has a canteen for its customers.

The **Lysaya Gora ski centre** outside the city offers lodging all year round.

### **Food**

**Ochag.** Stroiteley 2 a, (81532) 63068, Mon-Thu, Sun 12:00-24:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-07:00. The city's highest quality restaurant, which is also open late.

**Nivskyye Berega.** Lomonosova 1 a, (81532) 64681, Tue-Thu 18:00-23:00, Fri-Sat 19:00-02:00. Hotel restaurant.

**Statoil.** At the intersection of Nivsky prospekt and Energetikov. Guaranteed hot dogs, hamburgers and pizza, in principle 24 hours a day.

**Uyut.** Belova 3, (81532) 64371, Tue-Thu 12:00-17:00 and 18:00-23:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-17:00 and 18:00-01:00, Sun 12:00-17:00 and 18:00-03:00. Basic bar.

**Shashlychnaya.** Kurchatova, Mon-Thu, Sun 12:00-24:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-01:00. Kebab.

**Shashlychnaya.** Nivsky prospekt 7 a, Mon-Thu 12:00-24:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-01:00, Sun 11:00-24:00. Kebab.

**Lyoha.** Energetikov 19, Mon, Wed-Thu, Sun 12:00-24:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-04:00. Billiards.

**Russkiye bliny.** Stroiteley 3, (81532) 63966, Mon-Fri 11:00-15:00 and 16:00-20:00, Sat-Sun 12:00-19:00. Inexpensive, but not a good blin coffee shop.

### Night life

**Pautina.** Nivsky prospekt 12 a, (81532) 65726, (921) 2888002, Mon-Thu 17:00-03:00, Fri 17:00-06:00, Sat 13:00-06:00, Sun 13:00-03:00. This brand new beer and bowling centre is the city's centre of night life. The bowling alleys, billiard tables, bar, restaurant and disco are open late every day.

**Voskhod.** Pushkina 11, (81532) 71597, Tue-Thu 17:00-01:00, Fri 17:00-04:00, Sat 13:00-04:00, Sun 13:00-01:00. Sports bar of the movie theatre on the pedestrian street, which also has game automats and billiards. A disco for young people on weekends, 22:00-05:00.

**Gandvik.** Lomonosova 4, (81532) 64139, Mon-Thu, Sun 18:00-03:00, Fri-Sat 18:00-06:00. Bar and billiards.

### Services

**City administration.** Sivko 1, (81532) 64171.

**Post office and telephone.** Sivko 1.

**Sberbank.** Lomonosova 28a, (81532) 64175.

There is a **supermarket** located on Energetikov Street on the left side as you leave Statoi. The square is on the other side of the street.

There is a **sauna** in the swimming hall and in Hotel Pirenga.

**First aid.** Nivsky 1a, (81532) 76952.

**Militia.** (81532) 64543.

### **Events**

Polyarnye Zori's **City Day** is celebrated on April 22.

A **troubadour festival** is arranged on the shore of Pinozero Lake in the middle of June.

A small **rock festival** is held at the culture house in the beginning of December.

### **Transportation**

The railway station is located on ring-like Energetikov Street.

Buses leave from and arrive at the railway station. There are buses to Kandalaksha about once an hour from six in the morning until ten at night. The last bus back leaves Kandalaksha already at 20:00. There are less buses on Sunday. There is a bus to Murmansk at 5:40 and to Kovdor at 17:30. A bus goes to Apatity and the airport from Monday to Friday at 5:10. The returning buses leave the airport at 22:10 and drive via Apatity's Lenin Square. Buses also run to Zasheyek and Afrikanda.

Taxis: (81532) 71515, 71300, (921) 6053232.

### **LYSAYA GORA SKI CENTRE**

Polyarnye Zori's ski centre, which belongs to the nuclear power plant, is smaller than Kirovsk's slopes, but better equipped and maintained. National-level competitions are arranged on the ski centre's steep slopes. There are three slopes. There are T-bar, disk and children's lifts. The vertical drop of the highest slope is 270 metres and the longest run is 1400 metres. Imandra Lake can be seen from the slopes. The season lasts from Nov. 4 to May 15, but there may be snow on the slopes as late as June.

Services are offered by a hotel, a restaurant, a bar and an equipment rental shop. Lodging service operates in the summer, also. The lodging rooms and restaurant are in a log building and the bar is in a Lapp hut. The sauna burned in 2007.

The ski centre is located along the main highway about ten kilometres north of the city. There are signs after the junction.

**Lysaya Gora ski centre and hotel.** (81532) 43271, 78431. In season, Mon-Sun 10:00-18:00. Even though the centre is supposed to be open until 18:00, when I went there it was closed already before five. Day ticket €10, one hour €3 and one lift ride €1. Lodging for 42. One person in a three-bed room costs €15.

**Restaurant Polyarnaya noch.** (921) 1501122.

In season, Tue-Fri 9:30-17:30, Sat 11:30-17:30, Sun 11:00-17:30.

## **NORTH OF POLYARNYE ZORI**

When you drive north of Polyarnye Zori along Kola's main highway, you come to the beautiful lake scenery of Imandra and Pirenga Lakes. The high Khibiny Mountains rise in the background. Imandra is the largest lake on the peninsula. It is comprised of three parts: Babinskaya Imandra on the west side of the road, Yekostrov Imandra on the east side and Great Imandra to the north. The Imandra lakes do not have much fish, but some freshwater fish is caught in Babinskaya Imandra. The road crosses over Pirenga Lake at the point where it flows as foaming rapids into Yekostrov Imandra.

Sami people from Babinskaya's *siida* used to live near Babinskaya Imandra. Among them were respected wise men who were sought for help all the way from Finland. Today descendants of the Babinskaya Sami people live in the settlement of Yona in the Kovdor district, but their language has disappeared.

There are service stations along the road at Polyarnye Zori and the Kovdor junction 20 km north of Polyarnye Zori.

**Pirenga Vacation Centre.** (921) 1532585, (921) 3133288, (911) 313 32 88. The vacation centre, which belongs to Monchegorsk's nickel company,

rents a ten-person cabin for €294. It is equipped with a shower, a sauna and a swimming pool. It is situated along the road to Kovdor 3 km from Kola's main highway. Signs show the way.

## **KOVDOR**

This guide was also supposed to include a chapter about the small administrative district of Kovdor, which is located between the Finnish border and Imandra Lake. Kovdor is a city with 26,000 residents, where iron ore is mined. The chapter was not written, because we were not able to visit Kovdor when this guide was being compiled.

The city is located in the frontier zone, and a visitor's permit is required to go there. We were granted a similar permit to visit the Alakurtti area, but not Kovdor.

We began applying for the permit a month and a half in advance. First the attitude in the city administration was positive and we were told the permit is just a formality. Then things changed. The City of Kovdor wanted additional explanations. I wasn't going to visit alone, I would have had my friends, ordinary Finnish tourists, with me. The city manager demanded "written recommendations" for the group from Finland.

The recommendations were sent, but apparently in vain: they had decided not to grant the permit. The city was not obligated to invite ordinary tourists, only me. They couldn't know who my travelmates were, and they couldn't guarantee their backgrounds to the security authorities.

But how, then, can ordinary tourists get to Kovdor? If tourists are not allowed in the city, there's no sense in writing about it in a travel guide. The mayor admitted that there is no tourism. We finally thought we had come to an agreement. The size of our group got smaller and everything looked good again. The city's positive recommendation was sent to the frontier guard. We began to plan our programme.

The last and final blow came a week before our trip. We were informed that the permit could not be granted because the visit is not mentioned in the original operating plan of the tourism project. In addition, we supposedly began applying for our permit way too late: the city administration has to

inform the frontier guard about the next year's planned visits already during the previous year.

According to the Russian embassy a frontier zone permit has to be applied for one month before the trip, but in Kovdor processing takes one year. The best of luck and success to the development of Kovdor's tourism!

## **LAPLAND BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

When you drive north of Polyarnye Zori along the main highway, high, treeless fells become visible to the west after crossing the strait between Chuna and Imandra Lakes. The Chuna fells form a nearly fifty kilometre long chain of fells that belong entirely to the Lapland Biosphere Reserve.

The extensive Lapland Biosphere Reserve is the largest wild nature reserve on the Kola peninsula. The nearly 3000 square kilometre area contains a wealth of different terrains: high, treeless fells, old pine and spruce forests, white-water rivers and small lakes. Most of this is beyond the reach of tourists, though, as recreational travel in the carefully protected nature reserve is not allowed. The reserve's administration has had plans to begin arranging organised hikes, but at least so far tourists are only allowed in the reserve's information centre in the southern part of the area.

The nature reserve was established already in 1930 to protect the wild reindeer. The wild reindeer is the same species as the reindeer, except that the reindeer is semi-tame. The reserve's wild reindeer stock has varied greatly over the decades. In 1960 is dropped to 200, while in the early 1980s there were already over 12,000 wild reindeer. The last time the wild reindeer in the nature reserve were counted from a helicopter with Finland's support in 2003, there were 1000 animals. The number was considered suitable with respect to the size of the area. The stock is regulated by three packs of wolves in the reserve area.

The information centre is situated on the shore of Chuna Lake in the southern part of the reserve. Kola's main highway bypasses the boundary of the reserve at the strait between Yekostrov Imandra and Chuna Lake. There is a new building by the road that will contain the reserve's information point. A road to the information centre five kilometres away turns west at the building.

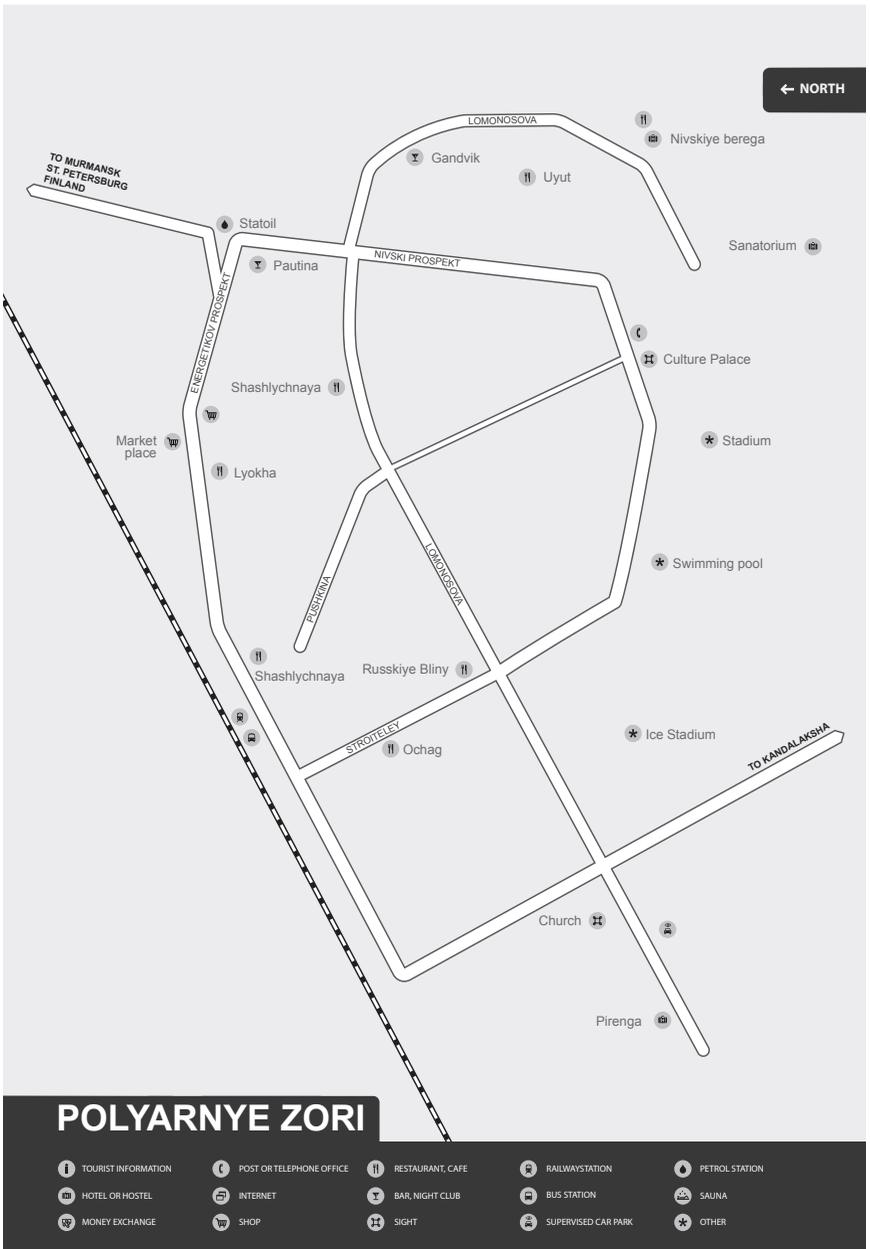
Visits are possible only by advance arrangement and they cost €3 per person. The information centre itself is comprised of a few wooden buildings on the lakeshore. The museums of German Kreps and Oleg Semyonov-Tian-Shansky, who founded the reserve, operate in the buildings. In winter there is a half-kilometre illuminated (!) nature trail in the surroundings of the centre that meanders in the vicinity of a creek that is unfrozen all year round. The creek flows from Yelyavr Lake. In the spring sun old spruces formed beautiful shadows on the snow. Rabbit and pine marten tracks were visible in the snow. They say foxes, otters, willow grouse and game birds also thrive in the surroundings. Swans can be seen on the lake. In the summer there are guided tours from the information centre to Yelnyun, the closest peak of the Chuna fells rising in the background, where there are *sieidi* sacrificial stones (see Kandalaksha: *Sieidi* sacrificial stones).

The significance of the nature reserve lies in its size: the protected area is so large that mammals and fish can spend their entire lives in the reserve without ever leaving it. Two rather large rivers, Nyavka and Chuna, flow entirely within the reserve and supplement the badly decimated fish stock of Imandra Lake with their trout and Arctic char. Thirty to forty bears live in the reserve, and threatened birds of prey can be seen there.

About 60 % of the reserve consists of on forests and bogs, 40 % is tundra. Some of the trees are up to 500 years old. There has never been any extensive logging in the area, but forest fires have destroyed trees from time to time. Long ago the area was pastureland of Sami communities. Tens of *sieidi* sacrificial rocks have been found in the reserve.

The nature reserve is supervised from guard huts located around the reserve. This does not prevent unauthorised trespassing in the area. The most popular site of unauthorised recreational travel are the two waterfalls (6 and 15 m) on the northwest side of Seidyavr Lake where the Chuna and Monche Fells meet, which can be accessed by trekking from a side road of Murmansk's main highway.

**Lapland Biosphere Reserve office.** Monchegorsk, Zelyonyi pereulok 8, (81536) 58018, 57199, lapland@lapland.ru, www.lapland.ru.



# POLYARNYE ZORI

TOURIST INFORMATION

POST OR TELEPHONE OFFICE

RESTAURANT, CAFE

RAILWAYSTATION

PETROL STATION

HOTEL OR HOSTEL

INTERNET

BAR, NIGHT CLUB

BUS STATION

SAUNA

MONEY EXCHANGE

SHOP

SIGHT

SUPERVISED CAR PARK

OTHER

## 6. APATITY

### THE ROAD TO APATITY

The road to Kirovsk and Apatity turns off Kola's main highway 51 km north of Polyarnye Zori and 34 km south of Monchegorsk. It is hard to miss the junction. Magnificent views of Imandra Lake open along the road to Apatity at Yekostrov Strait. Fells are visible beyond the lake. In March there were ice fishermen in tents on the ice. There is an old settlement of Yekostrov *siida* Sami people on the west side of the strait. Soviet rule abolished the *siida* in the 1930s. There are several Soviet-era vacation centres along the road to Apatity, some of which also welcome random tourists. Many of the vacation centres operate all year round.

**Vacation Centre Rus.** (921) 0329292, (921) 7348406. The log hotel emanates a Soviet-era atmosphere: decorative wood panelling and old photographs. It is worth visiting the hall furnished with Soviet furniture and paintings of the Khibiny Mountains and a squirrel feeding station outside the window. The vacation centre's dogs bark but don't bite, in fact they crave for attention. Sauna, a cold swimming pool and a fitness hall. Double room, €15. After Yekostrov Strait on the left side of the road towards Apatity. Signs from the highway. 13 km from Apatity to the junction.

**Vacation Centre Jaurens.** (921) 1672281. A few kilometres after Yekostrov Strait on the right side of the road towards Apatity. Ten-person cabin, €38, six-person cabin, €29. Sauna to order.

**Vacation Centre Sosnovaya Gorka.** (921) 2719251. On the northwest side of Yekostrov Strait. The vacation centre, which has seen better days, offers cabin lodging. Director Oleg Igorevich. Turn right at the first junction after Yekostrov Strait when coming from Apatity. The vacation village is at the end of the road.

**Vacation Centre Ryabinka.** (911) 3015384, (911) 3015378, (911) 3192103,

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(81555) 54991. On the southwest side of Yekostrov Strait. Director Elena Stepanovna. Two-person cabin, 200 roubles. No sauna. Turn left at the first junction after Yekostrov Strait when coming from Apatity. Then turn left again at the first junction.

## **APATITY**

Apatity lives up to its name. The collection of grey apartment buildings creates an apathetic feeling even though the rugged Khibiny Mountains rise in the background. Nevertheless Apatity, with its 64,000 residents, is South Kola's largest city, so it is difficult to pass by – especially if you are heading to the Khibiny Mountains. With its services it offers tourists a likely base for exploring the area. Apatity offers cheaper hotel lodging and services than Kirovsk, especially during the skiing season.

Apatity is the newest of Kola's cities. It was established in 1966 between the railway and the settlement of Belorechensk, founded in the 1930s. The reason for Apatity's existence is apparent from its name: the phosphate mineral, apatite, mined in Kirovsk, is refined here. The OAO Apatit Company employs as much as one-third of the city's population. A dreadful industrial complex exists beneath the Khibiny Mountains on the north side of the city. The beautiful fell scenery has been destroyed by building an immense apatite refinery and smokestacks of a heating plant in front of it. Apatity is a sorrowful example of the destruction of Kola's environment.

Not only is Apatity an industrial city, it is also Kola's scientific centre. Here, and not in Murmansk, is the Kola scientific centre of the Russian Academy of Science. The buildings of the scientific centre, called Akademgorodok or "academic city", are situated in a large park-like area on the north side of Lenin Square. The scientific centre has nine research centres in Apatity: institutes of chemistry, mining, geology, geophysics, ecology, informatics, energy and economics. The centre also has three museums. Four university branches also provide higher education in the city.

It is relatively easy to find your way around in Apatity. The centre of the city is – surprise, surprise – the Lenin Square, around which are the post

office, the Polyarnyi movie theatre and coffee shop and the main building of the scientific centre. The main streets, Lenina and Fersmana, named after Soviet geologist Alexandr Fersman, who studied Khibiny's minerals, take off from the square. If you walk west along Fersmana Street, the scientific centre area and a food store called Nauka (Science) are on the right. A park lane that takes off from the street displays rocks that represent minerals found in Kola. The next roundabout on Fersmana Street is Geologists' Square, around which are a bank, a telephone and a large Pcholka supermarket. Fersmana continues on from the square, bypasses the Salma art and handicrafts gallery and ends at a Statoil service station on the ring road.

If you walk south from Lenin Square along Lenina Street, the tall Hotel Ametist is on the immediate left, and the excellent Yantar Restaurant is situated along the side street, Kosmonavtov, on the right. Lenina Street continues past the city's culture building and swimming hall and ends in front of the Atlet sports palace on the ring road. The ring road circles the entire centre of the city – true, driving in the spring was hindered by an immense puddle that cut off the road.

There is an immense unfinished building standing on the corner of Kosmonavtov Street and Bredova Street, which takes off from Geologists' Square. Bredova is a common street name in the Kola Peninsula. The name originates from Anatoly Bredov, a 21-year-old soldier who was killed in WWII while defending Murmansk. According to the official version, Bredov was the last one of his platoon alive, and he threw a grenade that killed not only ten Fascists, but himself, also. Indeed the story doesn't relate how this is known, if Bredov was the last Soviet soldier alive.

The railway station and the surrounding residential area "Apatity-1" are situated a little apart from the rest of the city on the west side of the tracks. From here a side road takes you a couple kilometres to the settlement of Tik-Guba on the shore of Imandra Lake. Tik-Guba even has a swimming beach for daredevils. A hydrometeorological research station operates in Tik-Guba.

When you arrive in Apatity by car, you first come to a traffic militia checkpoint. Especially at night, the papers of all cars are checked. We had to

get an insurance paper for the militia from a vacation centre ten kilometres away in the middle of the night. When you reach the settlement, avoid the first turn to the left, even though the sign direct you to Apatity. This junction takes you to a bypass road in very bad condition. The next road to the left is a much better alternative for getting to the city centre and Kirovsk.

## Museums and galleries

### Scientific centre's northern areas' research museum.

Akademgorodok, building 40 a, (81555) 79255, patsia@isc.kolasc.net.ru. Mon-Fri 10:00-17:00. Well-arranged exhibition displays Sami artefacts and information about Kola's researchers and natural resources.

**Scientific centre's mineralogy museum.** Fersmana 14, (81555) 79739.

**Scientific centre's geology museum.** Fersmana 16. (81555) 79255, 79274. Mon-Fri 10:00-13:00 and 14:00-18:00.

**City museum.** Lenina 24 A, (81555) 74640.

**Salma art.** Dzherzinskogo 1, (81555) 41183.

Mon-Fri 11:00-19:00, Sat 11:00-18:00, Sun 11:00-16:00.

Stone products, jewellery and souvenirs.

**Gallery M.** Lenina 3.

## Lodging

**Ametist.** Lenina 3, (81555) 74966, 76409, hotel-ametist@yandex.ru. The city's "number one hotel", true this reputation is from the Soviet era. Over 200 beds. Located in the city centre off Lenin Square. Double room, €24-€79 depending on the quality. All the rooms have a WC and washroom. Some of the rooms have a view of the Khibiny Mountains. The second floor bar is open 8:00-24:00.

**Izovela Sanatorium.** (81555) 62666, izovela@com.mels.ru. Here the daring can get mud baths, massages, laser therapy and even leech treatments. Double room, €12-€31 depending on the quality. The sanatorium has a canteen, full care costs an additional €21 per day. Sauna.

**Olimp.** Chehova 14 a. (81555) 62117, 62241, goroo@aprec.ru.  
Children's "supplementary education centre" or former pioneer palace  
hostel. Double room, €8.

**Uyut.** Zhemchuzhnaya 7a. (81555) 71444. Only five rooms. Double room,  
€15. Restaurant. Situated near the railway away from the city centre.

**Biznes-industriya rooming house.** Dzerzhinskogo 35, (81555) 44586.  
Double room, €18.

### **Food**

**Yantar.** Kosmonavtov 8, (81555) 77028. Mon-Sun 12:00-24:00. A  
pleasant, high-quality coffee shop that also serves meals. The best that  
Apatity has to offer.

**Zapolyarye.** Lenina 31a, (81555) 63127. Mon-Thu 12:00-24:00, Fri-Sun  
12:00-01:00. A Soviet-spirited, heavily furnished restaurant.

**Kaspii.** Dzherzinskogo 18 a. This place run by Caucasians offers food until  
three in the morning. When we were there the band played the familiar  
prison-theme hit, Vladimirsky tsentral.

**Vecherneye.** Bredova 1, (81555) 74317. Mon-Sun 12:00-23:00. Not a  
particularly inviting place.

**Statoil.** At the intersection of Fersmana Street and the ring road. The  
Norwegian service station offers also this Kola city's best fast food.

**Ivushka.** Lenina 22 a. Mon-Fri 11:00-15:00. Canteen.

### **Coffee shops**

**Yantar.** See Food.

**Polyarnyi.** Lenina 3, (81555) 61999. Mon-Sun 12:00-24:00.  
Movie theatre coffee shop is quite OK. Ice cream dishes.

**Kafe-morozhenoye.** Kosmonavtov 7, (81555) 61802.

### **Night life**

**Filin.** Fersmana 2 a, (81555) 62191. Mon-Sun 20:00-05:00.  
Night club frequented by students.

**Viking.** Kosmonavtov 36, (81555) 43060. Mon-Sun 12:00-06:00. Night club, also food.

**Aivengo.** Lenina 22 a, (81555) 62757. Mon-Sun 12:00-24:00.  
Local pub atmosphere.

**Grill bar.** Fersmana 2 a. Mon-Sun 10:00-23:00. Bar.

**Caesar.** Dzerzhinskogo 48, (81555) 70779. Mon-Wed, Sun 12:00-24:00,  
Thu-Sat 12:00-03:00. Bar.

**Khutorok.** Dzerzhinskogo 50, (81555) 64222. Mon-Wed,  
Sun 12:00-23:00, Thu-Sat 12:00-01:00. Bar.

## Services

**Administration.** Lenina 1, 76495.

**Culture building.** Lenina 24.

**Post office.** Fersmana 11 (Lenin Square). Mon-Sun 8:00-21:00.  
Internet Mon-Sat 10:00-22:00 and Sun 11:00-20:00.

**Telephone.** Geologists' Square, corner of Fersmana and Bredova Streets.  
Mon-Sat 10:00-21:00, Sun 12:30-18:00.

**Sberbank.** Fersmana 32 a. Mon-Fri 10:00-14:00 and 15:00-19:00,  
Sat 10:00-14:00 and 15:00-17:00, Sun 10:00-14:00 and 14:30-16:30.  
Currency exchange. Geologists' Square.

**Supermarket Pcholka.** Fersmana Street, towards the ring road from the  
corner of Bredova Street. Mon-Sun 8:00-24:00.

**24-hr store.** Between Kosmonavtov Street and the Dzerzhinskogo  
pedestrian street.

**Bookstore Bukinist.** Severnaya 16, (81555) 62966.

**Banya.** Energeticheskaya 29 A. (81555) 61712.  
Sauna. Swimming hall. Lenina 26, 61797, (81555) 61070.

**Vorobyinaya Gora ski centre.** 62241. Small ski centre on the north side  
of the city. Vertical drop only 80 m.

**Atlet sports palace.** (81555) 77437, 74978. Sauna to order.  
Climbing wall.

**Hospital.** Kosmonavtov 21, (81555) 45271, 40090.

## Other

**Kola nature conservation centre** (Kolsky tsentr ohrany dikoi prirody). (81555) 66286, (921) 2740014, kola@biodiversity.ru, bubo\_bubo@mail.ru, www.kola-nature.ru. Kola's most active nature conservation organisation operates in Apatity. It seeks to establish conservation areas and has promoted the preservation of forests, the Khibiny Mountains and Kanozero.

**Kola ecological co-ordination centre Gaia.** Moskovskaya 2-8, (81555) 75553, (921) 6601547, kec.org.ru, gaia@aprec.ru. Various projects in the field of environmental protection. Chairperson Elena Kruglikova.

## Events

A **jewellery exhibition** called Kamennyi tsvetok is held in Apatity's culture building in late January, tel. (81555) 62003.

Eskimoskiye igry, an **"Eskimo games"** event, is arranged in the surroundings of Apatity and Kirovsk at the end of March, in which teams compete in events like building a snow cave, skiing, orienteering and escaping an avalanche.

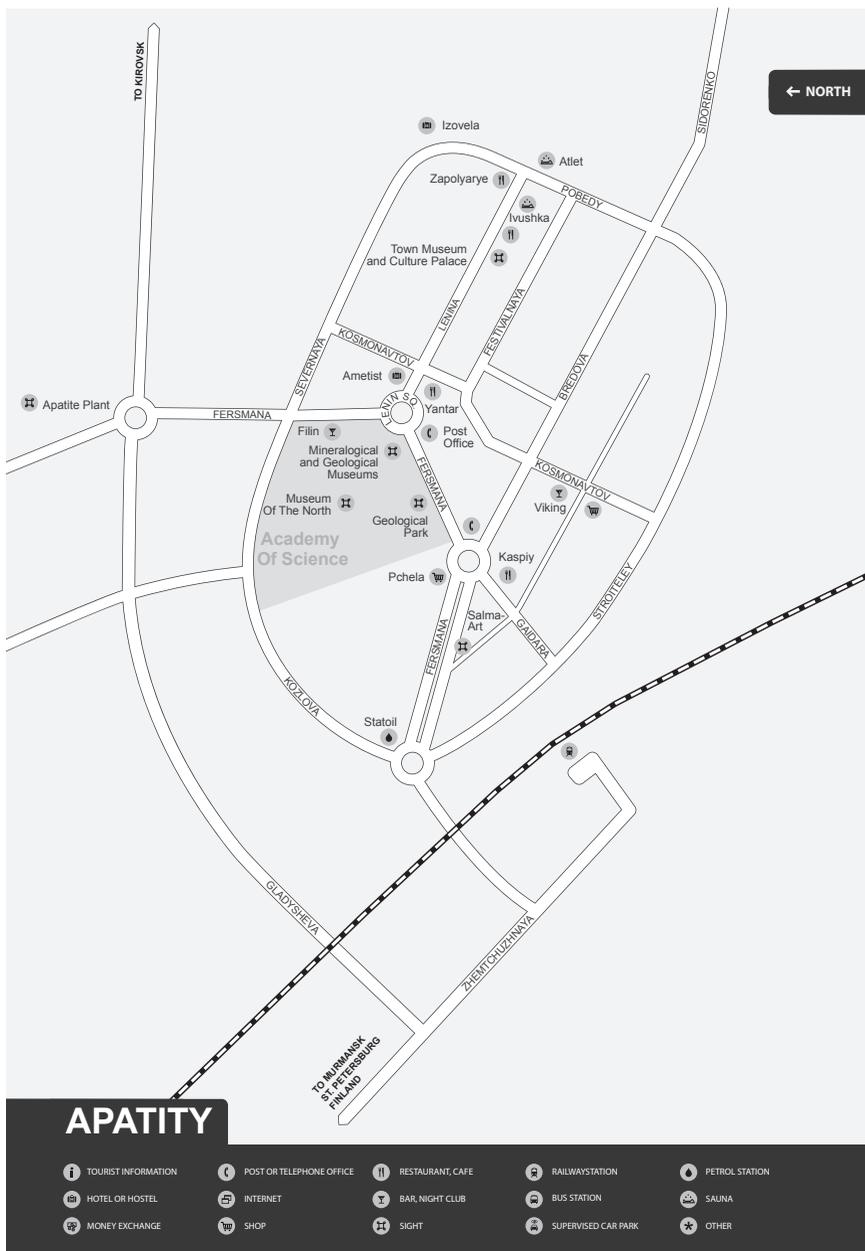
## Transportation

**Khibiny airport** is located halfway between Apatity and Kirovsk (see How do I get to South Kola?).

A **plane, train and bus ticket booth** operates in a nine-storey building behind Lenin Square. (81555) 62132. Mon-Fri 5:45-13:00 and 14:00-19:00, Sat-Sun 5:45-13:00 and 14:00-18:00. Bus tickets are also sold at the post office.

**Railway station.** (81555) 71200. Buses 5 and 13 run from the station to the city centre.

**Buses to Kirovsk** are 101, 102 and 105. Bus 101 leaves from the railway station. They all stop on Fersmana Street.



## 7. KIROVSK

Kirovsk, built on the slopes of the Khibiny Mountains, is one of the best cities in Kola. West Russia's highest alpine ski slopes are found in the surroundings of Kirovsk, and most of the trekking routes to the Khibiny Mountains start from the city. You can also spend time in Kirovsk by visiting the exceptional arctic botanical garden or by relaxing in the brand new swimming hall. Tourism has created services in Kirovsk. Although it is a small city with 34,000 residents, here you can choose from several hotels and restaurants. There are travel agencies in the city.

Most beautiful in Kirovsk is its setting, the Khibiny Mountains, which surround it to the west, north and east. In winter Kirovsk is covered with snow. Ploughed routes are lined with snowbanks many metres high. They contain buried cars or basketball hoops. Steep streets become impassable. Pedestrians who fight the winds and snowstorms are very brave. It is immediately apparent that Kirovsk is a skiing city. A small lift for little children hums in the city centre. The actual ski centre on Aikuaivenchorr Fell rises right above the buildings. Viewed from the slopes, the city with its apartment buildings appears to be on the palm of the hand. Kirovsk has three ski centres, described further on. In the summer Kirovsk's slopes are used by hang gliders.

The city primarily consists of Soviet-era apartment buildings spread out in rows along the slopes of the fell. Some of the houses appear to frighteningly askew. In the very centre of the city are older buildings from Stalin's period. The most architecturally magnificent view opens from Lenin Square up the main street, Lenina, a park-like street framed by symmetrical buildings, towards the culture building adorned with columns. Concerts and other public events are arranged in the building. If the possibility arises, it is worth visiting inside the building. Another landmark in the city centre is the bell tower created from the former fire

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tower, whose aesthetics divide people's opinions. Lenin Square is decorated by a statue of Lenin. Kirovsk's so-called city park is located on a slope east of the city. It differs very little from ordinary fell undergrowth.

History can be sensed in Kirovsk along the railway below the city proper, where there is a deserted old phosphate plant and railway station. The station, adorned with columns and arched windows, is an impressive sight. A funeral home operates next door. Still lower is the fell lake, Great Vudyavr. Kirovsk's church stands on the other side of the city along the incoming route. The new building is not particularly attractive.

Kirovsk is a mining city, built around the rich apatite deposits of the Khibiny Mountains. Mining began in the 1930s in the so-called 25th kilometre suburb. The mines and railway were built using prison labour, and conditions were harsh. The ore was extracted with picks and transported with horses. The workers lived in tents and pits in the ground. The first wooden barracks were built below slopes prone to avalanches. In 1934 as many as 88 people were killed when the residential buildings were buried under snow. The Germans bombed Kirovsk during the war. After the war the city centre was moved to its current location. Kirovsk was originally called Khibinogorsk or "Khibiny Mountains". After the murder of Leningrad's party leader Sergey Kirov the city was named after him. Kola had belonged to the area governed by Kirov, but he visited his future namesake city only twice. There are several cities with the name Kirovsk in Russia.

Many residents of Kirovsk still get their livelihood from the mining industry. Apatit Company, which extracts phosphorous-rich apatite used by the fertilizer industry, employs as many as 13,500 people in Kirovsk and Apatity. The oldest mines still in operation are situated in the 25th kilometre suburb, while the so-called main mine, accessed via the South Slope ski centre, is the largest. Apatite concentrate is manufactured in two refineries, one in Apatity and the other near the South Slope ski centre. Apatit Company's tall main office is situated on Leningradskaya Street. Twenty percent of the company was owned by Russian billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was sentenced to prison partly because of

confusion related to Apatit Company. The court determined that he had obtained his shares from the state through criminal business operations.

### **Tourist information**

Lenina 7, (921) 1676747, (84591) 57711.

### **Swimming hall**

Kirovsk's brand new swimming hall, Delfin, is a great place to relax after skiing or trekking. The hall has a 25-metre pool, a water slide, a Jacuzzi and a Turkish sauna.

**Delfin swimming hall.** Mira 9, (81531) 34406, 52701. Entrance Tue-Fri 18:00-20:00, Sat-Sun 15:00-20:00, swimming time continues until 22:00. In addition, the pool alone is open Tue-Sun 8:00-14:00 and 15:00-20:00. Take your own swimsuit, towel, swimming cap and slippers. Caps and slippers can be rented.

### **Culture**

**Culture building.** On the corner of the boulevard from Lenin Square and Mira. The city's jazz and brass ensemble, circus and various dance groups operate here. The building is worth visiting even for its grand Stalin-era architecture.

**Venedikt Erofeyev museum.** Lenina 15. (81531) 96321. The late Russian author grew up in a children's home in Kirovsk. The museum corner is in the city library.

### **Lodging**

Kirovsk has several hotels of varying quality, but especially for the March-April season you should reserve lodging several months in advance. Advance reservations are best made through a travel agency. The price level is higher in Kirovsk than elsewhere in South Kola. What's more, some hotels raise their prices during the skiing season.

**Severnaya.** Lenina 11, (81531) 54442, 33100, severnaja@apatit.com. The city's number one hotel also has a good price-quality ratio. A double

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room costs €47-€62, including breakfast, which is not typical in Russia. No season prices. The rooms are furnished with handsome dark wood. There is a good restaurant downstairs, open Mon-Thu, Sun 8:00-15:00 and 19:00-24:00 and Fri-Sat 11:00-15:00 and 17:00-03:00. Manicures, pedicures, a hairdresser and a solarium.

**Gornitsa.** Dzerzhinskogo 19, (81531) 59111, gornitsa@list.ru. The city's newest hotel and one of the most pleasant. 36 double and triple rooms, some on two levels. A double room costs €71, including breakfast. Billiards. A small restaurant upstairs serves breakfast and supper, open Tue-Sun 9:00-11:00 and 18:00-24:00.

**Ekkos.** Lenina 12a, (81531) 32716. Overpriced lodging, recognisable by its end tower visible from Lenina Street. A major renovation is underway, now the interior is Soviet-spirited. Double room in season €74, at other times €59.

**Khibiny.** Leningradskaya 7, (81531) 58901, 58902, khibiny@com.mels.ru, www.khibiny.mels.ru. Located a little way from the centre at the top of the slope. Soviet atmosphere. Wall paintings with a skiing theme. Most of the rooms have been renovated. In the unrepaired rooms water leaked from the sink onto the WC floor. Double room in season (1.3.-10.5.) €39-€54. The price includes mandatory breakfast and supper, served at specific times in the second-floor restaurant. The seating arrangement is always the same. The restaurant is open Mon-Sun 9:00-12:00, 14:00-17:00 and 19:00-20:30. The third-floor bar is open Mon-Sun 10:00-22:00 and the downstairs bar, Mon-Sun 18:00-04:00. The hotel has a sauna and a fitness room.

**Kaskad.** Yubileinaya 14 B, (81531) 56358, kaskad@kirovsk.net, www.kaskad.kirovsk.net. Motel-like little hotel on the shore of the pond in the centre of Kirovsk. Double room €32. Cellar bar open Mon-Sun 12:00-24:00.

**Sport.** Dzerzhinskogo 7a, (81531) 92650, 91145. The city's cheapest hotel is intended for sports groups and it is packed full in season. 120 beds in simple rooms. Double room €25, without a shower €20. The canteen is open Mon-Sun 9:00-19:00, the bar Mon-Sun 20:00-03:00. Drive to the

hotel between buildings 5 and 7 on Dzerzhinskogo Street.

**25th kilometre lodging** see 25th kilometre.

It is also possible to find **home lodging**.

## Food

**Kafe Vecherneye.** Khibinogorskaya 29, (81531) 92274.

Tue-Thu 13:00-23:00, Fri 13:00-01:00, Sat 14:00-17:00 and 18:00-01:00, Sun 14:00-22:00. One of the city's best places to eat, although the service is slow. A blues band played when we were there. The actual restaurant is located in the cellar. A coffee shop at street level also serves food.

**Hotel restaurants.** The best is Severnaya, which has a special on meals during the day.

**Stolovaya (canteen).** Leningradsky prospekt 5. Mon-Fri 9:00-15:00.

The bar is open Mon-Thu 12:00-19:00 and Fri-Sat 12:00-21:00.

**Bolshoi Vudyavr.** (see Night life).

## Night life

**Bolshoi Vudyavr.** Lenina 8, (81531) 32930, 54820.

Wed-Thu, Sun 21:00-01:00, Fri-Sat 21:00-06:00. One of the city's top entertainment places. Beer bowling; a disco on weekends. The restaurant is open Mon-Tue 13:00-15:00, Wed-Thu, Sun 13:00-01:00,

Fri-Sat 13:00-06:00. Specials on daytime meals.

**Lavina.** Olimpiyskaya 13. Mon 17:00-24:00, Tue-Thu 17:00-04:00,

Fri-Sun 15:00-06:00. After-ski night club whose name means avalanche.

**Bar Okean.** Lenina 17. Mon-Sun 9:00-22:00.

**Bar Zenit.** Lenina 3. Mon-Sun 8:00-22:00.

## Services

City hall. Lenina 16, (81531) 58436.

**Telephone and Internet.** Lenina 9 (Lenin Square).

Mon-Sat 10:00-21:00.

**Post office.** On the corner of Lenina and Leningradskaya. Mon-Sat 9:00-20:00. You can also use the Internet at the post office on Mon-Fri 12:00-15:00 and 15:30-18:30 and Sat 12:00-15:00 and 15:30-17:00.

**Sberbank.** Yubileinaya 2, (81531) 54549.

**Plane and train ticket booth.** Yubileinaya 10, (81531) 94160.

**24-hr food store** in the Hotel Kaskad building.

The **market square** is located next to the Lavina night club on Olimpiyskaya Street.

**Apothecary.** Lenina 28, (81531) 54328. Mon-Fri 8:00-21:00, Sat 8:00-20:00, Sun 10:00-19:00.

**Youth centre sauna.** Kondrikova 4 a, (81531) 94262.

Sauna to order, €12 per hour.

**Horseback riding.** (81531) 95397, 54723, (909) 5631565.

In the botanical gardens.

## Transportation

**Plane schedule** to the Khibiny airport, see: How do I get to South Kola?

**Railway station** is 15 km away in Apatity.

Buses run continuously between Apatity and Kirovsk. Bus 101 comes from the Apatity station. Buses 102 and 105 also travel along Fersmana Street in the centre of Apatity. The bus stop for buses leaving Kirovsk is on the corner of Khibinogorskaya on Lenin Street.

**Bus and plane ticket booth.** Yubileinaya 13.

**Taxi numbers** (921) 2804181, (909) 5631882, (911) 3065028, (81531) 55050, 54444, 120, 190.

## ALPINE SKIING

Kirovsk's ski slopes are the highest in West Russia - the vertical drop is as much as 615 metres. As in Lapland, the ski season lasts from November-December to the middle of May. There is alpine skiing at three different ski centres near the city. The slopes at all the centres are quite poorly groomed and there are a lot of stones. Skiing outside of the ski centres is possible with the help of snowmobiles.

Skiers in Kirovsk must be prepared for abrupt changes in the weather, for which reason the slopes and lifts may be closed unexpectedly. For example, during our four-day ski vacation in April the weather changed from calm, sunny and mild to windy, snowy and 10-below temperatures. The best time to come to Kirovsk is in March-April, which regrettably many have noticed: the lift lines were long.

### **City slopes**

The ski lifts of 1050-metre Aikuaivenchorr Fell start right above the apartment buildings at the edge of the city of Kirovsk. The ski centre's equipment is from the Soviet era. The highest lift is a chair lift, which was, however, closed unusually often "due to weather conditions" when we were there. Neither is it officially open as long as the other lifts. One can enjoy the scenery and freeze on the chair lift. There are four T-bar lifts. The slopes are moderately steep and not very well groomed. The greatest vertical drop is 570 m.

**City slopes (Gorodskiye sklony) or Kolasportland.** (81531) 95594, 95474, [www.ski-kolasport.narod.ru](http://www.ski-kolasport.narod.ru). Day ticket for the T-bar lift €12, for all lifts €21. One lift ride €1.50, chair lift €3. Equipment rental. Fast food booths.

### **Southern slopes**

The southern slopes of Aikuaivenchorr Fell 11 km from Kirovsk are the city's newest and highest ski centre. The vertical drop from the bottom station to the top of the highest lift is 615 metres. The slopes are gentler and better groomed than in the city. The southern slopes have two disk lifts, the first going halfway up and the second going the rest of the way to the top. Children have their own lift. The ski centre's official name, Bolshoi Vudyavr, is deceptive, as the lake of this name is located on the other side of Kirovsk.

**Southern slopes (Yuzhnye sklony) or Bolshoi Vud'yavr.** (81531) 34614, www.bigwood.ru, Mon-Sun 10:00-18:00. Ten lift rides €13, one lift ride €1.50. Drive 5 km towards Apatity from Kirovsk and turn left at the intersection. After 2.9 km turn left again. The ski centre is 2.8 km down this road.

### **25th kilometre slopes**

Steep Kukisvumchorr seven kilometres from Kirovsk best fills the stereotype of Russian ski centres. The road there is not cleared. Half of the T-bar lifts are out of order. The ticket inspector sells tickets under the table at reduced prices. The lifts are open even if visibility at the top is only twenty metres. The slopes are not groomed, and there are icy moguls under the snow. People ski in forbidden avalanche-prone areas. Services are offered in a wooden hut, which sells vodka and sausages. The experience is topped by blasting in the mine below, which causes the entire mountain to tremble.

The 25th kilometre slopes are Kirovsk's steepest. In practice, there are two possible alternatives for skiing: straight down or along a ridge that continues to the left. Between these routes and to the right are avalanche-prone areas, and you should not go there.

### **25th kilometre slopes (Sklony Dvadsatpyatogo kilometra)**

**or Kukisvumchorr.** (921) 1679697. Day ticket €18, three hours €10, one lift ride €1.

### **Alpine skiing off the groomed slopes**

Deep powder skiers ascend the Khibiny Mountains on foot or by snowmobile, which can be ordered from most tour operators in Kirovsk and Apatity. A snowmobile and driver for one day cost €150 in the spring of 2007. Popular places are the Kaskasnyunchorr and Rischorr Fells and the eastern ridges of Petrelius and Takhtarporr.

When skiing in deep powder, special attention must be paid to avalanche safety (see Avalanches), as many fatal accidents have happened at Khibiny.

Heli-skiing is not very popular in Kirovsk, as the helicopter has to be ordered from Murmansk at €1500 per hour.

### **”25th KILOMETRE”**

The suburb seven kilometres from Kirovsk is officially named Kukisvumchorr, but the locals just call it ”25th kilometre” (Dvadtsatpyaty kilometr). The name dating back to the Soviet era refers to the distance from Apatity’s railway station.

Kirovsk’s mines and city started from the 25th kilometre. Blasted mountains are visible on every side of the settlement. The area’s oldest quarry is still in operation here, and anyone who wishes can take a look at the large crater by walking without being stopped through the mining area. However, watch out for the giant Belaz mine vehicles moving around all over! The mine is at the end of the settlement.

The 25th kilometre neighbourhood has Kirovsk’s oldest building stock. The main street is bordered by stately Stalin-era apartment buildings, many of which are in poor condition. In the spring of 2007 the roof of one of the buildings had collapsed and the apartments were deserted, but a food store operated downstairs! The 25th kilometre has Kirovsk’s museum and a strange playground where a giraffe’s head stuck out of the snow in winter. A botanical garden and the Tirvas sanatorium are situated nearby.

The steep ski slopes of the 25th kilometre rise right behind the suburb (see Alpine skiing). Buses 1, 12 and 105 run from the city centre to the 25th kilometre suburb.

**Museum.** Sovetskaya 9, (81531) 52063, Tue-Sun 10:00-17:00.

History of Kirovsk and mining. An exhibition dedicated to party leader Sergey Kirov is situated in a separate wooden building.

**Tirvas Sanatorium.** (81531) 33680, 33670. Located next to the botanical garden. Tirvas offers less expensive lodging than the centre’s hotels (double room €24). A weary traveller can pamper himself here with various treatments.

**Day care centre lodgings.** (81531) 52684. The 25th kilometre day care centre offers simple lodging for skiers during the spring season. A bed in a large room costs €5, floor space €2.50.

**Botanical garden** cabin see Botanical garden.

**Kapriz.** Kirova 30, (81531) 52809.

**Sever.** Kirova 6, (81531) 51820.

## **BOTANICAL GARDEN**

Lemon trees, coffee trees, fig trees, cactuses, rain forest ferns and palm trees. The tropical greenhouse built next to the fell is Kirovsk's most unreal sight, especially in winter when there is over a metre of snow outside.

The botanical garden was created in 1931, and its task was to bring greenness to the new northern cities. Plant species from the southernmost mountain areas were adapted to Kola's conditions. The botanical garden consists of an immense 1670-hectare area that is mostly an ordinary fell environment. There is a planted park near the garden buildings.

Exotic plants can be admired in tropical and cactus greenhouses. They say mice eat the palm trees in the greenhouse. Decorative plants are grown for sale in three greenhouses. Their flowering beauty includes gerberas, piasters, tulips and narcissuses.

The botanical garden is located near the "25th kilometre" suburb. The road to the garden turns left just before the suburb.

**Botanical garden.** (81531) 51436, 79130, pabgi@aprec.ru. Open all year Mon-Sun 8:30-16:00. You can visit the park without advance notice, but you should arrange a visit to the greenhouses beforehand. In winter the garden rents an ascetic five-person cabin to tourists. Inquire at (81531) 79302.

## **KHIBINY**

Khibiny's (Umptek in Sami) massive range of fells is Kola's most popular recreational area. In the spring it is populated by skiers from all over

Russia and daredevils who ski in deep powder off groomed slopes. Even then it is possible to find natural quietude in Khibiny if you ascend out of the reach of people into the majestic heights: a world of steep slopes, snow-filled valleys and white peaks.

Khibiny's specialty becomes apparent if you look at a map. The fell highlands comprise an unbroken massive range of fells 30 km in diameter that rises above the otherwise low-lying Kola Peninsula between Imandra and Uмба Lakes. While the surrounding land is only 150-300 metres above sea level, Khibiny's highest fell, Yudyumchorr, rises to 1200 metres. No wonder it is very windy on top of Khibiny - even windier than on the highest mountains.

Khibiny's scenery resembles Saana in Finland or northern Sweden's Abisko. The fells have relatively steep slopes and rounded peaks. The Ice Age ploughed the unbroken mass of mountains into ridges separated by valleys. The terrain here varies: there are gravel slopes, rock walls and gentler slopes containing meadows. Forest grows only in the surroundings of the Kuniyok River valley, where there is an abundance of suitable camping places. The rest of Khibiny is treeless. Plants resemble those found in northwest Lapland. Bountiful lichens indicate that reindeer do not graze here. A local specialty is the Khibiny poppy, which is found on gravel slopes above the tree line. There is snow in shady notches even in the summer.

The best time for recreational travel in Khibiny is March-April and in the summer. It is necessary to remember that the weather may change unexpectedly. Travellers are threatened by storm winds, poor visibility and avalanches, which are described further on. Especially in winter, if you travel elsewhere than in the Kukisumchorr Pass and the Kuniyok River valley you should take along a guide who is familiar with the terrain. Tour guides operating in Khibiny are listed in the chapter Practical information: How should I go. 1:100,000 maps of Khibiny are available (see Practical information: Maps).

It is quite easy to get to Khibiny, since the cities of Apatity and Kirovsk have grown so that they touch it. Most recreational travellers set out for

the fells from the Tirvas sanatorium on the edge of Kirovsk. You can park your car in the yard of the sanatorium. Another way to approach Khibiny is to take the local train from Apatity to the Nefelinovye Peski or Imandra stop.

From Tirvas most travellers follow the wide Kukisvumchorr Pass to the Kuniyok River valley 20 km away in the middle of the fell area. The trip takes all day, either trekking or skiing. A road passable by car in the summer goes along the pass to the Kuelporr rescue station in the middle of the valley. In winter the trip can be made by snowmobile, which can be arranged by Kirovsk's rescue service, Kuelporr's hostel or most tour operators in Kirovsk and Apatity. The price seems to be set by a cartel – in the spring of 2007 the rate was €66 for a one-way snowmobile trip from Kirovsk to Kuelporr. The trip took less than an hour. A snowmobile and driver for one day cost €150.

The routes in the mountains go over the lowest passes in the ridges, or *perevals* in Russian. There are several established routes and *perevals* in the fells. For example, an alternate route from the Kuniyok River valley to Kirovsk goes via the Western Petrelius Pass and the Ramsay's Pass. The difficulty of the passes varies. Some can be crossed without special equipment, others require crampons, safety ropes, etc. In addition to the valleys and passes, in Khibiny it is possible to travel along the upper plains. The best alternatives for skiing in the fells may be telemark or touring skis, which are suitable for both alpine and cross-country skiing. Deep powder skiing is described in more detail in the chapter on alpine skiing. Surfaces of varying difficulty are available for rock, mountain and ice climbing.

A tent is not the only possibility of lodging in Khibiny. A hostel opened in 2006 operates in the Kuniyok River valley (67°48'1 and 33°36'3). It has neat six-person rooms. The rescue service station next door offers simple cabins and a sauna. Especially in season, lodging reservations should be made months in advance.

Khibiny is not a conservation area, there is mining operation there. Geological studies of the fells were started by Wilhelm Ramsay (1865-

1928), a Finn after whom the impressive Ramsay's Pass near Kirovsk was named. Ramsay's work was continued in the Soviet Union by academician Alexandr Fersman. Extraction of phosphorous-rich apatite was started in the 1930s near Kirovsk. Today a large area east of the city is comprised of quarries. Mining operation is expanding even further east to the vicinity of Nyorkpakhk Fell. A real threat to Khibiny is posed by the new SZFK Company's plan to begin quarrying at Partomchorr in the Kuniyok River valley in the heart of the fell area. This would mean extension of infrastructure and roads to the north side of Khibiny and destruction of the area's environmental and scenic values. Ore was prospected in the Kuniyok River valley already during the Soviet era, when "micro-nuclear explosions" or low-power underground nuclear explosions were made there. According to the authorities, no abnormal radiation has been detected in the terrain.

Apatite is recognised by its greenish colour. It's Greek name means "treacherous stone", as it may mistakenly be thought to be a more precious stone. However, glossy gold afstrofyllite and eudiolite, called "Laplander's blood" because of its blood-red splotches, are prettier stones.

We skied to Khibiny along the gradually rising Kukisvumchorr valley. We met several groups of travellers: from St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tula, Tikhvin. Many had set out for the fells with their children. Snowmobiles also whizzed by. Kukisvumchorr is a wide saddle valley. It was very windy at its highest point. The surrounding slopes were steep and we could see ice falls. Frighteningly heavy ledges of snow hung above shelves of rock. Nevertheless, we only saw traces of small avalanches. Man proved to be a worse danger factor than natural forces. Two drunken men driving a tracked vehicle "jokingly" pretended to run me over with their vehicle weighing many tonnes. I jumped into the bushes to avoid them, stumbled, and the track missed my foot by a half metre.

At our destination in the Kuniyok River valley we lodged at the Kuelporr youth hostel, which was full of children and youths. We borrowed a guitar from them and spent a pleasant evening moment singing songs. The youth hostel keeps a lonely reindeer, whose two pals

had escaped, in a fenced area.

On the second day we left the hostel for a day's trip east to the Risyok River valley. Along the way is a frozen waterfall in a narrow rock gorge. We ascended from the bottom of the valley to the pass on the South Rischorr ridge (67°45'8 and 33°41'0), which gave us a view east to Umba Lake and the Lovozero Fells visible beyond the lake. There is a memorial for a trekker that died at the pass. There was an very strong wind on the ridge and visibility began to get worse. We did not dare to continue to the upper plains in the direction of Akademicheskoye Lake, instead we turned back. Our guide, Slava Zaytsev, recalled a situation when he was not able to go down the Rischorr's slope because of the overpowering wind. In the evening we bathed in the rescue station's excellent sauna. We politely bypassed the possibility of swimming in the unfrozen Kuniyok River.

On the third morning we awoke early, as we knew we had a long day ahead. We intended to return from the Kuniyok River valley to Kirovsk via the Western Petrelius Pass and Ramsay's Pass. We followed the river through the valley, which had a sparse growth of spruce. As we ascended the forest changed to bushes and then to stunted tundra vegetation. The Western Petrelius Pass (67°43'8 and 33°30'6) is very steep. We negotiated the climb without crampons, as the snow was soft. We carried our skis on our backs. From the pass we went down to the snow-filled Lutnarma River valley, from where Imandra Lake is visible to the west.

A skier feels himself small at the foot of such magnificent peaks. The landscape resembled a black and white Japanese drawing: snow-covered mountains, steep rock walls, gorges, rocky slopes, deep gullies and stunted birches. The wind had carved fantastic shapes into the surface of the snow.

We slowly ascended the last ridge, Ramsay's Pass (67°42'7 and 33°32'7), named after Finnish geologist Wilhelm Ramsay, who discovered Khibiny's ore reserves. The narrow gorge between rock walls tens of metres high is like a giant gateway. The wind had driven snow into it. We went down an endless pure white valley and enjoyed the absolute quiet

for yet a moment. When we looked back we saw that Ramsay's Pass was hidden by a thick snow cloud. We got out in time.

Before coming to Kirovsk, next to Small Vudyavr Lake we saw mysterious holes drilled into the ground from which water spurted. The frozen blue column of water was a strange sight.

Our trip ended suitably for a weary traveller in the yard of the Tirvas sanatorium.

**Kuelporr hostel.** Kuniyok River valley. The youth hostel owned by the Ramzay-Sever Company in Kirovsk (see Practical information: How should I go?) offers pleasant lodging in neat six-person rooms. The furniture appears to be from Ikea. WC, shower, possibility to prepare food and buy food - a meal costs €6. Sheets on the beds. Double room €47, a bed in a six-person room €15-€18. Reservations should be made well in advance. Ramzay-Sever arranges transports by car in the summer and by snowmobile in winter.

**Rescue station's cabins.** Kuniyok River valley. The rescue station has three old, simple but heatable cabins. One night costs €3-€5 per person. Especially in late winter the cabins are often packed full. Advance reservation is difficult, but you can try through Kirovsk's rescue station (see Avalanches). You can ask the person in charge of the station about the possibility to bathe in the sauna by the river. We paid €29 for two hours of bathing.

## **AVALANCHES**

Every year people die in avalanches and other natural accidents in Khibiny and Lovozero Fells.

Because snow mass becomes critical on 25 – 45-degree slopes, the threat of avalanches is greatest for deep powder skiers. They themselves trigger avalanches. Cross-country skiers do not ski on such steep slopes, so they are only buried by avalanches by chance.

The southern slopes are most prone to avalanches. The risk grows after a heavy snowfall or on spring afternoons when the sun warms the snow.

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Safety equipment needed to prepare for an avalanche includes shovels, probe sticks, beepers and marking ribbons that the Russians use. These should always be included on a deep powder skier's list of equipment.

Safety equipment doesn't do any good if a snow ledge weighing thousands of kilos drops on you.

Another danger that a traveller in Khibiny faces is poor visibility. You should not venture into the upper plains if the fells are covered by fog or clouds. A wrong step on top of a cliff or snow ledge may be fatal. In the summer there are stone and gravel slides on the slopes.

A rescue service operating under Russia's Emergency Ministry operates in Kirovsk. Its task is to help recreational travellers in trouble. The rescue service has an operating point in Kuelporr in the Kuniyok River valley, which has radio phone connections. It is recommended that a recreational traveller planning a demanding trip should report to the rescue service before leaving.

Because someone buried under snow lives for about ten minutes, the rescue service assists avalanche victims mainly by digging out their bodies. In other accident situations, though, the rescue service may have a decisive role. For example, if necessary they can come to the assistance of a traveller with a broken leg by helicopter. To make it possible to signal for help, travellers should have with them an Iridium-standard satellite phone.

**Kirovsk's rescue service.** Sovetskoi konstitutsiy 3, (81531) 58895. These husky men will come to help if you're in trouble in Khibiny. The rescue service arranges snowmobile transports. Here you can also hear terrific stories: we were told of a traveller whose head was cut off above his backpack by an avalanche. The rescue service provides up-to-date information about the weather, the avalanche situation and possible routes.

## **EAST OF KIROVSK**

There is a road east from Kirovsk to the settlement of Oktyabrsky on the south side of Umba Lake. Turn east off the Kirovsk-Apatity road 5 km before Kirovsk. The road branches after 11 kilometres: the left branch continues to the Koashva mine and the right branch continues 15 km to Oktyabrsky. The road to Oktyabrsky is interestingly paved with concrete, but it is passable by car.

Umba Lake (Umbozero in Russian, Umpyavr in Sami) is one of Kola's largest lakes. The body of water spread between the Khibiny Mountains and Lovozero Fells 45 km long and as much as 115 metres deep, which makes it the deepest lake on the peninsula. There is no road to the shore, but you can get close from Oktyabrsky or Revda. Umba Lake is unpredictable: in the summer a kayaker may be surprised by large waves, in winter the lake may not freeze over completely due to currents. Umba Lake does not have much fish, but you can catch pike and trout from smaller lakes nearby.

An off-road vehicle road continues on from Oktyabrsky at least to Fedorova Tundra Fell, possibly even further east in the direction of the Pana Fells. Canadian mining company Barrick has planned on opening a platinum mine on Fedorova Tundra Fell. A cross-country road that turns north to Revda follows the shore of Umba Lake and a side track. The road from Oktyabrsky south to Umba is passable only with an off-road vehicle (see Umba: The road from Umba to Kirovsk).

## **SHOOTING THE RAPIDS ON THE UMBA RIVER**

One of the most popular white-water routes and also most easily accessible in terms of transports is the Umba River, which drops 149 metres on the way from Umba Lake to the White Sea. According to the Russian classification the Umba is a class three river route for catamarans and rubber rafts and class four for canoes and kayaks. Thus, it is not suitable for beginners unless the rest of the crew is experienced and the worst rapids are portaged. The river is easiest to travel in midsummer. In early summer the large masses of water increase the force of the rapids and in

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late summer problems are caused by underwater rocks exposed by the low water level.

Rafting starts at the Kirovsk-Oktyabrsky road and ends at the village of Pogost a little before the settlement of Umba. The whole distance is about one hundred kilometres, or at least six days of hard paddling, or at least four days if the lakes are crossed with a motorboat. We travelled the route in five days with the help of a motor and no days of resting.

There are many established camping sites on the shores of the Umba River, which of course are quite full in season. At the end of August we saw three other kayaking groups on the river, but in July there are probably more.

Umba has Atlantic salmon, but the stock has declined due to overfishing and breeding of pink salmon (see Umba: Pink salmon). You can also catch grayling, whitefish, trout and pike.

We used a rubber pontoon catamaran favoured by the Russians, which probably can only be capsized on the river in Padun and the largest rapids in the Nizma tributary. Our guide was a local recreational traveller to whom we paid €150 per passenger for guide service, equipment rental and transports.

Except for a couple of small fast-flowing stretches, the start of the route consists of lazy still water and lakes. The surroundings are full of rugged forests of long, narrow Siberian spruce and bogs, beyond which the magnificent Khibiny Mountains rise.

Padun, the worst rapids on the Umba River, are the first to come 7 km from the starting point. The rapids are classified as class four rapids for rubber rafts and catamarans, and even more challenging for canoes and kayaks. An inexperienced paddler should not try his or her luck with Padun, and even an experienced paddler should check it beforehand from the shore. The rapids can be recognised by the growing roar and the narrowing channel.

The river drops 8 metres along the kilometre-long Padun. The rapids start with a 1.5 – 2-metre falls and a stopper should be negotiated down the middle on the right side of the small island on the left edge. Drifting

into the rapids sideways may be fatal with a catamaran, likewise falling into the water will probably result in a loss of life. The centre of the rapids contains strongly rolling water, eddies and stoppers. At the end, on the left side of the large island is another metre-high drop that should be bypassed to the left, but without crashing into the rock wall on the left.

A kilometre-long path travels along a rocky field on the left bank of Padun, along which equipment and kayaks can be portaged below the rapids. There are memorials of drowned kayakers along the path. The helmets and safety ropes of two schoolgirls were left at their memorial. Above them read "To two brave girls, Katya and Liza". There are suitable campsites below the rapids. When we arrived there, there was a group from Novgorod that had fun shooting the rapids several times.

Three kilometres after Padun are the shallow Kapustnoye Lakes, or "Cabbage Lakes", which most likely got their name from their abundant water plants. The Kapustnoye Lakes continue 15 km, which is agonizing to paddle with a catamaran or rubber raft that doesn't want to go straight. We used a motor part of the way, but the shallows made it difficult to use. At times it was easier to pull the catamaran along from the shore.

There is a strait between the upper and middle Kapustnoye Lakes that is paddled via the rapids of the left branch. There is a deteriorated bridge between the middle and lower Kapustnoye Lakes under which the raft has to be squeezed. The lower Kapustnoye Lake should not be paddled to the end, you should turn to the shore towards the right side of the ridge rising in the background. You should not paddle to the summer village of Kapustnoye visible ahead.

After the Kapustnoye Lakes there are a couple of smaller rapids in the river. Three kilometres after the still water the channel turns left, where you can hear the roar of rapids. Razboynik, or "Robber", is a class two rapids for a catamaran that you can shoot without checking beforehand. Canoers and kayakers should take a look at the rapids from the riverbank. We camped below the rapids in a place that even in late August was filled with mosquitoes, gnats and biting midges. The sun shone, it rained and rainbow appeared in the sky as we spent the evening under a canvas lean-

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to we rigged up. In the morning the river was covered by fog.

After the Robber we paddled six kilometres to Dedkova Lambina Lake, where there is a former village on the right shore. In the middle of the pond we passed a partially collapsed bridge. At the end we passed to the left of some islands, where the river continues as seven-kilometre-long but easily negotiated Semivyorstnyi Rapids. The rapids are followed by six kilometres of still water. There is a good campsite on the high sandy bank on the left, where we found a field sauna lined with foliage.

After the still water we came to smaller rapids (Karezhka and Karelsky), class two for a catamaran. Along the way we passed a salmon fishing camp where it would have been possible to buy a salmon permit. Seven kilometres later the river turns sharply to the left, to the second most difficult rapids along the route, Kanozero Rapids, where the Umba River empties its waters into Kanozero Lake. The rapids are class three for a catamaran and require checking beforehand. The kilometre-long rapids start with a small step. Shooting the rapids is difficult because of the numerous large rocks. There are several alternative routes that depend on the water situation. The oars are like levers that the paddler has to plunge into the river to turn the catamaran to avoid obstacles. There is another step and a stopper at the end of the rapids, followed by miserable shallows. We camped on an island immediately below the rapids, where we caught a grayling.

Kanozero Lake is nearly 30 kilometres long, and crossing it with a rubber raft or a catamaran in a headwind saps the energy of even the enthusiastic paddler. It is recommendable to take along an outboard motor or purchase a ride from the lake's gold-toothed forest ranger Vereshchagin, who demands a €100-€150 fee for the service. They say Vereshchagin often waits for paddlers at the mouth of the Umba River.

Kanozero is known for its Stone Age rock drawings (see Umba: Kanozero Lake rock drawings), most of which are located on the northernmost island. Paddling continues along the left shoreline until at the end you turn towards the sandy beach visible to the right. This is a good campsite with frames for canvas tent saunas. The river continues

onward from the left side of the beach as Rodvinga River. Another branch, Kitsa River, which takes off further north, has less water.

After Kanozero the surface of the Umba River drops another 50 metres before reaching the sea. There are small rapids between Kanozero and Ponchozero Lakes. The river branches about three kilometres after Kanozero. We went down the left branch, or Rodvinga. The right branch, Nizma, circles Ponchozero Lake and there is supposed to be difficult waterfall-like rapids along the way.

Ponchozero is an eight-kilometre long lake with boggy shores. Here we came upon a stinking pile of pink salmon from which the roe had been taken. After the lake the river again continues as the Umba River. Ahead is probably the most fun, five-kilometre continuous, fast-flowing rapids where many times the catamaran dives through nearly-metre-high waves of white water. The rapids are challenging for canoes or kayaks, class two or three for rubber rafts.

Below the rapids are six kilometres of lily pad-filled still water and small currents all the way to the village of Pogost, which has summer residents. There is a deserted salmon fishing camp on the right: Umba's salmon catches have decreased. Pogost is a good place to end the trip, because it is accessible by road. If you continue paddling to the Kandalaksha-Varzuga road, there are still ten kilometres of still water ahead. On the way you have to negotiate a salmon dam where researchers count Atlantic salmon and remove pink salmon from the river. And they don't take any for themselves, do they?

It is not recommendable to camp along the road, because it is restless near the settlement of Umba. We were met by a convoy of a few cars and motorcycles, which offered us expensive salmon and equally expensive rides.

A rafting trip on the Umba river can be arranged by, for example, the Ramzay-Sever travel agency in Kirovsk or the Sariola recreational club in Monchegorsk (see Practical information: How should I go). Ramzay-Sever charges €560/person for a rubber raft trip, including guides, equipment, tents, sleeping bags and meals. The lakes are crossed

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using outboard motors and the whole trips takes only four days. The price can be chewed down to €320/person without meals and camping equipment. Sariola uses catamarans at €150/person without meals and camping equipment.

The water in the Umba River is always cold, so paddlers should wear a wet suit and hip boots. When you add a life vest, helmet and mosquito netting, you have a moon man. Baggage can be placed in waterproof sacks and tied on or between the pontoons. We had a lot of stuff with us – chequered refugee sacks, a plastic barrel and even the flag of the Monchegorsk recreational club.

## **EVINRUDE**

We wanted to save our strength and time on the lake sections of the Umba River. Therefore we took along a 17-year-old 4-hp Evinrude outboard motor.

The Evinrude travelled with us across Finland and made it through customs. The first difficulties were encountered on the Kandalaksha-Apatity train. The young conductors thought they smelled gasoline in our baggage, which did include two filled canisters. Transporting flammable fluids on a train is forbidden, but we arrived at a solution that satisfied all involved parties: we paid the boys 200 roubles.

We started the Evinrude the first time on the Umba River's Kapustnoye Lakes. The feeling of speed lasted four kilometres. Then the motor's starter rope snapped. We started to fix the motor on an island at the north end of Kanozero. No one was interested in paddling 30 kilometres along the lake in a headwind with a catamaran that didn't want to go straight. We fixed the motor in a tent until late at night. We commented on the design of the Evinrude: it was amazingly difficult to open the cover of the motor. The most challenging task was installing the starter lever, which we nevertheless finally succeeded in doing.

The next day we succeeded in driving a couple hundred metres with the motor before it conked out and the back board of the mounting bracket came loose. We paddled five kilometres to the nearest island. The

carburettor needed adjustment. After that the trip continued as planned. We connected three catamarans together and the motor mounted on the first one was able to pull the line possibly up to seven km/h. It was faster than the two or three km/h paddling. Our progress was something to see: because the catamarans were fastened to each other with ropes, the first one swaying from side to side jerked the next one, causing a chaotic chain reaction. However, the motor saved us from the Kanozero and Ponchozero Lakes and the tiring still waters at the end.

The motor had to be dragged around the Kola Peninsula the rest of the trip, or the following two weeks. We thought of selling it, but because it was marked down on the customs papers, we had only one choice: the victorious return of the Evinrude from the great Kola expedition to Finland.



## 8. MONCHEGORSK

### MONCHEGORSK AREA

Just before Monchegorsk the main highway begins climbing the slope of a fell – we are arriving at Monche Fells (Monchetundry), which connect to the Chuna Fells (Chunatundry) in the east to form a whole mountain range. Because of the area's pollution, there is barely any recreational travel in the Monche Fells. There are two waterfalls at the junction of the two fell ranges, which also belong to a nature reserve.

The best legal recreational terrain is found in the Volchi Fells (Volchi tundry) on the north side of the Chuna Fells. The fell range that reaches an elevation of 956 metres is situated over 50 km from the main highway, but the area is relatively easily accessed in winter on skis or with snowmobiles along the frozen Monche Lake or in the summer with a boat or by paddling. The fells are easy to cross at their lowest point.

### MONCHEGORSK

If there were hell on earth, it could look like Monchegorsk. Here is Kola's most notorious area of environmental damage: the forest is dead in a zone many kilometres wide surrounding the city's infamous nickel smelting plant. The plant's stacks emit thick smoke and cover the fell landscape with unrealistic industrial smog. However, the good news is that the most polluted years are past. Lower production rates and technological improvements in the 1980s-1990s have reduced the plant's sulphur dioxide emissions to a fraction of what they used to be. What's more, the Norilsk Nickel Company that owns the plant has planted saplings in the damaged area. In spite of that, forests do not cover the immediate surroundings of the city.

Nevertheless, tourists should not speed past Monchegorsk, as the city is better than the apocalyptic impression would suggest. Monchegorsk is the

only place in South Kola where you can imagine you are walking on the streets of Moscow or East Berlin. The reason for this is found in the birch-lined Metallurgov Boulevard surrounded by magnificent "Stalin baroque" apartment buildings that give the city a special gloomily handsome appearance. The buildings have decorative balconies, colonnades, gable ornaments and other grand details. The buildings were built by German prisoners of war. Their quality is appreciated in Russia, because even German prisoners were said to do good quality work.

Monchegorsk's other sights include the Church of Christ's Ascension on the shore of the Imandra Lake. The whitewashed church, constructed in 1998, was built along the lines of old Russian stone church architecture, and it does not look bad in the middle of the fell scenery. The church has an iconostasis painted in a Greek style. The cupola contains frescos.

Monchegorsk is Kola's third largest city. At its highest the population was 70,000, but today it has dropped to 52,000. The city was established in 1937 around rich nickel deposits. The infrastructure was built largely with prison labour. Later metal refinement was started in the city. Today mining has slowed and the plant's raw material is brought from Pechenga and Siberia's Norilsk. Finished nickel is exported to the west as a raw material for catalysers that reduce automobile emissions. Around 4,500 of Monchegorsk's residents are employed by Norilsk Nickel. The company belongs to Russian billionaire Vladimir Potanin's business empire.

It is easy to find your way around in Monchegorsk. The main street, Metallurgov, begins in the typical Kola manner at the Statoil service station. A statue a miner holding a pick serves as a landmark on the other side of the street. A little way off on the left in the so-called Pentagon Square is a statue of an elk, which is considered a symbol of the city. A small, pleasant pedestrian street, Stakhanovskaya, takes off from the square to the right. The Stalin-era architecture continues along Metallurgov Street five blocks to the city park. You can walk from the park to the shore of Lumbolka Lake.

If you continue on along Metallurgov Street, you come to the large Revolution Square roundabout, where the gaze of a statue of Lenin appears

to rest on the landscape of the fell city. Around the square are the culture building, the closed Laplandia Hotel and the city hall, whose architecture hints of functionalism. Metallurgov continues through an area of newer buildings to the shore of Imandra Lake.

Heading south from Revolution Square is Prospekt Lenina, which goes to the Moncha suburb, filled with nine-storey apartment buildings. From there you can go to the church and the ski centre. On the fell opposite the ski centre is a TV tower and lookout point accessible by car in the summer. It is also possible to drive 12 km to Rizhguba on the shore of Imandra Lake in the summer.

Monchegorsk is surrounded by three lakes: Imandra and smaller Lumbolka and Nyudyavr Lakes, which regrettably are polluted. Many city residents travel on the ice in winter. The magnificent Khibiny Mountains rise in the east.

Monchegorsk is 34 km north along the highway from the Apatity junction. The city, 5 km away, is visible from the road. Do not turn at the junction to the industrial area, turn at the next one.

## Museums

**City museum.** Tsaryovskogo 2, (81536) 34705, [history@monch.mels.ru](mailto:history@monch.mels.ru). Tue-Fri 10:00-18:00, Sat-Sun 11:00-18:00. The museum operates in a wooden building that is as old as the city. A nature exhibit and artefacts related to the history of the city and the mining industry.

**Stone museum.** Metallurgov 46, (81536) 32834, [museum@monch.mels.ru](mailto:museum@monch.mels.ru).

**Kolskaya GMK Company's museum.** Metallurgov 25, (81536) 31027. Tue-Fri 9:00-13:00 and 14:00-17:00.

**Private toy museum.** Gagarina 14-12, (81536) 74161.

## Lodging

**Sever.** Metallurgov 4, (81536) 72655, 72652. The municipal Sever Hotel is unfortunately nearly the only possible lodging place in Monchegorsk – the hotel is definitely one of the worst in Kola. Most of the rooms are

unrepaired and without WCs, in light of which the prices are high. No paper is kept in the hallway WC, you have to ask for it. The hotel was taken over by a large group of schoolchildren who ran around the floors late at night and early in the morning without any supervision. A double room costs €19-€47, depending on the quality.

**Metallurg.** Metallurgov 45 a, (81536) 74533. Metallurg is a high-quality hotel owned by Norilsk Nickel Company, which unfortunately does not take tourists without an advance reservation. A double room starts at €43. The rooms are new with a TV, phone and shower. Breakfast is served in a fourth floor coffee shop. There is a restaurant outside the hotel.

**Apartment rental.** (81536) 71347, (911) 3070666, (921) 2890119.

## Food

Although Monchegorsk has over ten restaurants, you'll want to go to only a few of them.

**Kofeinya.** Metallurgov 3. Mon-Sun 7:30-23:00. Kofeinya or Coffee Shop is the most pleasant place in Monchegorsk. From early in the morning to late in the evening it serves different types of coffee, pastries and tasty meals. The sitting room-type atmosphere gathers the city's best gangs.

**Ambar.** Lenina 9/23, (81536) 71701. Mon-Thu 11:00-24:00, Fri 12:00-02:00, Sun 12:00-24:00. Ambar, decorated inside to resemble a "storehouse", is a good choice as a place to eat.

**Ani.** Metallurgov 4, (81536) 73351. A simple Armenian place next to Sever Hotel.

**Statoil.** At the beginning of Metallurgov Street. Norwegian fast food.

**Kafe Metallurg.** Metallurgov 45 a, (81536) 34890. Mon-Wed 12:00-23:00, Thu-Sat 12:00-02:00, Sun 12:00-24:00. OK place to eat in the Metallurg Hotel building.

**Skazka.** Metallurgov 22. Mon-Wed, Sun 12:00-24:00, Thu-Sat 12:00-02:00.

**Volshebznitsa.** Metallurgov 35. Mon-Thu, Sun 11:00-23:00,  
Fri-Sat 11:00-01:00.

**Shashlychnaya.** Bredova 4, (81536) 30459. Mon-Sun 12:00-02:00. Kebab.

### **Night life**

**Kasino Fanat.** Metallurgov 6 (courtyard). Mon-Fri 12:00-05:00, Sat-Sun 14:00-05:00. Casino, bar and restaurant.

**Tsiklon.** Komsomolskaya 46, (81536) 74327. Mon-Thu, Sun 23:00-06:00, Fri-Sat 23:00-07:00. Disco on the second floor. Bar and billiards open Mon-Sun 18:00-06:00.

**Atmosfera.** Kondrikova 34, (81536) 50225, 56807. Disco.

**Belaya vorona.** Lesnaya 27/34. 24-hr restaurant in a wooden building in the Moncha suburb mainly serves alcohol.

### **Services**

**City administration.** (81536) 72443.

**Post office.** Metallurgov 29. Mon-Sun 8:00-21:00.

**Sberbank and automatic teller machine.** Metallurgov 7. Mon-Fri 10:00-14:00 and 15:00-19:00, Sat-Sun 11:00-17:00.

**Ski centres.** (81536) 77557, 79170. There are two ski centres in Monchegorsk, but it is not worth coming here for a ski vacation. The lifts are not open for outside visitors, they are used by a sports school. Strangers can try to get on the slopes 12:00-15:00 on weekdays. The vertical drop is 245 m and the longest slope is 1200 m. Two disk lifts and two T-bar lifts take skiers up. There are ski trails in the surroundings. The ski centres are situated next to each other on the south side of the Moncha suburb. There are no related services: the restaurant has burned down.

**Stadion.** Kirova 3, (81536) 33836. Skate and cross-country ski rentals in winter.

There are **kiteboarders** in Monchegorsk, who can be contacted through the sports and tourism committee, Kirova 10, (81536) 32715, 32711. The city also has a carting track.

**Boat club.** (81536) 32977, 56275. Sailboats and motorboats.

**Four-wheel-drive club Laplandia.** (81536) 73693, eremeeva@autocentre.ru. Four-wheel-drive safaris.

### Events

**Farewell to winter** at the end of March. Sports competitions and a rally on the lake ice.

**Metallurgists' day** in mid-July.

**Sailboat regatta** on Imandra Lake in mid-July.

**City day** in September.

### Transportation

The **bus station** is located on Komsomolskaya Street near the Lenina intersection. The Kola railway does not pass through Monchegorsk, but there is a bus connection from every train from the Olenegorsk railway station 27 km away to Monchegorsk. Several buses travel to and from Murmansk between 7:00 and 20:00, and to and from Apatity between 6:00 and 21:00. Some of the Apatity buses continue to Kirovsk. There is a bus to Kandalaksha Mon-Sat at 20:15 (from Kandalaksha at 4:50 a.m.) and Sun at 18.30 (from Kandalaksha at 15:30) and to Kovdor every day at 18:50 (from Kovdor at 5:45 a.m.).

**Bus, train and plane ticket booth.** Komsomolskaya 25 B, 72150, 76090.

**Ticket booth.** Metallurgov 5, (81536) 74434. Mon-Fri 8:00-14:00 and 15:00-19:00, Sat 8:00-17:00. Taxi numbers: 041, 045, 064, 58100, 74878.

Taxi trip inside the city, €1.50. To Murmansk, €32, to Apatity, €18.



## MONCHEGORSK

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|---|--|--|---|--|
|  TOURIST INFORMATION |  POST OR TELEPHONE OFFICE |  RESTAURANT, CAFE |  RAILWAY STATION     |  PETROL STATION |
|  HOTEL OR HOSTEL     |  INTERNET                 |  BAR, NIGHT CLUB  |  BUS STATION         |  SAUNA          |
|  MONEY EXCHANGE      |  SHOP                     |  SIGHT            |  SUPERVISED CAR PARK |  OTHER          |



## 9. LOVOZERO

### THE ROAD TO LOVOZERO

The road to Lovozero turns east from the St. Petersburg-Murmansk main highway at Olenegorsk. The unsigned junction does not raise expectations, but road is paved and even better than the main highway. In the beginning there are piles of slag from Olenegorsk's mining industry along the road, but soon the scenery gets better. The road meanders through a fell landscape.

There are sights along the road to Lovozero that should be left without closer scrutiny. On the north side of the road about 30 kilometres from the Olenegorsk junction is an immense oddly shaped building on the north side of the road that houses an early warning radar of Russia's missile defence system. The building is visible from the road, especially when driving from Lovozero. The place is marked "hay barns" on the map. Closer to Lovozero after the Revda junction seven towers or antennas at least 100 metres high are visible on the north side of the road. Apparently it is a missile base. There are air defence sites near Lovozero and some say there is also an air force wing. We do not recommend driving on the side roads leading to military sites.

Two side roads are in general use. A road that shortens the distance from Lovozero to Murmansk by twenty kilometres turns north 34 kilometres after the Olenegorsk junction. The road is paved, but full of holes. A road to Revda turns south 62 kilometres from the Olenegorsk junction. This junction can be recognised by a rejected traffic militia checkpoint. There are no militia on the road to Lovozero, but a cardboard militia vehicle has been erected alongside the road to scare speeders.

Chudzyavr Lake lies ten kilometres north of the road to Lovozero. The Sami village of Chudzyavr was closed down in 1967.

## REVDA

This dwindling mining settlement with 8000 residents does not charm with its beauty. Nonetheless, Revda is the gate to the Lovozero Fells, which rise majestically a few kilometres away.

Revda's streetscape is dominated by two-storey Stalin-era apartment buildings. The windows of many apartments are boarded shut. In recent years the locality's largest employer, mining company Lovozersky GOK, has reduced the number of employees. Although Revda is not a very cheerful sight, it differs positively from Kola's industrial cities because of its small size. The township is more human and the residents are friendly. Some Skolt Sami people from Notozero live in the locality.

Established in 1950, Revda got its name from a nearby pond. The sights in today's Revda include a Sami museum and a British Hawker Hurricane airplane, which was erected in 1989 as a memorial to military co-operation between the Soviet Union and Great Britain. Revda also has a culture building and a hotel, but no restaurants. The streets of the settlement were slushy in March. We were able to park the car handily right in front of the militia station, which the locals recommended. There is a storehouse for submarine-launched missiles near Revda.

A 7 km paved road goes to Revda from the Olenegorsk-Lovozero road. The junction is 62 km from Olenegorsk's roundabout. The road to Revda turns off at the place where there is a rejected traffic militia checkpoint. Do not turn off to the garrison two kilometres earlier. Buses run to Revda from Olenegorsk's railway station twice a day. There is a daily bus connection to Lovozero. A bus goes to Murmansk, also.

**Museum.** Kuzina 7/5, (81538) 33333. Mon-Fri 10:00-13:00 and 14:00-18:00. Revda's praised museum contains Sami artefacts, an authentic peat Lapp hut and mineral and rock collections.

**Oktyabrina Voronova museum.** Komsomolskaya 25-4. Material related to the life of a Sami poet in a private museum.

**Hotel.** Umbozerskaja 1, (81538) 34134. Revda's simple, best and only hotel is found in a small apartment building behind the militia station. Turn right

off the main street after the culture building and right again at the next intersection. The rooms have beds and a wood floor. Shower and WC in the hallway. You can cook yourself in the kitchen. The service was friendly and understanding. A double room costs €15.

## **KARNASURT**

The small mine train drives around the bend so fast that some of the ore it is carrying flies off the car. Then a tracked vehicle that resembles a tank appears from somewhere. The Karnasurt mine, which blends in poorly with the fell landscape, is an excellent example of the paradoxes of the Kola Peninsula: here side by side are environmental damage and exceptionally beautiful scenery.

The road to the Lovozero Fells goes via Karnasurt's small but absurd mine. Drive 7 km up the road from Revda. There is a guardhouse at the gate of the mine. Guards are present 24 hours a day, and a traveller to the fells can arrange to leave his or her car in the adjoining parking lot. They also record all travellers to the fells. The guards give permission to go through the gate and the mine area to the point where the Elmora ridge is crossed.

Today Karnasurt is the only mine in operation in the Lovozero Fells. The mine produces loparite, which contains titanium and other noble metals. The ore is radioactive – a sign warning of radiation is posted on the door of one storehouse. The actual mine is underground. Two tunnels that go underground are visible on a slope further south from the buildings.

A second mine in the Lovozero Fells is located further west on the shore of Umba Lake in the place where the Sami *siida* of Umpyavr, used to be. The *siida* was closed down in 1977. This Umbozersk mine was discontinued a few years ago. The area is radioactive.

Karnasurt has a small ski lift, but the open hours are unknown. There was one skier on the slope when we were there.

**Mine workers' buses** to Karnasurt leave from Revda's main street bus stop on weekday mornings at 6:40 and 7:10. Buses return from the mine at 15:00 and 15:20. It is easier to take a taxi, which is also found on Revda's main street.

## **LOVOZERO FELS (LOVOZERSKIYE TUNDRY in Russian, LUYAVRURT in Sami)**

The over one thousand metre high Lovozero Fell highlands, or Luyavrurt, are the second highest point on the Kola Peninsula after Khibiny. They form a 20 km wide mountain range between Umba Lake and Lovozero. The fells offer exceptionally beautiful scenery and terrain for both winter and summer recreational travel. Compared with Khibiny, the Lovozero Fells are less populated. Bad connections and a lack of lodging are a minus.

The steep Lovozero Fells contain massive rock walls, deeply carved valleys and majestic ridges. A specialty of the Lovozero Fells is their extensive highlands along which one can travel. The rounded peaks are swept by nearly unceasing winds. From the top there are excellent views of the surrounding Kola plains, Umba and Lovozero Lakes.

Seidyavr (Seidozero) Lake, considered holy by the Sami people, is situated in the middle of the fell area. The valley is surrounded by steep-walled, often rocky slopes. Eight-kilometre-long Seidyavr Lake is protected nowadays. It got its name from the numerous *sieidi*, or sacrificial sites, in the surroundings. It was believed that the gods and spirits lived at Seidyavr Lake.

The best time for winter travel in the Lovozero Fells is in late March and early April. Then the days are long, the weather is a little milder and storms are no longer very probable. Also, the danger of avalanches is not as great as it is later in April. In the summer you have to choose whether you want warmer weather and insects from the end of June to mid-August or colder weather without mosquitoes before or after midsummer.

The Lovozero Fells are most easily accessed via Revda, where you can set out from the Karnasurt mine. Another possibility is to set out from the settlement of Lovozero on the northeast side of the fells, where you can order snowmobile transportation in winter. You can also get to the Lovozero Fells by snowmobile or on foot from Kirovsk in the south, but the distance is longer, though. Trips to the Lovozero Fells are offered by several tour operators in Kirovsk, Apatity, Monchegorsk and Lovozero (see Practical information: How should I go?). There are recreational maps of the Lovozero Fells (see Practical information: Maps).

It is also possible to get to the fells from the settlement of Lovozero through the Tundra reindeer co-operative or the Yulins' family-owned company, Piros, both of which have reindeer herds in the area. Tundra's herds are on Suelkort mountain in the northeast part of the area in March-April. The reindeer herders live in a Lapp hut erected in the Svetlaya Creek valley. A grey line of reindeer travelling along a high fell slope is a handsome sight. The adjoining little Svetlaya Lake is a fishing place favoured by Lovozero's residents, and in the spring ice fishers try their luck there catching Arctic char.

The route of most travellers to the Lovozero Fells goes to Seidyavr Lake, where there are good campsites in the surrounding protective forests. The route from Karnasurt to Seidyavr Lake passes over the relatively easily crossed Elmora ridge (660 m). There are numerous other passes of varying difficulty in the fell range, but they should not be attempted by an inexperienced traveller, at least in winter, without a guide who is familiar with the terrain. You can also go to Seidyavr Lake without crossing the fells by following the lakeshore from the settlement of Lovozero.

We set out to the Lovozero Fells from the Karnasurt mine, from where we ascended towards the Elmora Pass. The route travels along a rapidly rising valley surrounded by rugged rock walls. Skiing was facilitated by a crust on the snow. Pelts fastened to the bottoms of the skis greatly eased skiing up the steep rise. Pelt users had time to try downhill skiing while waiting for the others.

A view into the Seidyavr Lake valley in the heart of the Lovozero Fells opens from the Elmora ridge (67°51'9 and 34°38'8). All around rises a dark, beautiful row of fells that in places drops down to the lake as rock walls tens of metres high. The rock wall closest to the lake resembles a human face. The Sami name of the fell is Kuivchorr, the Russians call it Starik (Old man).

Our descent along the steep slope to Seidyavr Lake was reckless. Our backpacks caused us to fall down, and those pulling a Lapp sled careened down the narrow gutter at a deathly speed. Someone decided to send their backpack rolling down the slope. The descent appeared easiest with telemark skis.

In the Seidyavr Lake valley alpine birches appeared first and then tall,

narrow spruce. A well-packed ski track went down to the lake. On the long, gentle slope it felt like our skis were motorised. The creek had thawed in places, and from somewhere a true natural miracle appeared, a mosquito that forebode the coming summer. There was not much snow for this time of the year. Rocked were showing here and there. We picked a lingonberry.

Tenting is the only lodging alternative in the Lovozero Fells. Because nearly everywhere else the terrain is treeless, you should spend the night in the vicinity of the Seidyavr Lake valley. It was almost sweaty sleeping in a winter sleeping bag, as the temperature remained above freezing at night, too.

At Seidyavr Lake we found the tent camps of two Russian groups. "Don't you have a guitar with you?" asked a girl skier from Novgorod. The Russians travel in the fells in large groups. For them, recreational travel is a sport. The routes are often demanding and long. They include crossing mountain passes, hard climbs and steep descents. The groups usually have a leader who is responsible for everything, including the participants' personal equipment lists. Each trip has a specifically defined degree of difficulty, or category.

Our guide, Slava Zaytsev, a familiar chemist from St. Petersburg and an experienced Kola traveller, had planned a real marathon for the next day. First we ascended a brush-filled valley that grew Arctic birch and then a steep creek bed (67°48'0 and 34°36'0) until we were in a treeless, deep saddle valley. Sunshine changed to a stiff wind. The valley ended at a 25 degree slope beneath the North Tavayok River Pass (67°48'3 and 34°36'6). The surface was rock-hard crusty snow that would have required crampons. We clung on with all our strength and hoped our skis wouldn't slip.

A strong wind blew on the roof of Kola. Braving the forces of nature, we skied into a headwind that blew snow at us. Our tracks disappeared in a moment. Below this snowy wilderness Kola's wide lowland extended to the horizon. Those with enough energy skied to the highest peak of the Lovozero Fells, round-topped Angvundaschorr (1116 m). From its peak you can see both Lovozero and Umba Lakes.

Only at sundown did we finally descend into the ruggedly beautiful Chinglusuai mountain valley, where the erratic boulders scattered around

the bottom looked like they were thrown by a giant. We started the descent from a creek bed in the highland (67°48'7 and 34°39'7). The steep slopes of the valley were decorated with gingery lichen and three magnificent ice falls suitable for climbing. The largest looked like a pipe organ. We erected our tents in the bottom of the valley. It was nice spending the evening in the warm weather. The northern lights made the mountains look like they were on fire.

On the third and last day we returned to Seidyavr Lake, made a steep climb to the Elmora River Pass and descended to the Karnasurt mine. An alternative route would have gone along the highland straight to the Elmora ridge, but it would have required an energy-sapping diagonal traverse along the slope of the fell.

### **LOVOZERO (LUYAVR in Sami)**

The district centre of Lovozero is the largest residential centre of Kola's Sami people: one-fifth of the 3,300 residents are Sami. The general appearance of the settlement is grotesque and even forbidding. During the Soviet era five-storey apartment buildings that were considered progressive and pleasant were constructed in Lovozero. However, today they are badly deteriorated. The uniqueness of the locality is noticed only after a second glance. Here are the most important institutions of Kola's Sami people – a Lapp hut-shaped culture centre and the Tundra reindeer kolkhoz. The numerous boathouses on the Virma River indicate that natural sources of livelihood are still important. In the spring Lovozero's centre was filled with cars, snowmobiles and a tracked vehicle hauling a hut on skids.

Lovozero is one of the oldest settlements of Kola's Sami people. It is mentioned in documents the first time in 1608. Nevertheless, the Sami people had a habit of changing the location of their villages, and the winter village of Lovozero *siida* has been situated in different places at different times. During the Soviet era Lovozero became Kola's only characteristically Sami residential centre when the other *siida* were shut down and their residents were forced to move to Lovozero. Today Lovozero is home to not only original Lovozero Sami people, but also Sami people and their descendents born in Voronya,

Varzina, Yokanga and Ponoï in North and East Kola. In addition, there are Komi people and Russians, which form a majority, in the settlement. Today the district of the same name, covering two-thirds of Kola's surface area, is administered from Lovozero: the central, eastern and northern parts of the peninsula and the coast from Sosnovka to Varzina, with the exception of the military sites.

It is easy to find your way around in the settlement of Lovozero. The road from Olenegorsk continues as the main street, Sovetskaya, along which most of the stores and other services are found. A Lapp hut-type building on the right at the beginning of the street is the Sami culture centre. Another Lapp hut-type building visible along the Pionerskaya side street is Hotel Koavas. Further along Sovetskaya Street is the post office and telephone on the left and the administrative building on the right. Later the street branches. The right branch goes to a museum and the left branch crosses a bridge to the Tundra co-operative's office and bar.

Lovozero's most important employer is the Tundra co-operative, which practices reindeer farming, fur farming and cattle farming. There are two schools and day care centres and a vocational school where reindeer breeders and "Lapp hut workers", or housekeepers, are trained. There is a boarding school for reindeer breeders' children. Unemployment is high, especially among the Sami people.

Kola's roads that are passable by car end in Lovozero. The settlement is a good starting point for an expedition to the eastern areas, which are accessible from here by snowmobile in winter and by small plane and boat in the summer. Lovozero has travel agencies and organisations that can arrange such trips.

A five-kilometre-long road goes southeast to the shore of Lovozero Lake. Semyorka geophysical observatory is located at the end of the road. Lovozero is Kola's third largest body of water. It is a shallow lake filled with islands and straits, with the magnificent Lovozero Fells rising in the background. The lake is suitable for paddling. Winds in the north-south direction create high waves in the lake in the summer.

The Voronya River, which flows from Lovozero Lake, is harnessed

nowadays. Large areas along the river are currently reservoirs, which inundated Voronya, or the Sami village of Korddok, among others, in the 1960s and 1970s. Voronya is a potential kayaking river that can be paddled from Murmansk to the road to Tumannyi or to the Serebryansky power plants, which indeed are in a closed area. Most of the way the river flows lazily.

## Sights

**Museum.** Sovetskaya 28, (81538) 31447. Tue-Fri 10:00-13:00 and 14:00-17:00, Sat 10:00-16:00. Artefacts related to Kola's old Sami way of life, such as clothing and a reconstructed kammi (Sami hut). One of the most amusing objects is a pair shorts made from reindeer skin. The museum contains rock drawing stones found in Central Kola's Chalmnivarre. There is a changing exhibit in a separate room. The museum sells jewellery, reindeer skin boots, wooden dishes and other souvenirs and literature.

**National Culture Centre.** Sovetskaya 27, (81538) 30363, 30139. A Lapp hut-style former restaurant building has been renovated with Scandinavian support for the operation of the culture centre. The "Lapp hut" contains a rock drawing fresco and sun floor. Two Sami and one Komi folklore group, Lovozero's Sami radio and Sami organisations operate here. The culture centre arranges handicraft courses and teaching in the Sami language. Tourists are welcome, especially on festival days (see Events). The culture centre can arrange contacts with Kola Sami yoik or luvvt chanters Vera Galkina and Pavla Konkova. When I visited the centre 11-year-old Marimiana Sorva and 12-year-old Karina Vasilyeva were practicing yoik pop music. The centre's staff communicate with each other in Russian.

## Lodging

**Hotel Koavas.** Pionerskaya 13, (81538) 31515, 31316, covas@covas.ru, www.covas.ru. Cosy Koavas is Lovozero's most pleasant lodging option. The hotel operates in a Lapp hut-style building along the side street Pionerskaya. A double room costs €35. Breakfast, lunch or supper, €3/meal - mealtimes must be reserved in advance. A four-person sauna costs €9/person. There is

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a travel agency in conjunction with the hotel. Koavas's owner is a Norwegian man who came to Lovozero to convert the Sami people into Lutherans.

**Hotel Luyavr.** Pionerskaya 6, (81538) 30169. The locality's second hotel operates in the main floor of an apartment building on the side street Pionerskaya. Double room, €35.

## Food

**Hotel Koavas.** Meal reservations have to be made in advance. See Lodging. **Canteen.** Sovetskaya 19. Often closed.

**Bar.** Mon 9:00-24:00, Tue, Thu and Sun 12:00-24:00, Fri-Sat 12:00-03:00. Go along the left branch of the main street over the bridge and to the left. Servings heated in a microwave oven.

## Services

**District administration.** Sovetskaya 10, (81538) 31308.

**Seidyavr Lake conservation area office.** Pionerskaya 6, (81538) 31085. Director Ivan Vdovin is an expert in Kola's Sami history.

**Post office and Internet.** Sovetskaya 13. Mon-Sat 9:00-20:00. Along the main street in the post office building, which can be identified by its large satellite dish. Kola's slowest Internet. The Koavas Hotel has a faster connection.

**Sberbank.** Sovetskaya 10, (81538) 31436. Currency exchange.

**Public sauna.** Fri and Sat. After the bridge on the right.

## Events

Most of Lovozero's festivals are arranged by the National Culture Centre.

A **Lun Komi festival** is held in January.

An **international Sami day** is celebrated on February 6th.

**Festival of the North**, arranged throughout Kola on March 24-25.

**Sami games**, a festival arranged on June 17th.

Lovozero's **Sami people hold their own festival** on October 1st.

A **bear hunting feast** is held every third year.

## Transportation

Lovozero's **closest railway station** is in Olenegorsk.

**Buses to Olenegorsk** leave every morning at 7:25 in front of Lovozero's post office. The point of departure in Olenegorsk is the bus station next to the railway station. You can take a bus from Olenegorsk to Revda, also, which has connections to Lovozero.

A regular taxi shuttles between **Lovozero and Murmansk** on Mon, Wed and Fri. It leaves Lovozero at 7:00 and Murmansk at 17:00 (from the Exponeft service station next to the Volna department store and from the Voyazh bar). Inquiries at (8152) 782828 and (921) 7082828.

**Lovozero's airport** see Practical information: How do I get around in South Kola?: By plane.

## THE SAMI PEOPLE

"Tirv! (Hello!)" Seman Galkin, 61, greets his guest in Kildin Sami at a reindeer herding station in the tundra. Black-bearded Galkin is dressed in the traditional reindeer breeder's costume, a reindeer fur *malitsa* coat with a fur-lined hood and decorative reindeer skin boots. Around his waist is an ancestral belt with a fine brass buckle and a sheath knife.

Seman's wife, Galina, 59, has prepared delicious smoked reindeer stew that she has flavoured with cloudberry juice. "It's better to live here than in Lovozero. The tundra water takes care of the stomach and intestines. Apartment building water smells like iron," says Galina.

The cheerful couple talk to each other in the Sami language, which is full of esses. Their children don't speak the language, though. "Speaking Sami to children used to be forbidden. The language is disappearing," Galina sighs.

In the 2002 census there were 2,000 Sami people in Russia, which is more than before. "Their quality has weakened, though," says Kola's Sami Federation's vice-chairman Alexandr Kobylev in Lovozero. "Most of the Sami people live in mixed marriages and perhaps only half speak the language."

A Sami culture centre, two Sami associations and a small Sami local radio that broadcasts an hour a week operate in Lovozero. The Sami language can be studied at school as a free-choice elective. During the period of *perestroika*

Kola's Sami people experienced a national awakening. "We have learned from the Scandinavian Sami people to be proud of being Sami people," says culture centre director Larisa Avdeyeva.

The Sami spoken in Lovozero is the Russian Sami people's main language, Kildin Sami, which is written with Cyrillic letters. The situation of Kola's other Sami languages is even worse. Ter Sami is understood by only a few people in Lovozero. Some people in the settlement of Verkhneye Tuloma use Skolt Sami. Kola's fourth Sami language, *Akkel (Babinsky)* Sami, died out in 2003, when its last speaker passed away.

Sami people are thought to have lived in Kola for at least two thousand years, possibly even much longer. For a thousand years the Sami people have had to deal with Russians arriving from the south and Scandinavians from the west, often paying taxes to both.

The Sami people lived nomadic lives. They had separate winter and summer villages, and they moved to more favourable places with the seasons. Fishing was a more important livelihood than reindeer herding. They also hunted reindeer and fur animals. Their winter dwellings were peat Lapp huts. Later they began to build log houses.

Although the Sami people were converted to the Orthodox religion, they retained features of natural religion alongside Christianity. They brought reindeer antlers to sacrificial stones, followed old fishing and hunting customs and practiced natural healing. Kola's Sami people's mythical creature was Myandash, which was able live as a human and a reindeer.

As late as a hundred years ago the Kola Peninsula was nearly uninhabited wilderness. One-fourth of its few thousand inhabitants were Sami people. The Soviet era crushed the Sami people's traditional way of life. Wealthier reindeer owners were harassed as "*kulaks*". In the 1930s the Sami people were even accused of seeking independence. Those who were claimed to be "rebellion leaders" were executed. Reindeer herding was moved to kolkhozes, where the Sami people's more diversified, semi-nomadic natural economy had to make way for Komi-type large-scale reindeer farming.

The Sami people had divided into 18 village groups, or *siida*, in Kola. Elimination of the *siida* during the Soviet era was a blow to Russia's Sami

people from which they have yet to recover. All villages with a Sami majority were shut down in the 1950s-1980s. Some got left under reservoirs, some were replaced by military bases and some were emptied for no specific reason. Families lost their old hunting grounds and fishing waters. The people were forcefully moved to Lovozero. Only a small portion were allowed to continue reindeer farming.

Due to a lack of work and housing, many movers hit the bottle. Children did not learn reindeer management from their parents, as they were placed in boarding schools. Parents were forbidden to speak Sami to their children.

Now the Sami people no longer are ashamed of being Sami people. Little boys break dancing in a paved yard in Lovozero were proud of their origins. "I'm Sami!" yelled 11-year-old Pavel Kuptsov. "I'm Komi!" announced Kirill Filippov, 10. Then they repeated numbers and names of animals in Sami and Komi languages, which the boys studied in school. One of the boys, Pavel Dmitriyev, 9, spoke Sami as his native language with his parents.

However, according to Alexandr Kobylev, vice-chairman of the Sami federation, the government's support measures for the Sami people are still insufficient. "Murmansk oblast's administration has compiled a Sami support programme, but it does not help the Sami, instead it carries out projects for the public good specified by the district administration, like renovation of apartment buildings or health care centres."

The question of Sami people's land is open in Kola, also. Families' former grazing lands and fishing waters were transferred to the government during the Soviet era. A solution has been sought through Russian legislation that would make it possible to establish "communities of the small northern nation". So far only one community is in operation, formed by reindeer breeder Andrey Yulin's, 42, family. "We have leased 48,000 hectares of our old family land from the government. We breed reindeer and offer tourism services. We don't receive support from the state, we pay normal rent for the land," he explains.

**Murmansk oblast Sami association OOSMO.** (81538) 31023, (921) 2785694, oosmo@mail.ru.

**Kola's Sami association AKS.** (8152) 424464, (921) 1682445, (921) 2889795, nina@Samicouncil.net.

### **Kildin Sami language**

tirv = hello

tirvuz vudee = goodbye

poaz = reindeer

mun ton kofksa = I'll kick you (a curse)

yel kessel = don't kid me

mun tone shobsha = I love you

ton lyah pei = you are like the sun

### **REINDEER HERDING**

Some thousand reindeer make their way along the steep slope of the Lovozero Fells, where the melted snow has revealed delicious sprouts of lichen. It is above freezing, but the wind whistles in our ears. Below is a fantastic view over the lowlands of the Kola Peninsula. Following the herd of reindeer is 32-year-old herder Nikolai Yuryev. Another reindeer breeder, 38-year-old Ivan Krasavin, herds the animals from below with a snowmobile.

Yuryev and Krasavin are in the fells for a two-week turn of herding. Their employer is Lovozero's Tundra reindeer sovkhoz. They sleep on reindeer furs in a Lapp hut erected on the shore of a fell pond. There is a team-drawn sled outside the hut, the draught reindeer have been turned out to graze.

Once the snow melts, the men drive the sled far into the woods where the herds are driven to calve. In the summer they move further north to the tundra, where the reindeer can graze freely. The autumn reindeer sorting and slaughtering take place near the winter feeding grounds.

Reindeer herding in Kola is concentrated in two Soviet-era sovkhozes that have been converted to co-operatives. Tundra's main place of operation is in Lovozero and its grazing areas extend from the Lovozero Fells almost to the seacoast in the north. The main place of operation of the Lenin's Remembrance sovkhoz is in the village of Krasnoshchelye and the grazing land is in the eastern part of Kola. Both sovkhozes have about 30,000 reindeer,

which are herded by eight 'brigades' situated in different places. Reindeer breeders' private reindeer graze in the same herd as the co-operative's animals. Reindeer breeders in the Tundra sovkhos are allowed to have up to 70 of their own reindeer.

The reindeer are slaughtered in a modern Swedish-owned slaughterhouse in Lovozero. Most of the meat is sold to Finland. The Tundra co-operative also has its own meat processing plant constructed by Finns.

During the Soviet era there were twice as many reindeer in Kola as there are today. Before the revolution in 1914 there were somewhat more reindeer than now, 80,000. The Sami people's reindeer farms were smaller than those of the Komi people, and they used the animals more for transportation. When reindeer farming was collectivised in the 1930s, the model was taken from the Komi people's large-scale reindeer farms based on meat production.

The grazing lands are currently not threatened. There is also enough nutrition for the animals. Lichen grows abundantly on the peninsula, as Kola has one-third as many reindeer as Finland. According to the Tundra co-operative's reindeer farming director Vladimir Filippov, reindeer poachers are a problem, as are sport fishing companies, which prevent local people from accessing traditional fishing waters. "Some travel agencies even sell "wild reindeer hunting trips,"" Filippov exclaims.

Reindeer breeders, "Lapp hut workers", or housekeepers and animal technicians are trained in Lovozero's vocational school. However, many feel these professions can only be taught by one's own parents. During the Soviet era children were not allowed to be brought to the tundra. Now families have again begun to take their pre-school-aged children with them to herd reindeer. School-aged children can only be along in the summer, as they live at Lovozero's boarding school in winter.

Many reindeer breeders are young. Only a part of them are Sami. In Krasnoshchelye most of them are Komi. There are also a few Russians.

"This work used to be more interesting," says Sami reindeer breeder Vitali Krut in a herders' Lapp hut in the Lovozero Fells. "Then old men were along and they explained the work to the younger ones."

## CENTRAL AND EAST KOLA

The central and eastern parts of the Kola Peninsula form one of Europe's last unbroken wilderness areas. Because there are no roads in the area, one must travel along rivers and the sea, with tracked vehicles or snowmobiles or by air. Because of the difficult connections, travel in Kola's wilderness is expensive.

Central and East Kola are best known for their salmon fishing possibilities, which are discussed in the chapter, Salmon rivers. The area also has rivers suitable for rapids shooting, although transports to the rivers are difficult. There are inhabitants in two inland villages, Krasnoshchelye and Kanevka, and in Sosnovka on the coast. The Ostrovnoi or Gremikha navy base is a closed area.

In this book Central and East Kola refer to the area belonging to the Lovozero district east of the settlement of Lovozero (the entire centre part of the Kola Peninsula and the coast from the south side of the village of Sosnovka to the west side of the mouth of the Varzina river in the north with the exception of the Ostrovnoi and Lumbovka military areas).

Except for expensive campsites owned by salmon fishing companies, there are no hotels in Central and East Kola. Home lodging can be arranged in the villages, elsewhere one must rely on a tent. There are heatable vacant huts (*izba*) along the coast and a few further inland. However, only some of the *izba* are suitable for sleeping, and not all the cabins marked on maps exist.

## FROM LOVOZERO TO KRASNOSHCHELYE

The distance from the settlement of Lovozero to the village of Krasnoshchelye in the middle of the Kola Peninsula is about 150 km. The trip is easiest to make in winter, when there is a well-packed snowmobile route between the localities.

We drove the distance at the end of April, or at the last moment. The route had already been closed, but late snowfalls enabled it to be reopened. The trip one way took seven hours, even though at times we drove fast. It is not very comfortable riding in a wooden box fastened to the back of a snowmobile - the vibration and the snow blowing in one's face were a

nuisance. In the spring of 2007 a one-way trip by snowmobile cost 5,000 roubles, or nearly €150. We paid 10,000 roubles, or a little less than €300 for a round trip. The trip included one day at the destination. The route had also been driven with a tractor.

The snowmobile route first crosses Lovozero Lake on the ice. About a third of the way into the trip is Karal, the reindeer sorting site of Lovozero's Tundra sovkhos (67°48'0 and 35°50'4). Karal has two lodging huts. On our visit there were several reindeer breeders, thick-furred dogs and a team of reindeer. The air in the hut was thick with tobacco smoke. The reindeer breeders included both Sami and Komi. A younger reindeer breeder replied in Russian to an older one's questions in Sami. An old Sami reindeer breeder was dressed in alpine ski glasses and said he owned the team of reindeer.

Along the way are spruce and pine forests and open bogs. The low Keivy Fells rise a little further north. Somewhere we passed a herd of reindeer, which ran off in a cloud of snow.

## **KEIVY FELLS**

A low range of fells rises to the north a long way along the snowmobile route between Lovozero and Krasnoshchelye. The peaks are bare and covered with rocks. The Keivy fells are the highest point in the middle of the lowlands in the northern part of the Kola Peninsula. They form a 150-km-long ridge in the east-west direction. They also form a divide between the Ponoï River and north-flowing rivers and in many places the border between forest and tundra. The highest point of the Keivy fells is only 398 m above sea level.

We made a small loop off the Krasnoshchelye-Lovozero snowmobile route and drove to the nearest peak of the Keivy Fells. The small fell rose as a cluster of rocks in the middle of the lowlands. Although it was not high, it was sufficient to give us a view over the extensive lowlands and forest tundra. The high Lovozero Fells were visible to the west, to the north was open tundra.

There are many types of rock in the Keivy Fells, and they have been the destination of numerous geological research expeditions. Finnish geologist Wilhelm Ramsay studied the geology of the ridge already in the 1800s. So far

the area has been preserved from mining activity. We saw shiny grey cyanite in the fells.

## KRASNOSHCHELYE

The wilderness village of Krasnoshchelye (67°20'9 and 37°03'0) is situated just about in the middle of the Kola Peninsula at the headwaters of the Ponoï River. The village was established by reindeer breeders from Komi in 1919. Even today a large part of the village's 700 inhabitants are Komi people. There are also Russians, Nenets and Sami people and their descendants who were displaced from the shut-down village of Chalmnivarre. The village appears to be full of life and there are a lot of children. The most important employer is the Lenin's Remembrance reindeer sovkhov, whose grazing area covers the entire eastern part of the peninsula.

The village is spread along the high bank of the Ponoï River. The residential buildings are arranged in straight rows between the streets, forming a closely spaced residential neighbourhood. Most of the houses are wooden, and there are huge stacks of firewood in their yards. There are only a few old-looking log buildings. The village has stores, a post office, a telephone and an 11-class school. Next to the school is a culture building that is also supposed to be a museum. However, it was closed when we were there. The village has a folklore group specialised in Komi culture. Like in many other remote villages, electricity is produced in Krasnoshchelye with a diesel generator. The electricity is off from eleven in the evening until morning.

At first the village of Krasnoshchelye may appear to be in a state of war: massive tracked vehicles resembling tanks are parked in front of the houses. Nevertheless, here they are only used as civilian vehicles. There are also a few cars in Krasnoshchelye, which can be driven in the village area. The children in Krasnoshchelye were amazed by our driver Ivan's "*inomarkka*", or imported Bombardier snowmobile and asked if they could sit on it. A man hoping for money for vodka came knocking on the door of our lodging place. News about the Finns visiting the village spread quickly, and we didn't need introductions as we walked down the street. In the evening we had a sauna at the home of a Sami woman named Lyudmila. She offered a lovenge

poultice with the sauna and sanctified water as a sauna beverage. Our driver Ivan adopted a reindeer hound puppy in Krasnoshchelye that could barely stand up.

There is no hotel or restaurant in Krasnoshchelye, so lodging and meals have to be arranged in people's homes.

It also is possible to get to Krasnoshchelye by snowmobile from Oktyabrsky via Urmavarka Fell. Near Urmavarka is the Karal reindeer farming station of the Tundra sovkhoz, where it is possible to arrange lodging.

**Krasnoshchelye's village council.** (81538) 37287.

## **THE KOMI PEOPLE**

Not many know that, in addition to the Sami people, another reindeer herding people related to the Finns lives in the Kola Peninsula, namely the Komi people. Komi people live in Krasnoshchelye, Lovozero, Kanevka and Sosnovka. There are 2,600 of them in Kola, or more than the Sami people. Most of them have preserved their own language.

The Komi people came to Kola relatively late - they have lived in the area for a shorter time than the Russians. The first Komi families came to the peninsula across the frozen White Sea from the Kanin Peninsula in 1883. They brought with them 9,000 reindeer, of which nearly half died from boils, though. The Komi people initially settled Lovozero. The migration continued and the Komi people established the villages of Krasnoshchelye and Kanevka in the 1910s-1920s.

The Komi and Sami people did not get along together. The reasons were understandable: The Komi people brought their herds to the grazing lands of the Sami people and used the same hunting grounds and fishing waters. Depictive of the relations between the peoples is the fact that the first marriage between a Sami and Komi happened in 1954.

The Komi reindeer breeders were wealthier than the Sami, and they had more reindeer. They brought with them large-scale reindeer farming based on meat production and year-round nomadism, which replaced the Sami people's more diversified natural economy. During the Soviet era the Komi

people adapted better to the new system and achieved good positions in the local administrations.

Some Nenets reindeer breeders moved to Kola along with the Komi people. They still live in Krasnoshchelye and Kanevka. The Nenets in Kola have forgotten their own language.

## **PONOI RIVER**

Kola's longest river and most well-known salmon river flows 426 kilometres from the east side of Lovozero Lake to the eastern end of the peninsula. Along the way the river drops about 200 metres. The headwaters of the Ponoï flow gently, with sandy banks. The last 110 kilometres contain difficult rapids and rock canyons. There are extensive bogs midway along the river.

We skied along the Ponoï near Krasnoshchelye - the ice carried us even though it was the end of April. The river meandered through a flat wilderness. Spruce grew along the left bank and pine forest that beautifully filtered the sunlight grew on the right. The sun had exposed the sandy north bank.

## **SALMON RIVERS**

It is customary to link Kola's tourism possibilities above all to salmon rivers and sport fishing. A couple thousand fly-fishers a year visit the region. Atlantic salmon spawn in the peninsula's rivers, and they are even advertised as "the world's best salmon rivers". According to fish companies, fly-fishers in Kola catch a salmon a day - more than anywhere else.

Unfortunately and luckily the most fish-rich salmon rivers are located beyond difficult journeys in the eastern part of the peninsula. This has made salmon fishing in Kola a sport enjoyed by only few. The business is run by a few Russian, American and Finnish companies. Fishing camps are accessed by helicopter, and often a western cook travels along. The price of a week-long fishing trip may come to as much as €10,000 per person.

In principle, salmon rises into all the rivers in Kola. However, there are differences in the stocks. It is said the salmon in the north and east-flowing rivers are larger. The catches are said to be best in the Ponoï and Varzina Rivers, while the salmon stock in the Umba River has dropped. Because of

years of overfishing, the stocks are small in the Kuzreka, Kolvitsa and Kanda Rivers, which are located closer to inhabitation and transportation. Known salmon rivers also include the Varzuga, accessible by car, and the Chavanga, Strelna, Yokanga, Drozdovka, Kharlovka and many smaller rivers located beyond roadless areas. Fishing in the Umba and Varzuga Rivers is somewhat less expensive because helicopter transports are not necessarily needed.

Numerous firms in Russia and abroad sell salmon trips to Kola. The following list contains mostly service providers with their own fishing campsites (permanent or tent campsites).

**Northern Rivers Company.** Murmansk, Starostina 31, (8152) 275628, 267480, info@kharlovka.com, www.kharlovka.com. Campsites on the Rynda, Kharlovka and Litsa Rivers in North Kola.

**Varzina River Company.** 09 439 30633, office@varzina.fi, www.varzina.fi. This Finnish company's campsite is at the bottom of Varzina Fjord on North Kola.

**Murmansk Turist.** Murmansk, Burkova 29 ofis 1, (8152) 441651, russfish@aspol.ru, www.yokangafish.ru. Permanent campsite on the Yokanga River.

**Ponoi River Company.** +44 1285 741340, info@frontierstrvl.co.uk, www.ponoiriver.com. This American company is one of the oldest and most expensive entrepreneurs. Permanent campsite on the Ponoi River's Ryaboga.

**Silver of Ponoi.** Murmansk, Oktyabrskaja 28 ofis 1, (8152) 424545, 451116, serebrop@rol.ru, serebrop@mail.ru, www.silverofponoi.ru. Permanent campsite at the mouth of the Pacha River, a tributary of the Ponoi River.

**Tal-Tur.** Murmansk, Lenina 85-14, (8152) 450141, 453001, taltour@teletoria.ru, www.taltour.ru. Tent campsite on the Yokanga River, sells trips to the Ponoi and Varzina Rivers.

**Vskhody Kommunizma.** Murmansk, Vorovskogo 5/23, ofis 507, (8152) 288931, 288943, 287484, vktour@aspol.ru, www.vktour.ru. Varzuga's Sprouts of Communism kolkhoz is responsible for fishing tourism on the Umba, Varzuga and Strelna Rivers. The kolkhoz directed by Varzuga's patriarch Svyatoslav Kalyuzhin owns permanent salmon fishing campsites

on the Umba, Varzuga and Pana Rivers and transports customers with its own helicopter if necessary. The helicopter flight costs over €1,000 per hour. Chairman Svyatoslav Mikhailovich Kalyuzhin (81559) 62435 (work), 62486 (home).

**Alivekt.** St. Petersburg, Nevsky prospekt 112, (812) 3376767, 3278989.

**Ramzay-Sever.** See Practical information: How should I go?: Kirovsk. Salmon fishing trips to the Pana River, a tributary of the Varzuga River. Transports by off-road vehicle.

**Lapin Ekspertit.** Sodankylä, Poromiehentie 7-9 F 19, 040 517 1031, 050 342 7783. Sells fishing and hunting trips to Kola.

Salmon fishing can also be done by independent travellers. It is easiest to get to the Umba, Varzuga and Voronya Rivers, accessible by road. In principle, it is possible to hike to the Chavanga or Strelna River, for example, or purchase a boat ride along the coast. A permit is required to catch red fish (salmon, trout and pink salmon). In 2007 a 12-hour fishing permit for one salmon cost €9 for a foreigner. A permit can be purchased from the following firms:

**Krasnoshchelye.** Lovozero, Shkolnaya 2-23, (81538) 31057. Salmon permits for salmon rivers in the Lovozero district.

**Kolvitskiye prostory.** Kandalaksha, Novaya 10 korpus 1, (81533) 99099. Salmon permits for the Kolvitsa, Niva and Kanta Rivers.

**Vskhody Kommunizma.** Varzuga / Murmansk. See above. Salmon permits for White Sea coastal rivers from the Varzuga to the Pulonga. Fishing permits for participants of group trips are arranged by the travel agency. Most of the salmon quotas are catch and release fishing. Some of the permits allow you to keep the fish.

A fisherman without a permit has to pay a fine. The salmon fishing season lasts from May to October.

The relationship between the sport fishing business and the local population in Murmansk oblast is a subject of constant speculation. The locals complain about fishing limitations and decreasing stocks of salmon. On their part the fishing companies have hinted of overfishing practiced by the locals. The

Sami people are another story, as their age-old fishing waters have become commercial property of fishing authorities. In the 1990s many fishing companies supported local projects. Now the support is channelled to a foundation under Lovozero's district administration.

### **CHALMNIVARRE**

The former Sami village of Chalmnivarre is located near the Ponoï River over 30 km southeast of Krasnoshchelye. The residents of the village were moved to Krasnoshchelye in the 1930s.

Chalmnivarre is known for its rock drawings, which were discovered on the low rocks along the Ponoï River amazingly late - not until 1973. There are a couple hundred drawings on ten different rocks. The oldest are on the lowest rocks, and their age has been calculated to be four thousand years. Many of the drawings depict humans. One shows a human giving birth to a reindeer.

Kamenka's or Kintus's Sami *siida* was located to the west of Chalmnivarre.

### **KANEVKA**

The village of Kanevka is located midway along the Ponoï River nearly 300 km from Lovozero. The village was established by Komi brothers Igor and Vasily Kanev in 1923. Today there are about 70 inhabitants in Kanevka, most of which are Komi people. They are reindeer farmers paid by Krasnoshchelye's Lenin's Remembrance sovkhos.

It is possible to travel between Krasnoshchelye and Kanevka by boat in the summer. In winter the trip between the villages takes six hours one way by snowmobile. A flight from Lovozero takes 1 hr 20 min.

### **FORMER VILLAGE OF PONOÏ**

The former village of Ponoï is located near the mouth of the Ponoï river about 10 km from the sea. The location of the village at the base of a high riverbank is impressive. Ponoï was a mixed village of Sami people and Russians that was shut down in 1973. There is a large labyrinth near the

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village (see Kandalaksha: Labyrinths). The mouth of the Korabelnoye River is a closed military area.

## **SOSNOVKA**

Sosnovka, located on the seashore, is the easternmost inhabited village on the Kola Peninsula. The 70 inhabitants include Russians, Komi and Sami people. There are many summer residents in the village.

A few kilometres from the shore in front of Sosnovka is Sosnovets Island, which has an operating lighthouse. The island grows tundra plants and is supposed to contain bowl-like gravel formations.

A flight from Lovozero to Sosnovka on a small An-2 airplane lasts two hours.

## **CLOSED AREAS**

North of the Ponoï River along Kola's coast are military sites that should be taken into consideration when planning the route of a trip.

The closed areas are Korabelnoye at the mouth of the Ponoï river and the Gorodetsky lighthouse and Lumbovka Bay further north. There is or there used to be a navy air force practice area in Lumbovka. The historic Orlov lighthouse between Lumbovka and the mouth of the Ponoï River should be an open area, but the situation should be checked before going there.

Ostrovnoi's or Gremikha's nuclear-powered submarine base, which is being shut down, is still a closed area in a 30 km radius, including Svyatoi Nos ("The Holy Cape"), which separates the waters of the White Sea and the Barents Sea. The city of Ostrovnoi currently has about five thousand inhabitants and it forms a separate closed administration area. Gremikha is no longer actively used as a submarine base. Instead, it is a storage place for the navy's nuclear waste, and construction of a plant that dismantles nuclear submarines no longer in use is planned there. The Sami village of Yokanga was emptied to make room for the garrison in 1963.

Further west the coast is open area at the mouth of the Varzina River and then closed again from the Vostochnaya Litsa River west all the way

to the Norwegian border. The sea area is a closed frontier zone near the military sites and on the west side of Svyatoi Nos.

### **NORTH-FLOWING RIVERS**

The north-flowing Varzina River (Arsyok in Sami) is one of Kola's famous salmon rivers, that also contains a lot of trout. The river is only 20-30 metres wide. The banks are forested. The surroundings are difficult to travel. The Sami village of Varzino, which originally was the summer village of the Semiostroyev or Arsyok Sami *siida*, used to be located at the mouth of the Varzina River. The village was shut down "for having no future" and the inhabitants were moved to Lovozero in 1969. Ancient labyrinths have been preserved at the mouths of the Varzina and Drozdovka Rivers (see Kandalaksha: Labyrinths).

Another famous salmon river, the Yokanga (Yovkui in Sami) also flows to the city of Ostrovnoi. It is 40 m wide on average and a fast-flowing white-water river that flows part of the way through a rock-walled gorge. The river has tens of rapids. The headwaters start at Kuottemyavr or Kuropteyevskoye Lake, which lent its name to the former Sami *siida*.

The Kharlovka and Rynda Rivers, which flow into the closed area, are smaller rivers that flow through the tundra. Alpine birch grow along the banks. Kharlovka has many rapids.

### **TUNDRA**

If you travel a few dozen kilometres northeast of Lovozero, the coniferous forest begins to thin out. At some point only alpine birch grows in the surroundings. Then they also disappear: you are in the open, endless tundra. It is hard to estimate distances. It seems visibility is poor, but it isn't. There is just unlimited space.

Tundra covers a third of the Kola Peninsula. The treeless belt begins approximately at the ridge of the Keivy fells and covers the northern part of the peninsula, extending southeast to about Sosnovka. The tundra with its flora, fauna and scenery is a different Kola that is definitely worth visiting should the opportunity arise.

We visited the tundra from Lovozero in April. The rolling, snowy

landscape was decorated by melted patches that exposed red undergrowth and stones. Willow grouse with their black tail feathers flew away from the path of our snowmobile. Along the way we saw plovers, little Siberian tits and ravens. A sea eagle soared in the sky. Then a wolverine appeared about 50 metres from our snowmobile. It was clearly playful, and ran in the same direction as our snowmobile - and kept up with it!

In the tundra northeast of Lovozero is a sovkhos reindeer herding station (68°19'7 and 36°03'1), comprised of a couple of buildings and a sorting fences. The Galkin Sami couple stays here in winter. A white dog was in the yard. A row of bloody reindeer heads was placed on the roof of a storage building, which a cat was inspecting. The place is about 60 km from the settlement of Lovozero and 90 km from the sea.

A Sami *siida* winter village used to be located further east near Lyavozero or Leiyavr Lake. The remains of an old Orthodox prayer house have been found at the lake.

## THE GREAT KOLA EXPEDITION OF 1887

Before the railway and roads were constructed in the 1900s, people in the Kola Peninsula travelled primarily by sea. The most important inland route followed the course of the current main highway and railway from Kandalaksha via Imandra Lake to the Kola Fjord. This route was travelled in 1836 by Finnish folklorist Elias Lönnrot “in a terrible February snowstorm”. Only Sami people with teams of reindeer travelled in the inland parts of the peninsula.

The idea of a research expedition into the interior of the Kola Peninsula, “where no natural scientists had previously visited” and of which there weren't even any good maps, began to form among scientific circles in Finland in the 1800s. This journey, known as “the great Kola expedition”, was made by eight scientists in the summer of 1887. The objectives were to determine the extent of forest, map the region and study the flora and fauna, terrain and soil.

A vanguard of researchers reached the city of Kola via Kuusamo and Kandalaksha in late April. The researchers were surprised by an early spring: the ground was almost bare and it appeared impossible to travel. Nevertheless,

the expedition's "scout", botanist A.O. Kihlman, succeeded in travelling by sea to the Voronya River, where the Lapps gave him a reindeer ride to the winter village of Voronya. With the help of the Lapp guides he continued by boat from Voronya to Lovozero, from where he visited the Lovozero Fells and recorded the annual life cycle of the Lapps.

The rearguard of researchers were stuck a long time in the city of Kola, but at the end of the summer they finally succeeded in acquiring reindeer from Finnish pioneers in Notozero. They also took along a boat "that was made of cloth and so light that a one man could carry it". Escorted by Lapp and Finnish guides, the group reached Kihlman in Voronya.

After studying the Voronya and Lovozero area the expedition decided to split up again. Kihlman and geologist Wilhelm Ramsay went east from Voronya, assisted by Lapps and reindeer. It had been difficult to acquire guides because the Lapps didn't want to leave in the middle of the fishing season. Kihlman and Ramsay finally ended up in Yokanga and from there by sailboat to the mouth of the Ponoï River. Professor J.A.Palmén and graduate Alfred Petrelius went by boat to the headwaters of the Maryok River (Afanasiya), from where they hauled the boat five versts to the waters of the Ponoï River. Game here "was so abundant that the travellers did not need to touch their food preserves for three weeks". Palmén, Petrelius and company travelled down the Ponoï to the sea - downriver the boat had to be portaged past the large rapids that "the Lapps feared immensely". The travellers headed from the mouth of the Ponoï towards Archangel by sailboat in September.

The outcome of the expedition includes a map compiled by Petrelius and the discovery of the Lovozero Fells. They also "got quite a clear picture" of the extent of the forest and the quality of the soil. The men studied animal species by shooting hawk offspring, Arctic warblers and blue foxes for samples. The scientists were greatly daunted by the origin of palsas. Not knowing that they were caused by frost, the scientists came to the conclusion that the palsas had to be filled with sand. Geologist Ramsay returned to Kola several times and was the first to map the rich mineral reserves of the Khibiny and Lovozero Fells. The Kola expedition is well documented in Kalevi Rikkinen's book *Suuri Kuolan retki 1887*, published in 1980.



## LOVOZERO



TOURIST INFORMATION



POST OR TELEPHONE OFFICE



RESTAURANT, CAFE



RAILWAY STATION



PETROL STATION



HOTEL OR HOSTEL



INTERNET



BAR, NIGHT CLUB



BUS STATION



SAUNA



MONEY EXCHANGE



SHOP



SIGHT



SUPERVISED CAR PARK



OTHER

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## **GEOGRAPHICALLY IN EUROPE, MENTALLY SO FAR AWAY!**

Even though the Kola Peninsula in Northern Russia is famous for its military sites and industry, a large part of it is still virgin wilderness. Here salmon are free to swim upriver to spawn and bears amble to their mating grounds without anyone bothering them.

This book tells about South Kola's tourism possibilities, travelling in the region and places where you can find food and lodging. A traveller that appreciates the quietude of nature can spend unforgettable days fishing, trekking or kayaking in Kola. Kirovsk has West Russia's best ski slopes and the clear waters of the White Sea are great for diving. Tourists can relax in Kola's cities and get a glimpse of the northern urban way of life.

In this book we skied in the Khibiny Mountains, visited the tundra's Sami reindeer herders and relaxed in a steaming sea plant bath in a small vacation village on the shore of the White Sea.

During the trip we fished for flounder with a purse seine, became familiar with ancient rock drawings and kept pace with a wolverine when riding a snowmobile.

This book was produced in the partially EU-funded "LapKola 2 – development of tourism business between Lapland and South Kola" project. The project belongs to the Interreg III A Northern Kolarctic Neighbourhood Programme.

ISSN: 1239-7741

ISBN: 978-952-5153-76-7

