

DOG SLEDDING

FLY RYANAIR TO TURIN FROM 10 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING ✕ BARI | ✕ BRINDISI | ✕ BRUSSELS (CHARLEROI) | ✕ GIRONA (BARCELONA) |

✕ IBIZA | ✕ LONDON (STANSTED) | ✕ MADRID | ✕ PARIS (BEAUVAIS) | ✕ TRAPANI | VISIT RYANAIR.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION

REIGNING CHAMPION

*Much simpler than skiing – and a million times cuter – “mushing” is a fast, fun way to explore the French Alps. The only problem is convincing a team of canines you’re top dog, as **Matt Glasby** discovers*

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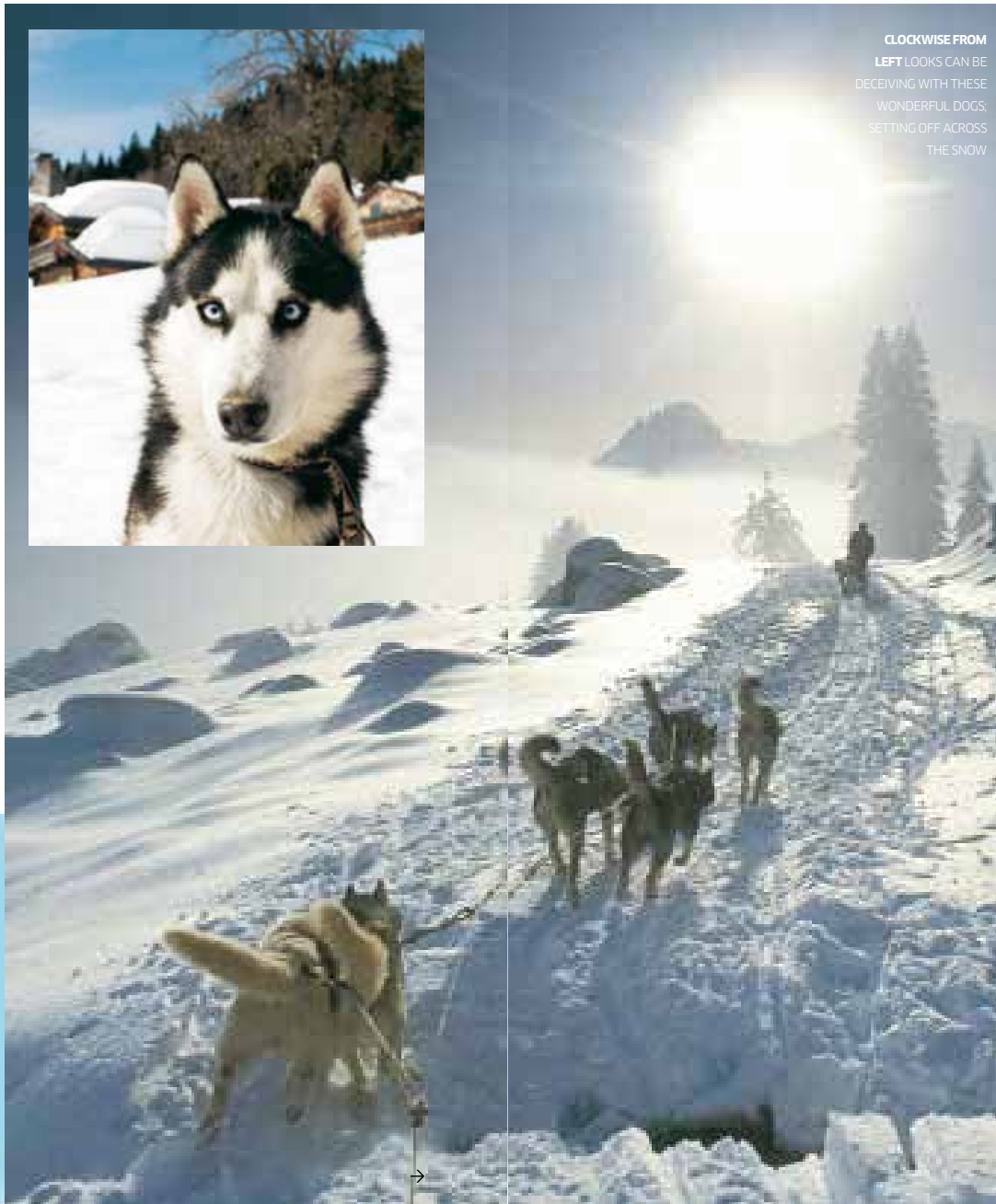
✕ IBIZA | ✕ LONDON (STANSTED) | ✕ MALTA (LUQA) | ✕ PARIS (BEAUVAIS) | ✕ TRAPANI | VISIT RYANAIR.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION

Behind a chain-link fence sits a mixed pack of Siberian Huskies, Samoyeds and Canadian Eskimo hounds with lean, wolfy features and ice-blue eyes.

Some of them howl ominously at the sky. The rest are staring at me. The sign outside the enclosure says, in no uncertain terms, do not touch the dogs. Try telling them that.

As I follow our guide Christophe inside, one of his furry charges lunges at me growling and pressing its face into my shin – dog-speak, I believe, for “Who the hell goes there?”. After a brief sniff of my lower leg, he rolls onto his back and puts his paws in the air – dog-speak for “Please tickle my tummy!”. Soon, most of his friends are following suit and rolling around at my feet waiting to be rubbed. It’s by some distance the cutest thing I’ve ever seen. It’s also humans 1, dogs 0.

We’re on a plateau high above Val Cenis ski resort in the Haute-Maurienne region of the French Alps. I’m here with a group looking to learn dog-sledding, or “mushing” and, having already tried my hand at snowshoeing and skiing, I’m happy to let someone – or something – else do the work. Besides, I thought we’d won the man-animal contest eons ago, and I’ve been looking forward to barking orders at a team of loyal canines as they speed me serenely



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING WITH THESE WONDERFUL DOGS, SETTING OFF ACROSS THE SNOW



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WOLF WATCHING IN SWEDEN

Track these protected predators across the Malingsbo-Kloten nature reserve on foot or cross-country skis. Trips are organised in conjunction with Sweden’s leading wolf research centre. Even if you don’t see these notoriously shy creatures crossing frozen lakes, you’ll hear them howling spookily in the distance. It costs £945 (€1,200) for four days.

responsibletravel.com

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO STOCKHOLM (SKAVSTA AND VÄSTERÅS)

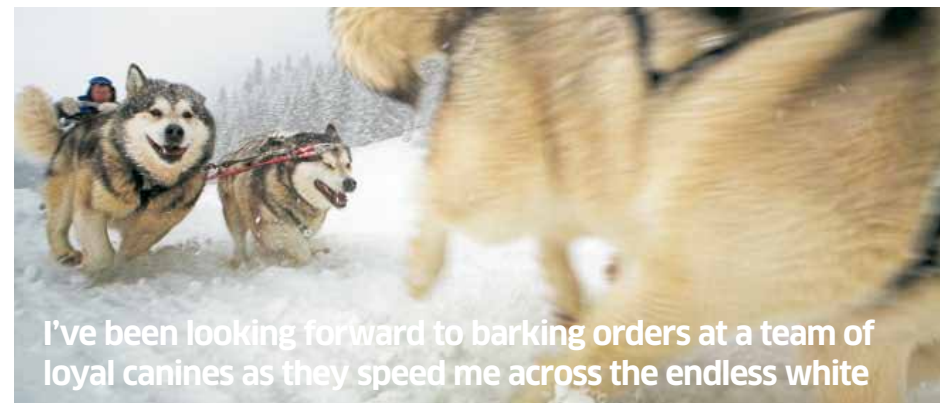


HORSES AND HUSKIES IN NORWAY

Follow in the footsteps of polar explorer Roald Amundsen with a husky safari across the untouched Rendalen countryside – you stay overnight in a cabin for that genuine lost-in-the-wilderness frisson. For something more sedate, try clip-clopping through the woods in a fur-lined, horse-drawn sleigh. Trips cost from 600NOK (€80).

spydspissen.no

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO OSLO (RYGGE AND TORP)



I've been looking forward to barking orders at a team of loyal canines as they speed me across the endless white

which isn't really cricket. Mushing has also been part of the Winter Olympics since 1932, and forms the basis of La Grande Odyssée Savoie Mont Blanc, a sled race through 1,000km of alpine resorts that takes place every January.

Unfortunately, my team seems to be in training for such a feat. We're not meant to overtake the sleds in front of us, but my dogs use their superior numbers to race past the rest of the group. It's a question of hanging on, rather than steering; leaning into the curves and braking gently, if at all. However, as they power me across the pristine plateau I feel on top of the world, if not quite the task in hand. Humans 2, dogs 0.

It's when we pause to take instruction from Christophe that the downside to having an extra

dog becomes apparent. As we're talking, the hounds leap high into the air to get the sled moving again, and it's all I can do to keep us stationary. You've heard of being pulled apart by horses – this is the canine equivalent. I stand firm, but Roisin looks back at me as if to say "Come on!", disapproval furrowing her little brow.

She soon gets her way. On the first big downhill, the huskies race joyously forward, completely unencumbered by thoughts of my wellbeing. Before long I'm thrown sideways into a huge pile of snow, which is refreshing to say the least. I manage to remount the sled before they run off with it any further, but it's definitely humans 2, dogs 1.

"There is no such thing as making a pet out of a sledge dog," declared Amundsen's mission-mate →

COOL OFF WITH MORE MAGNIFICENT CREATURES

PHOTOS: SUPERSTOCK; NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY



REINDEER IN SCOTLAND

Hidden away in the Cairngorms, you'll find Scotland's very own herd of 150 reindeer, which were imported to the hills above Aviemore in the 1950s by an eccentric Swede. Guided tours allow you to feed and stroke the creatures, costing £10 (€12.80). They run at 11am and 2.30pm daily, May to September; then at 11am daily in winter, weather permitting.

cairngormreindeer.co.uk

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO EDINBURGH AND GLASGOW (PRESTWICK)

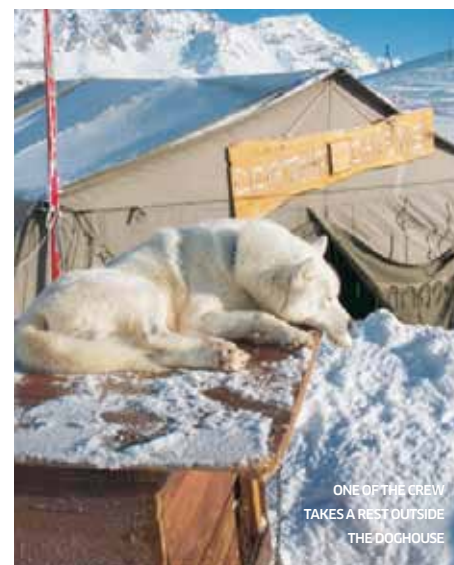


PENGUINS IN LONDON

OK, we admit they aren't wild penguins, but as wintry animal encounters go you can't beat a trip to see the penguin colony at the Sea Life London Aquarium. The Gentoo penguin is originally from Antarctica and a unique artificial habitat here recreates their home. Watch them underwater in the ice cave. Adults £19.80 (€25), children £14.40 (€18).

visitsealife.com

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO LONDON (GATWICK, LUTON AND STANSTED)



ONE OF THE CREW
TAKES A REST OUTSIDE
THE DOGHOUSE

My dogs have shrugged me off the sled and are bounding down the incline

Helmer Hanssen. He wasn't wrong. At various points throughout our half-day trip the other dogs decide to take different routes to the ones that Christophe is leading us along out in front, and all of their friends follow, ignoring his instructions completely. If they'd ganged up on Amundsen like this he might have found himself endlessly circling the Pole. We'll call it 2-2.

On the final downhill of the day, the end of our glorious jaunt, our inter-species rivalry comes to a head. Before I can slow them, my dogs have shrugged me off the sled and are bounding down the incline. There's nothing more demeaning than chasing after your own sled, so I dust myself off – again – and trudge south. At the bottom I find four gleeful dogs who look up at me, surprised, as if to say, "Oh, you're back! What kept you?". Alright guys, call it a draw? ●

A 30-minute introduction to mushing costs €40 (under-12s €30). A half/full day of learning to become a musher costs €115/€185 per person.

PHOTO: BETTY

[husky-adventure.net](https://www.husky-adventure.net)

MORE OFFBEAT WAYS TO TOUR A DESTINATION

BY HANG-GLIDER IN LANZAROTE, SPAIN

With just the right combination of warmth and windiness, Lanzarote is the perfect spot to get your wings. From October to March, take a tandem flight over the stunning volcanic landscape. For best results, try not to close your eyes. €120 per person. [flylanzarote.com](https://www.flylanzarote.com)

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO LANZAROTE

BY SNOWSHOE IN TALLINN, ESTONIA

Take a day trip from the capital and strap on some snowshoes. This ancient method of icy perambulation is an authentic way to stomp across Estonia's wintry wilderness looking for lynx, deer and boar – if you don't mind waddling like a constipated duck, that is. €59 per person, [tallinnadaytrip.com](https://www.tallinnadaytrip.com)

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO TALLINN

BY TRIKE IN EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

The chauffeur of your motorised trike will speed you round Auld Reekie favourites such as regal Holyrood and Arthur's Seat. Breakfast-and-whisky tours are also available for the strong of stomach – alongside other types of trip. From £55 (£70) per person, [triketoursscotland.com](https://www.triketoursscotland.com)

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO EDINBURGH

BY SEGWAY IN BERLIN, GERMANY

Hit the ground rolling on a two-wheeled tour of some of the most significant spots of 20th-century history – from Hitler's Bunker to the Berlin Wall. For these tours, riders must be over 15, 45kg-115kg and have a driver's license (car or scooter). €67 per person, [citysegwaytours.com](https://www.citysegwaytours.com)

✕ FLY RYANAIR TO BERLIN (SCHÖNEFELD)

