

## FOREST SAAMI

The forest Saami in the past inhabited a large portion of the forested areas in the interior of Upper Norrland. Today their territory is limited to the inland area between Vittangi in Norrbotten County down to Malå in Västerbotten County with Arvidsjaur as the core area. The life of the forest Saami is adapted to that of the forest reindeer, which finds all its forage in forest areas and never needs to move to the mountains. Before the 18th century, forest reindeer husbandry was small-scale, every household keeping about 10 domesticated reindeer. Hunting, and above all fishing, brought the staple nutrition.

## THE GREAT CHANGE

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, conditions changed. The forestlands were populated by non-nomadic settlers, who were allotted land that by tradition had provided reindeer forage. Many forest Saami abandoned their traditional way of life, while others specialised, increasing the size of their herds. In Arvidsjaur Municipality today, there are three sijddas (Saami = group of companies or district for reindeer keeping) that actively herd forest reindeer.

In Lappstaden there are display boards that in words and pictures tell the story of Lappstaden and those who use it – make a visit!

For more information:  
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## UNIQUE

Lappstaden in Arvidsjaur church town is unique – nowhere else are there so many well-preserved forest Saami gåhties (Saami pyramid-shaped dwelling) as here. Their form combines that of the round gåhtie tent with the square timber dwelling. Lappstaden has never been used for permanent living; only for overnight stays during church festivals.

## A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

The buildings in Lappstaden are owned by the forest Saami themselves and are still in use. Here, people stay to spend time together and the tradition survives of spending the night in Lappstaden during the church feast, the last weekend in August. Families enjoy coming here – there is a positive atmosphere in Lappstaden!



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# LAPPSTADEN ARVIDSJOUR





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## LAPPSTADEN, FARMERS' TOWN, TRADESMEN'S TOWN

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the first churches were built in the vast regions of Lapland, and the church in Arvidsjaur was completed in 1607. The church was to bring to the Saami Christianity and Christian teachings. A so-called church attendance law stipulated a minimum level of attendance, but this was difficult for the nomadic Saami to fulfil. Since the road to church was long overnight gáhties were built, and nearby the settlers built their church cottages. The site of the first church was some way from the present Lappstaden – and was moved to its present site in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to Lappstaden for the Saami there is also a farmers' section, where the permanent dwellers of the parish has their church cottages and a section where tradesmen owned houses. This last section has had to make way for present-day Arvidsjaur, but Lappstaden lives on!

## THE STORSTÄMNING FEAST

Once a year Lappstaden becomes a hive of activity – and that is at Storstämning, during the last weekend in August – make a visit! According to the priest Petrus Laestadius 1831, this was: "the main feast of the Arvidsjaur Lapps..." "Nowhere else were the catechetical home visits as solemn as here..."

A Storstämning nowadays lasts from Friday to Sunday, beginning and ending in church. During the feast, there is a meeting, always well-attended, of the Saami association, and in connection with the meeting the different Saami sijddas take time to discuss questions and issues of common interest. During the Saturday there are contests for reindeer herders in marksmanship and lassoing, and on the Sunday there is a dried-meat auction. Before leaving Lappstaden, folk gather for a church service in the Saami association's gáhtie. The feast is over.

## CHURCH TOWNS

There have been 71 church towns in Sweden – all but one of them located in the two northernmost counties of Sweden. Today, 16 church towns remain, of which Gammelstad Church Town in Luleå is the biggest and best-preserved, and since 1996 is listed as a World Heritage site.

The first churches in Upper Norrland were built in place where people were used to congregating: in Arvidsjaur the church town was located in a forest Saami winter area. In connection with church feasts fairs were also held. In the church town there were also cells, a bailiff's office and a hostelry – with the school housed in the courtroom building. The church town filled a much-felt need in Upper Norrland. It was a "temporary town" in an area that long lacked a sustainable base for a town.