

THE ARCTIC WEDDING PLANNER

Meet Janne Honkanen, the man who arranged the magical winter wonderland wedding for Formula One world champion Mika Häkkinen in Lapland

Words Rita Tainola

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ying the knot in Arctic temperatures might not be the first idea to occur to betrothed couples, but for a star such as two-time Formula One world champion Mika Häkkinen, Lapland offered the perfect romantic setting. He is not the only one: footballer David Beckham has holidayed with his family in the north of Finland, as have Madonna and *Game of Thrones* star Emilia Clarke, with Prince Albert of Monaco and King Abdullah of Jordan enjoying trips to the region, too.

The natural beauty and privacy in Lapland make it an ideal destination for celebrities whose holidays – and weddings – are facilitated by one man: Janne Honkanen. The former snowmobile racer specialises in bespoke experiences in Lapland, across Finland and the rest of the Nordic region.

Honkanen's career change stemmed from a terrible accident. His dreams came true when he was invited to race in the US, but an accident in a snowcross race in Minnesota left him with fractures in his heels and back. Things got worse. When he returned home for surgery, doctors found a brain tumour. The discovery was life-changing.

"I had to re-evaluate my life and started to see it from a different perspective," he explains. "I realised that my racing career was over. I did not give up but started to run a snowmobile school for children by the Arctic Circle." Later, this became the beginning of the story for his company, Luxury Action.

Over time, Honkanen became acquainted with wealthy families who sent their children to learn how to drive in icy conditions and they started asking him to design their holidays in Rovaniemi and Lapland.

"To be fully qualified to run the business and to understand my clients' requirements, I learned about different cultures and languages in my free time, and studied luxury travel in the French Riviera," he says. "In racing you are only as good as your latest result."

When Formula One world champion Mika Häkkinen started to think about his wedding, he called Honkanen. "I wanted to have the wedding to my lovely wife, Marketa, in Rovaniemi as there were many foreign guests invited. We wanted to show



foreigners the winter beauty of the Finnish north," Häkkinen explains.

The event of 120 guests included celebrities from Monaco, as well as France, Germany and, of course, Finland. "Because I drove the wedding car last autumn for Mercedes F1 driver Valtteri Bottas and his wife Emilia, Valtteri led the reindeer sleigh from the ceremony," Häkkinen laughs.

Travelling the world, Häkkinen, no doubt, had the option of many countries for his wedding but Finland has retained a special place in his heart. "The beauty of Finland, the clean air, safety and people are the best in the world," he says proudly. "Lapland is one of my favourite hideaways."

Honkanen was, of course, very happy to arrange Häkkinen's wedding and, with his experience, was just the man for the job. Of course, there have been some interesting enquiries over the years but nothing is impossible for a former racer. "One request was to put lights on in a forest in the middle of nowhere, and there was no electricity in the surrounding area," he remembers. "We ended up using snowmobiles with their headlights on."

As for his memories of Häkkinen's wedding, he says: "Right after the ceremony, the family's children spotted the reindeer. They hopped on the sleigh that was, in fact, designed just for the wedding couple. The reindeer transfer ended up being the highlight of the wedding – beating the fancy cars." luxuryaction.com



Mika and Marketa Häkkinen leave on a sleigh, top; and Janne Honkanen, of Luxury Action, left

Extreme wedding venues

UNDER THE SEA

On Thailand's Andaman coast, Trang has been officially recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the home of the biggest underwater wedding in the world each February with as many as 32 couples tying the knot at one time.



MOUNTAIN HIGH

In 2005, a Nepalese couple became the world's first to wed on top of Mount Everest. The 10-minute ceremony gave them just enough time to take off their oxygen masks, put on garlands and take a few photos, of course.



HOW DEEP IS YOUR LOVE?

For couples who fancy a wedding with a difference, it's possible to tie the knot in the heart of a natural cave on the peninsula of Lapad in Croatia. The reception takes place on the terrace in front of the cave.

