

SPECIAL INTEREST  
TOURS



with

**Astronomer Bob Berman**

**2020 Northern Lights  
Tour Information Packet**

## Weather

During March temperatures can vary quite a bit. Daily temperatures can range from 0 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit. That being said, it is still possible for temperatures to get very low, especially at night. Daily low temperatures range from -7°F to 9°F, falling below -27°F or exceeding 23°F only one day in ten.

## Clothing & Packing

- The key to staying warm in Alaska is layers, layers, layers! You should bring a wind resistant winter coat and plan to layer underneath both your coat and pants. We highly recommend bringing long underwear; silk and smartwool are great long underwear materials. At the very least we recommend wearing a base layer of long underwear, a sweater or fleece and a warm jacket.
- Warm socks are also important and smart wool is a great material for socks. It is better to have one warm pair of socks than 2 thin pairs of socks.
- It is also great to bring packs of hand and foot warmers, which can be slipped into your boots or gloves. You can find those at most outdoor stores. These can also be placed inside camera equipment bags to help keep batteries warm.
- We recommend bringing a sturdy pair of boots with good tread for icy conditions. These can be any height that you are comfortable with as most of the snow we encounter will be packed down. Waterproof is recommended, but not required.
- Chena Hot Springs does rent pants, parkas and boots for \$30 a day or \$15 per item per day. If you plan to do outdoor activities like cross country skiing while you are there, you should either bring or plan to rent snow pants.
- Though it may seem counterintuitive, make sure you remember your bathing suit so you can enjoy Chena's fabulous hot springs!
- There is no dress code; please dress comfortably.
- **Please Note** - You are responsible for all of your belongings and must only bring what you yourself can carry.

## Hotel Contact Information

The Anchorage Extension - March 19th & 20th

### **Hilton Downtown Anchorage Hotel**

500 W 3rd Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501  
(907) 272-7411

March 21st (For Anchorage Extension) & 22nd , March 25th & 26th

### **Westmark Fairbanks Hotel and Conference Center**

Address: 813 Noble Street, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-4977  
Phone: (907) 456-7722  
Fax: (907) 451-7478

March 23rd & 24th

### **Chena Hot Springs Resort**

Address: 17600 Chena Hot Springs Rd, Fairbanks, AK 99712  
Phone: (907) 451-8104  
Fax: (907) 451-8151

## Internet

- Wi-Fi should be available at all the hotels

## Recommended Restaurants in Fairbanks:

### **Lavelle's Bistro**

575 1st Ave, Fairbanks, AK 99701-4724  
907-450-0555  
<http://www.lavellesbistro.com>

### **Thai House Restaurant**

412 5TH Ave, Fairbanks, AK 99701-4718  
(907) 452-6123

### **McCafferty's Coffee House**

408 Cushman St, Fairbanks, AK 99701-4632  
(907) 456-6853  
<http://www.mccaffertys.net>

### **The Fudge Pot**

515 1st Ave, Fairbanks, AK 99701-4724  
907-456-3834  
<http://www.thefudgepot.com>

## Places to visit in Anchorage

**The Tony Knowles Coastal Trail** is a flat and scenic trail that runs 11 miles along the coast from downtown Anchorage to **Kincaid Park**. Along with beautiful views of the city and surrounding areas, it is possible to see fascinating wildlife such as moose and American Bald Eagles.

- <http://www.anchoragecoastaltrail.com>
- <http://anchorageparkfoundation.org/directory/kincaid/>

### **Anchorage Alaska Public Lands Information Center**

605 West 4th Avenue # 105, Anchorage, AK 99501

(907) 644-3661

<http://www.alaskacenters.gov>

**Anchorage Light Speed Planet Walk**- As you explore downtown Anchorage you may notice parts of the Light Speed Planet Walk. The Anchorage Light Speed Planet Walk is a scale model of our solar system. The scale was chosen so that a leisurely walking pace mimics the speed of light. On this scale, each step equals the distance light travels in one second (300,000 kilometers or 186,000 miles). A great place to start is at the Sun station located on the back corner of the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts (corner of [5th Avenue and G Street](#)).

Follow the inner planets along Fifth Avenue west to the beautiful **Tony Knowles Coastal Trail**. The signs continue south to Kincaid Park. <http://anchorageplanetwalk.org>

## Anchorage Restaurants

Anchorage is a lively city and in downtown Anchorage (roughly between 3<sup>rd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> Avenues and K-C Streets), there are many fun shops and restaurants.

The restaurants listed below are just a few of many in the downtown area within a walking distance of the hotel.

### **Simon & Seafort's Saloon & Grill**

420 L St, Ste 200, Anchorage, AK 99501-1976

+1 907-274-3502

<http://www.simonandseafort.com>

### **Snow City Cafe**

1034 W 4th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501-1919

+1 907-272-6338

<http://www.snowcitycafe.com>

### **Moose's Tooth Pub and Pizzeria**

3300 Old Seward Hwy, Anchorage, AK 99503-4129 (Midtown)

907-258-253

<http://moosestooth.net>

# Auroral Photography Guidelines

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A good display of the Northern Lights can be a lifelong memorable experience. If you are interested in trying to preserve your memories by photographing the displays, here's a short guideline to help you get the most out of your efforts.

- First of all, try not to get so caught up in taking pictures that you miss watching the display with your eyes. This may sound counterintuitive, but it can be very easy to get so involved with trying to get the perfect picture that you forget to watch the subtle display of light and movement that is the aurora. What you see with your eyes and what comes out of your camera can be two very different experiences of the same thing.
- Practice before you go. Once you are out under a truly dark night sky, you do not want to be fumbling around trying to fix things, figuring out what goes where and generally getting frustrated. It's easy to take your gear out into your backyard or a park and try things out beforehand. Be ready!
- Bring extra batteries and chargers for everything that needs them. Keep spare batteries in a pocket with you in case they are needed, as batteries die fairly quickly in very cold weather. If you are out at a time when the temperatures are going to be below freezing, you'll be amazed at how quickly batteries will drain and be grateful that you brought spares.
- Bring along a red flashlight. The eye is less sensitive to red light and using a red light flashlight will help you to see what you are doing. Your eye can take up to 20 minutes to fully adapt to the darkness. The red light will help you to maintain your dark adaptation and will also prevent you from bothering anyone around you trying to enjoy the lights and/or take pictures of them.
- Tips for keeping your hands warm: Bring along some hand and toe warmers. They are cheap and easy to get. They will help to extend your ability to stay out in cold weather dramatically. Also, you can find gloves with holes cut in the tips of them to allow the fingertips to poke out. A mitten can be placed over the fingers when needed. This will help give you the dexterity to change settings on your camera as needed, while still allowing you to keep most of your hand protected from the cold.

## ***Some thoughts and suggestions on cameras, lenses, settings and more:***

- Get a sturdy yet lightweight, transportable [tripod](#). Because the aurora is generally dim and it's a nighttime event, you will need to take multiple seconds exposures to capture most images. With long exposures you will need a steady support to make sure that your precious images don't blur. Be sure to attach the camera to the tripod a few times before going out for the real thing. Know how it works and if there are any flaws or problems that need to be ironed out beforehand.
- To take good pictures of the aurora, the ideal camera will be one that has a "bulb" setting. Many single lens reflex (SLR) cameras have this setting, most point and shoot type cameras do not. A bulb setting allows you to take pictures from a fraction of a second up to as long as you want. Depending upon conditions like the brightness and intensity of the auroral display, a good range of exposure time can be from a second or two up to about 30 seconds.

- Buy and test out a remote **cable release** that will work with your camera. When you are taking pictures exposed longer than a fraction of a second, it's easy to induce blurring even on a tripod unless you can use your camera's timer or have a remote cable release attached. A cable release will allow you to start and stop a picture from a distance and remotely control how long your exposure is. These need some practice beforehand to get the best results, but are well worth the investment. If you are trying to cut down on equipment, instead of using a cable release you can also set the shutter timer to trigger the shutter some seconds after you hit the button so your hand doesn't shake the camera.
- **ISO settings?** What is this and how does it work? Most digital cameras have the ability to change what are known as ISO settings. The ISO setting governs how sensitive the camera is to light. The higher the ISO setting, the shorter the exposure needed and the dimmer the light conditions can be to capture a given view. For good images of the aurora, a setting around 1600 or higher should work well. Be aware though that the higher the ISO setting, the more "noise" you insert into the image. Noise appears as almost sand-like granulation in pictures. It can get objectionable, but there is software available to reduce the effect. Varying the ISO setting during an auroral display along with trying various lengths of time for each exposure gives you a better chance at hitting just the right combination.
- Camera lenses, what's best? There is no absolute right or wrong answer to this question. Generally though, you want a lens with a wide field of view. auroras can cover huge sections of the sky at once so ideally you want to get as much in as possible with each shot. Some cameras come with fixed lenses with the ability to zoom out to cover a wide field, some allow you to change lenses to suit what you are doing. Use the lowest F stop available with your lens to let in the maximum amount of light. You don't need to spend a fortune on a special lens either. There are many places where you can arrange to rent just the right lens you want and have it delivered to your doorstep in time for your trip at a fraction of the cost of buying a new lens. [www.Lensrentals.com](http://www.Lensrentals.com) is a lens rental website we recommend.
- Focusing. Most modern cameras have autofocus capabilities. This works great for everyday shots of people or the outdoors during the daytime. Autofocus is not so good for nighttime pictures. Cameras can get confused in the darkness just like people. You will need a camera that allows the autofocus to be turned off. Then make sure that when you are out under that perfect aurora that you manually set the focus to infinity. This is something that you should double check each time you go out as it's easy to forget. Also, extreme cold can warp the camera's focus. Even if you set the focus to infinity, your image can go out of focus once the lens has been in the cold for a bit. Because of this, it is important to keep checking your focus as you continue to photograph.

### ***Some final thoughts...***

Some of the best pictures of the aurora have interesting things in the foreground for contrast and visual interest. Mountains, trees, buildings and people all make for more balanced, visually interesting shots.

Vary your exposure times and ISO settings. With digital cameras, it's easy to take tons of pictures and weed out the wheat from the chaff.

Above all, have fun and don't forget to look with both your eyes and through your camera for the most satisfying experience!