



ARCTIC AURORA TOUR

5-Day Itinerary

If you are serious about the northern lights, then you'll want to dedicate more than day to it. This trip carries you away from Fairbanks to the historic village of Wiseman in the Brooks Range of northern Alaska. In the quiet of the

northern wilderness, where there are few distractions, we have the time to dedicate ourselves entirely to photography. We will stay in a log cabin where we will cook and eat our meals communally. During the

daylight hours we can examine the historic cabins, and gold-rush era mining equipment of Wiseman, walk the snowy trails or the frozen river, admire the rugged mountain scenery, or head out in the vehicle to look for

wildlife and new views of the Brooks Range. There is no better trip to find and photograph the aurora, Alaska's winter landscape, and northern wildlife.

Expectations

Our chances of viewing and photographing the aurora borealis should be good during this excursion, but are not guaranteed. The northern lights require clear skies to be visible, and the right solar activity to occur. But, like any natural phenomenon, the aurora is difficult to predict. That's why I ask you to be flexible in your schedule and expectations. Below is a sample itinerary and it is very much subject to change. Weather will dictate our daily activities. If clouds prevail at night we'll spend our days searching out other photo subjects. On clear nights, you can expect to be out from 10pm to 2 or 3am. And don't worry, there will always be a warm cabin or vehicle nearby if you need to warm up or take a break.

Trip Details

Length: 5 Days, 4 Nights

Dates: March- early April or September/October

Destination: Wiseman, Alaska and the Brooks Range

Transportation Provided: Round-trip in a vehicle from Fairbanks to Wiseman and local transportation

Lodging: Rustic but comfortable cabin

Food: All meals provided except breakfast on Day 1 and dinner on Day 4.

Requirements: Must be physically able to walk over slick and uneven ground for short distances, and have a flexible and positive attitude.

Activities: Photography, hiking, natural history, aurora viewing



Day 1

At around 9am you'll be picked up at your hotel and we will turn our wheels north. We will quickly leave Fairbanks behind as we head up the Elliott Highway toward the snow-covered White Mountains. At about mile 70 we'll pass the small community of Livengood where we'll hang a right onto the famous Dalton Highway, or Haul Road. This narrow, mostly gravel highway parallels the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and connects the oil fields on the north slope with the rest of the state.

Heading north we'll wind through rolling forested hills before descending to the Yukon River. There, we'll take a lunch break and stretch our legs. About fifty miles north of the Yukon we'll pass the Arctic Circle at $66^{\circ} 33' 44''$ N where we'll officially cross into arctic Alaska. As we drive north, if it's clear, we'll begin to get our first look at the mountains of the Brooks Range. The Brooks lie entirely north of the Arctic Circle and stretch for 700 miles across the northern part of the state. For their entire length, the mountains are pierced by only a single road.

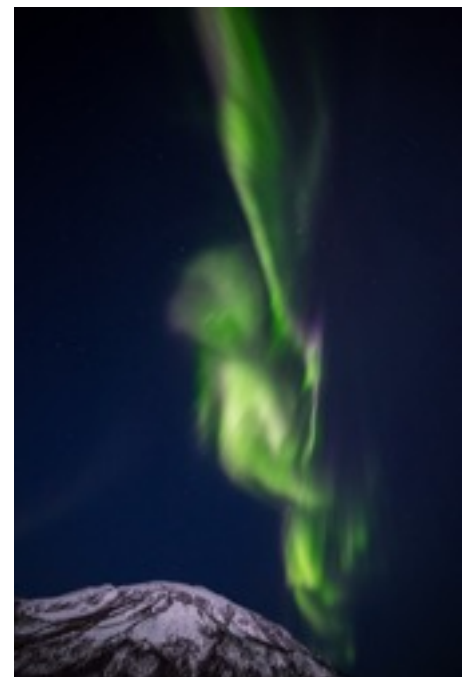
We'll carry on for another hour, slowly gaining elevation as we climb to the foothills and into the mountains themselves. At the truck stop in the small community of Coldfoot we'll take our last break of the drive.

It's just another 12 miles to the historic log cabin community of Wiseman where we'll be staying for the next four nights. In our warm cabin, we'll kick back and relax for a few hours, before we head back out for our first aurora hunt.

Day 2

After a late night, we'll sleep well into the morning. Our first full day, we'll have a chance to wander around the historic buildings of Wiseman and explore the nearby winter trails with our cameras. In the afternoon, when the light grows sweet, we'll head out to look for some nice compositions of the dramatic mountains

We'll return for dinner at our cabin and maybe a nap before heading outside to scan the skies for the northern lights.



Day 3

Continuing with the previous day's schedule, we'll have a good lie-in to recover from our inevitably late night. Weather and road conditions permitting, we'll drive up to Atigun Pass, the high point of the Dalton Highway on the crest of the Brooks Range. There, we'll be right in the mountains, and Dall Sheep may be present on the slopes close to the road. Willow Ptarmigan, in their white, winter plumage are frequently seen in the area. If road conditions and time allow, we'll descend toward the Atigun River and as far as the northern foothills where we will hopefully get a look out over the sweeping arctic coastal plain. We will take our time to watch the sunset over the mountains during the drive and may find the northern lights as we work our way back to our warm cabin in Wiseman.



Day 4

Our last full day in the Brooks Range, we'll return to some of our most productive landscape and wildlife spots of the past few days to hone our images, or see the views under different light. The evening will be filled with our final aurora hunt of the trip, where, with luck, we'll find the lights dancing over the frozen ice of Koyukuk River and the mountains beyond.

Day 5

We'll aim to leave Wiseman by mid-morning for the long drive back down the Haul Road toward Fairbanks. After a quick stop for gas and a coffee refill at Coldfoot we will make our way south. There will be fewer stops on the way south, but if we spot wildlife or great landscape scenes, we'll hit the brakes and make some images.

If all goes as planned, we'll be back in Fairbanks in time for dinner and some much-needed rest.

About Your Guide



David W. Shaw has photographed and lived in Alaska for almost 20 years. He has both an undergraduate and masters degree in wildlife biology. By blending science, natural history, and adventure into his images and words, he has created over 100 engaging stories for national magazines, websites, and books. His articles on the art of photography have been featured in magazines like Shutterbug, Photographic, Photo Technique, Professional Photographer, and Amateur Photographer. He is an instructor at the Digital Photography School and at ExpertPhotography.com. Additionally, his knowledge of science and the natural world have led to many publications in magazines like Sierra, UnDark, Ensia, Birds and Blooms, Defenders, Birdwatching, Birdwatcher's Digest, Alaska, Resurgence, and The Ecologist. Dave has travelled across the planet from Alaska to Antarctica and leaves bits of his heart in the wild places he visits. He has a particular passion for Alaska's wilderness. The Brooks Range, in Dave's opinion, is the most beautiful range of mountains in the world.

Questions?

If you have any questions or would like more details about what to expect, please don't hesitate to call or email.

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