

15 Top-Rated Things to Do in Fairbanks, Alaska



Fairbanks offers a completely different side of [*Alaska*](#), shaped by its interior location, extreme seasons, and strong connection to Arctic life. Known as one of the best [*places in the United States*](#) to see the northern lights, the city attracts travelers looking for unique winter experiences, rich cultural heritage, and wide-open wilderness.

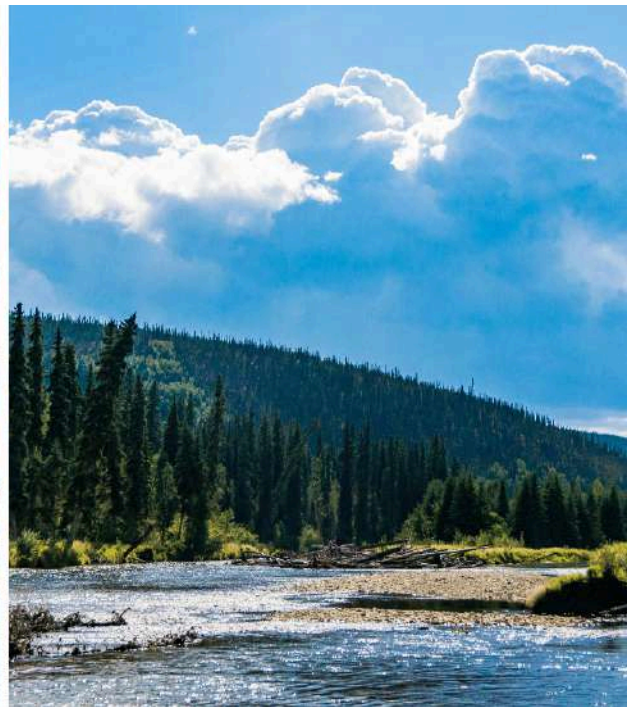
From watching the aurora borealis dance across the night sky to relaxing in natural hot springs, Fairbanks delivers experiences that are both rare and unforgettable. In summer, long daylight hours open up opportunities for river adventures, wildlife viewing, and exploring historic gold rush sites.

What makes Fairbanks stand out is its balance of nature and culture. Visitors can learn about Alaska Native traditions, discover the history of early explorers, and experience life in one of the coldest regions in the country.

Whether you visit in winter or summer, Fairbanks offers a mix of activities that you will not find anywhere else in Alaska.

Top Things to Do in Fairbanks

From northern lights and Arctic adventures to cultural experiences and scenic landscapes, Fairbanks offers some of the *[most unique activities in Alaska](#)*.



Watch the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis)

Fairbanks is one of the best places in the world to witness the northern lights, thanks to its location under the auroral oval. During the winter months, long nights and clear skies create ideal conditions for viewing this natural phenomenon. Travelers often head outside the city to darker areas where the lights appear brighter and more vivid. Shades of green, purple, and sometimes red move across the sky in a constantly shifting display,

creating an unforgettable experience. Guided aurora tours make it easier to find the best viewing locations while also providing warm shelters, photography tips, and expert insights into the science behind the lights.

Relax at Chena Hot Springs

Chena Hot Springs offers a relaxing escape just outside Fairbanks, where visitors can soak in naturally heated mineral waters surrounded by Alaska's wilderness. The outdoor rock lake is the highlight, allowing travelers to enjoy warm water even in freezing winter temperatures. In colder months, the contrast between the hot water and icy air creates a unique and memorable atmosphere, especially when the northern lights appear overhead. The resort also features an ice museum and showcases renewable energy projects, giving visitors both relaxation and an educational experience in one location.

Visit the University of Alaska Museum of the North

The University of Alaska Museum of the North provides a comprehensive look at Alaska's natural and cultural history. Exhibits cover everything from indigenous traditions and Arctic wildlife to geological formations and the state's gold rush past. The museum's architecture is designed to reflect the surrounding landscape, and inside, visitors will find carefully curated collections that bring Alaska's story to life. It is one of the best places in Fairbanks to gain context about the region before heading out to explore its landscapes and attractions.

Take a Riverboat Cruise on the Chena River

A riverboat cruise along the Chena River offers a relaxed way to experience Fairbanks while learning about life in Alaska's interior. These cruises

combine scenic views with cultural demonstrations, including bush plane takeoffs, sled dog showcases, and visits to recreated Native villages. As the boat moves through calm waters, guides share stories about early settlers, subsistence living, and how people adapted to extreme conditions. The experience is both informative and engaging, giving travelers a deeper understanding of Fairbanks beyond its landscapes. It is especially popular during summer when long daylight hours allow for extended sightseeing along the river.

Explore Pioneer Park

Pioneer Park is a historic attraction that reflects Fairbanks' gold rush roots and early frontier life. The park features preserved buildings, small museums, and exhibits that tell the story of the city's development. Visitors can walk through original cabins, explore displays of mining equipment, and learn about the people who helped shape the region. The relaxed setting makes it easy to spend a few hours exploring at your own pace, while seasonal events and local shops add to the experience. Pioneer Park provides a simple yet meaningful way to connect with the history of Fairbanks.

Go Dog Sledding

Dog sledding is one of the most authentic ways to experience Alaska, and Fairbanks offers excellent opportunities to try it. During winter, visitors can ride through snow-covered trails pulled by teams of trained huskies, guided by experienced mushers. The journey through quiet forests and open landscapes highlights the importance of sled dogs in transportation and survival across Alaska's remote regions. Many tours also include time to meet the dogs, learn about their training, and understand their role in Arctic culture. It is both an exciting adventure and a meaningful cultural experience.

Visit the Morris Thompson Cultural Center

The Morris Thompson Cultural Center introduces visitors to the traditions and lifestyles of Alaska Native communities in the Interior region. Through exhibits, videos, and storytelling, travelers learn about subsistence living, seasonal cycles, and the deep connection between people and the land. The center also provides helpful travel information for exploring Fairbanks and nearby areas. Visiting here adds valuable context to the experiences found throughout Alaska, helping travelers understand the cultural significance behind the landscapes and wildlife they encounter.



Take a Scenic Drive to the Arctic Circle

Fairbanks serves as a gateway to one of Alaska's most unique road trips, the journey to the Arctic Circle. Guided tours travel along the Dalton Highway, crossing the Yukon River and passing through vast, untouched wilderness. The drive offers expansive views of forests, rivers, and remote landscapes that feel far removed from modern civilization. Reaching the Arctic Circle

itself is a memorable milestone, marked by a sign that travelers often stop to photograph. This experience is long and adventurous, but it provides a rare opportunity to explore one of the most remote regions accessible by road.

Visit the Large Animal Research Station

The Large Animal Research Station offers visitors a chance to see Arctic animals up close in a safe and educational setting. The facility is home to species such as musk oxen, caribou, and reindeer, all of which are adapted to survive in extreme cold environments. Guided tours explain the biology, behavior, and conservation of these animals while providing insights into ongoing research efforts. It is one of the few places where travelers can observe these iconic Arctic species without venturing deep into the wilderness, making it both convenient and informative.

Experience Gold Panning

Gold panning connects visitors to Fairbanks' rich gold rush history in a hands-on way. Guided experiences teach traditional panning techniques while sharing stories about early prospectors who once searched for fortune in Alaska's rivers. Visitors can sift through sediment and often find small flakes of gold, adding excitement to the activity. Beyond the experience itself, gold panning helps travelers understand the challenges and determination of those who helped build Fairbanks during its early years. It is both interactive and historically meaningful.

Walk Along Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge

Creamer's Field offers a peaceful escape into nature just minutes from downtown Fairbanks. The refuge features open fields, wetlands, and walking trails that are ideal for birdwatching and quiet exploration. During migration

seasons, thousands of birds pass through the area, creating a dynamic and ever-changing environment. Visitors can walk along well-maintained paths while observing wildlife and enjoying wide-open views of the surrounding landscape. It is a calm and accessible way to experience Fairbanks' natural beauty without traveling far from the city.

Visit the Trans-Alaska Pipeline

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline is one of the most impressive engineering projects in the state, and visitors can view sections of it near Fairbanks. Informational displays explain how the pipeline was constructed to withstand extreme temperatures, earthquakes, and challenging terrain. Seeing the pipeline up close provides insight into Alaska's energy industry and its impact on the region's development. It is a quick but worthwhile stop that adds a different perspective to a trip focused on nature and outdoor adventures.

Explore Ice Art and Winter Festivals

Fairbanks embraces winter with creativity and celebration through its ice art events and seasonal festivals. The World Ice Art Championships showcase intricate sculptures created by artists from around the world, transforming blocks of ice into detailed works of art. Visitors can walk through displays, watch artists at work, and experience a unique form of creativity shaped by cold temperatures. These events add a lively and cultural dimension to winter travel, making Fairbanks more than just a destination for snow and northern lights.

Take a Snowmobile Tour

Snowmobiling is a fast-paced way to explore the snowy landscapes surrounding Fairbanks. Guided tours take visitors across frozen rivers, forest trails, and open terrain, offering a sense of speed and freedom in Alaska's wilderness. Even beginners can participate, as guides provide equipment and safety instructions before heading out. The experience combines adventure with scenic views, allowing travelers to cover more ground than traditional winter activities while still enjoying the beauty of the environment.

Experience the Midnight Sun

During summer, Fairbanks experiences nearly 24 hours of daylight, a phenomenon known as the midnight sun. This extended daylight allows visitors to explore at any hour, whether hiking, fishing, or simply enjoying the outdoors late into the night. The constant light creates a unique rhythm of life, with festivals, events, and activities continuing well past traditional evening hours. Experiencing the midnight sun is one of the most distinctive aspects of visiting Fairbanks, offering something that few other destinations in the world can provide.

Best Time to Visit Fairbanks

The best time to visit Fairbanks depends on the type of experience you are looking for, as the city offers completely different attractions in winter and summer. Because of its interior location, Fairbanks has more extreme seasonal changes than coastal Alaska, making timing an important part of planning your trip.

Winter Season (November to March)

Best for Northern Lights and Snow Activities

Winter is the most popular time to visit Fairbanks for travelers hoping to see the northern lights. Long, dark nights and clear skies create ideal conditions

for aurora viewing, especially from late November through March. During this time, temperatures can drop well below freezing, often reaching -20°F (-29°C) or lower, so proper winter gear is essential.

Despite the cold, winter offers unique experiences such as dog sledding, snowmobiling, ice fishing, and visiting ice art festivals. The snowy landscapes and frozen rivers create a true Arctic atmosphere that cannot be experienced during other seasons.

Summer (June to August)

Best for Outdoor Exploration and Midnight Sun

Summer in Fairbanks is defined by long daylight hours, with nearly 24 hours of sunlight during peak season. This “midnight sun” allows visitors to explore at any time of day, making it ideal for hiking, river cruises, wildlife viewing, and road trips to the Arctic Circle.

Temperatures are much milder, typically ranging from 60°F to 75°F (15°C-24°C), creating comfortable conditions for outdoor activities. Summer is also the best time to visit cultural attractions, museums, and historic sites, as everything is fully open and accessible.

Shoulder Seasons (April-May and September-October)

Fewer Crowds and Mixed Conditions

Spring and fall offer quieter travel experiences with fewer tourists, but weather conditions can be unpredictable. Spring brings melting snow and longer daylight, while fall introduces cooler temperatures and the return of darker nights.

September is particularly appealing for travelers who want a chance to see the northern lights without extreme winter cold. However, some tours and attractions may operate on limited schedules during these transitional months.

Travel Tips for Visiting Fairbanks

Planning ahead is essential in Fairbanks, where extreme seasons and remote conditions can shape your entire travel experience.

- **Dress for Extreme Temperatures:** Fairbanks experiences some of the coldest winters in the United States, with temperatures often dropping well below freezing. If you are visiting in winter, pack thermal layers, insulated jackets, gloves, hats, and proper winter boots. Even in summer, evenings can feel cool, so layering remains important for staying comfortable throughout the day.
- **Book Aurora Tours in Advance:** If your goal is to see the northern lights, booking guided aurora tours early is highly recommended. These tours take you to darker locations outside the city, increasing your chances of seeing clear displays. Many also include heated cabins, photography assistance, and real-time aurora tracking, which adds value to the experience.
- **Plan Activities Based on Daylight:** Fairbanks has extreme daylight variations depending on the season. Winter brings very short days, while summer offers nearly 24 hours of sunlight. Planning your activities around daylight hours helps you make the most of your time, whether it is scheduling aurora viewing at night or outdoor adventures during long summer days.
- **Rent a Car for Flexibility:** While Fairbanks has some local transportation, many attractions are spread out and not easily accessible without a vehicle. Renting a car allows you to visit places like Chena Hot Springs, Creamer's Field, and scenic areas outside the city at your own pace. It also provides flexibility for chasing the northern lights or exploring remote landscapes.
- **Stay in Accommodations with Aurora Access:** Many lodges and hotels around Fairbanks are designed for northern lights viewing, offering wake-up calls or on-site viewing areas. Choosing accommodation slightly outside the city can improve your chances of seeing the aurora due to lower light pollution.

- **Prepare for Remote Conditions:** Fairbanks is located in Alaska's interior, and services can be more limited compared to larger cities. Always check weather forecasts, road conditions, and tour availability in advance. Keeping essentials like snacks, water, and extra layers is helpful when traveling to remote areas.
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Conclusion

Fairbanks offers a travel experience unlike anywhere else in Alaska. From the glowing northern lights in winter to the endless daylight of summer, the city delivers moments that feel both remote and unforgettable. Whether you are exploring Arctic landscapes, learning about Alaska Native culture, or simply enjoying the quiet beauty of the wilderness, Fairbanks gives you a deeper connection to the Last Frontier.

Every season brings something different, marking it as one of the [US destinations](#) worth visiting more than once. With the right planning, you can experience the best of what Fairbanks has to offer, no matter when you travel.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the best things to do in Fairbanks, Alaska?

The best things to do in Fairbanks include watching the northern lights, visiting Chena Hot Springs, taking a riverboat cruise, exploring local museums, and experiencing dog sledding. Seasonal activities like snowmobiling in winter and midnight sun adventures in summer make the city unique year-round.

When can you see the northern lights in Fairbanks?

You can see the northern lights in Fairbanks from late August to April, with peak viewing between November and March. Clear, dark nights away from city lights provide the best chances to see the aurora borealis.

How many days do you need in Fairbanks?

Most travelers spend 2 to 4 days in Fairbanks. This allows enough time to see the northern lights, visit key attractions, and experience at least one outdoor adventure such as a river cruise or hot springs visit.

What is the best month to visit Fairbanks?

The best month depends on your travel goals. Visit in March for northern lights and winter activities, or July for warm weather and the midnight sun. Both months offer unique and memorable experiences.

Is Fairbanks worth visiting in winter?

Yes, Fairbanks is one of the best winter destinations in Alaska. Visitors can see the northern lights, go dog sledding, attend ice festivals, and enjoy snow-covered landscapes that create a true Arctic experience.

What is Fairbanks known for?

Fairbanks is known for the northern lights, extreme seasonal daylight changes, gold rush history, and its location in Alaska's interior. It is also a gateway to the Arctic Circle and offers unique cultural and outdoor experiences.

Can you visit the Arctic Circle from Fairbanks?

Yes, Fairbanks is one of the main starting points for trips to the Arctic Circle. Guided tours travel along the Dalton Highway and usually include stops at the Yukon River and the official Arctic Circle sign.

Do you need a car in Fairbanks?

While some areas are accessible locally, renting a car is highly recommended. Many attractions, including Chena Hot Springs and scenic viewing spots, are located outside the city and are easier to reach with your own vehicle.

What should you pack for Fairbanks?

In winter, pack thermal layers, insulated jackets, gloves, and snow boots. In summer, bring light layers, a rain jacket, and comfortable shoes. Weather can change quickly, so layering is important year-round.

Is Fairbanks good for families?

Yes, Fairbanks offers family-friendly activities such as museums, wildlife viewing, cultural centers, and seasonal experiences like dog sledding and riverboat tours. The city provides both educational and outdoor experiences suitable for all ages.