



# Arctic Quest

## *Some Notes About Winter in the Arctic*

November 2015

Hello all adventurous travelers!

Our upcoming tour to the Arctic is scheduled for January 28<sup>th</sup> through February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

We thought we ought to provide some insight on to the winter “environment” in Alaska, as it may seem intimidating to some.

### The Dark

Yes, the days are short in the winter! The shortest day of the year in Fairbanks, December 21<sup>st</sup>, lasts just 3 hours and 42 minutes. However, by late January, that has increased nearly two-fold to be 6-1/2 hours on the day we start the tour, and over 7-1/2 hours at the end, 10 days later. That means that just during the tour, the length of the day will increase by 17%. And, we usually refer to the length of the day as sunrise to sunset. However, as aviators, we know that it is “light” before the sun comes up and stays light after the sun goes down. Using the FAA’s definition of “day,” the days become much longer: 8-1/2 hours on January 28<sup>th</sup>, increasing to 9-1/2 on February 7<sup>th</sup>.

That said, however, the sun doesn’t get too high in the sky. This image, taken of downtown Fairbanks on the solstice, shows that it gets just a few degrees above the horizon, leading to a daylong sunrise-effect, another great reason to visit in the winter!



*Image Credit: Charles Mason*

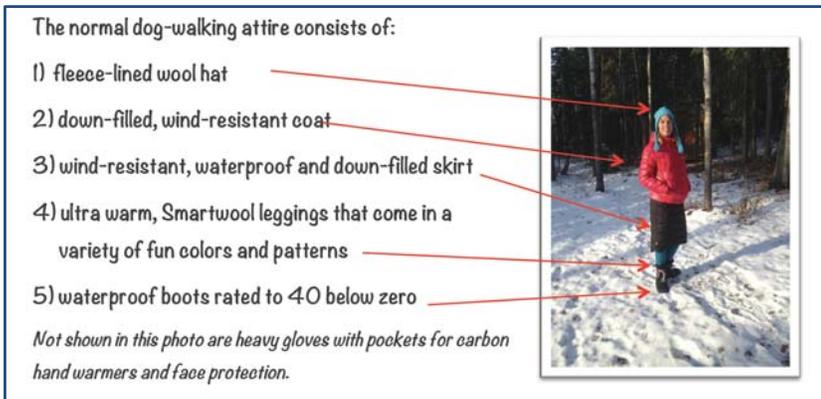
### The Cold

And yes, it can be pretty cold in the winter! This year, the Yukon Quest Sled Dog race began in Whitehorse, Yukon on February 7<sup>th</sup>; they started the running at -30°F and the temperatures dropped to -50°F by the mid-point of the race. However, by the time the first finishers arrived in Fairbanks 10 days later, the high temperature was +32°F. Both dogs and mushers were over-heating from the 80-degree change!

“Average” temperatures for Fairbanks run from about -5°F to +5°F for the first week of February. As the British explorer Ranulph Fiennes put it, “There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate

clothing.” So the key to staying warm on this trip will be appropriate clothing – and staying active when we are outside.

Layers are the key to comfort, especially in the winter. While large parkas and snow suits aren't necessary, they do help. Whether or not you have heavy snow gear, layers will make being outside comfortable. Start with snug fitting long/thermal underwear; this is the most important layer. On top of that you will want an assortment of undershirts, t-shirts, long sleeved shirts, sweaters, fleece vests and/or jackets. For the bottom-half try to have a base layer, then pants, and finish with water/wind resistant pants.



*Marisa modelling her winter outdoor wear.*

Sock liners and wool or wool-blend socks plus the warmest boots you can find will keep your toes warm; footwear is the weak point for most arctic novices. We also sometimes use chemical “toe-warmers” in our boots, so if your toes tend to be cold, you might want to bring a handful of those along also.

Keep the inside layers breathable and shy away from cotton, since cotton holds moisture and dries slowly. Also try to use layers that go from snug to loose.

To finish-off your winter wear bring a hat(s), scarf and mittens. Keep in mind that the warmest most expensive gloves in the world are not as warm as a decent set of mittens. These steps will keep you warm and comfortable down to -20°F or colder depending on the components used.

Note that it is rarely windy in the Fairbanks winter, so a wind-proof shell is probably not necessary here, but for your few days in Anchorage, you might want that.

We will have some time in Anchorage on Friday to visit a good store for outdoor gear, so you could top-off your wardrobe then if needed.

When we are outside on this tour, we will be staying active by walking, snowshoeing, and dog-sledding, which by itself will keep you pretty comfortable. The two exceptions will be the start of the Yukon Quest (which is right across the street from your hotel, so you can always dash back to the lobby to warm up) and evening aurora viewing. If you want to spend a lot of time outside in the evening watching or photographing the aurora, you'll definitely want to invest in the proper layers. It'll be worth it to see scenes like this!

In short, don't be intimidated by the winter, just be prepared! The winter arctic experience will be like none other!



*Photo Credit: © Ronn Murray Photography*