

› The dancing lights of the aurora borealis illuminate the night sky and snow in the Yukon.

# CHASING auroras

THE YUKON IS PERFECTLY POSITIONED TO CAPTURE THE  
NATURAL PHENOMENON OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Words: Dan Avila

➤ There is something primal about Canada's Yukon. It is mostly raw and untamed extending north to the Arctic Circle. With the wild and varied terrain reaching toward the top of the world, it makes sense to visit such a remote and special place in the summer months to take advantage of the long days, or almost endless sun with mild conditions, yet travelling to the Yukon in winter reveals a wonderland with true adventures and the chance to experience the spectacle of the northern lights.

"For some people, chasing the lights becomes an obsession," explains Ryan Gustafson, my guide and host at Mount Logan Lodge in Haines Junction. "I lead photographers from around the world who will go out every night for a month, chasing their perfect aurora shot."

I land in Whitehorse in late March when the snap-frozen Yukon Territory is (theoretically) warming up during ideal aurora season from August to mid-April. The final leg was a two-hour drive west towards the Alaskan border and Kluane National Park.

Aurora chasers can also opt to be picked up from their Whitehorse accommodation by an experienced guide and spirited away to a wilderness viewing site to await the appearance of the northern lights while relaxing around a campfire.

I was in the Yukon to chase my own aurora moment, which required several elements to align. An aurora event needed to be likely and with clear skies. I zealously checked the aurora forecast online for weeks in advance.

I arrived at Mount Logan Lodge shortly before sunset and asked Ryan if there was somewhere close I could grab a sunset landscape shot. After brilliantly not following his directions,

I shot off in the SUV up a mountain trail that progressively become narrower and increasingly rugged. Not ideal.

I drove back to the lodge to set up for the night, figuring that incident had been my offering to the gods of adventurous misfortune to ensure smooth sailing from here on.

"The aurora can come at any time – usually between 10pm and 2am," Ryan tells me. "And it can disappear within a few minutes. We just have to be ready." Just then, I noticed a faint glow on the horizon, like a distant metropolis. "Looks like we're getting a show tonight – let's go!"

We quickly drove to a small frozen lake that would offer an unobstructed view, with mountains in the distance. The temperature dropped substantially as we lost the sunlight, hitting minus 27 degrees Celsius.

Arriving at the lake, we scrambled to get the gear down a short trail and onto the smooth powder-white surface. I couldn't tell if it was the mind-blowing cold or the adrenaline-fuelled excitement causing my hands to shake. In front of me, within 20 minutes, the aurora went from a glow to series of magic dancing ribbons. I thought I was going to shed a tear. It was so beautiful and in that perfect, freezing moment, I had captured my aurora experience. **pc**



#### All of the lights

Visit your local Flight Centre for more information on travelling to the Yukon and the latest deals. Go to [flightcentre.com.au](http://flightcentre.com.au) or call 131 600 24 hours.

#### EXPERT TIP

**"You can explore the Yukon and Alaska on a seven-day Grand Circle self-drive roundtrip from Whitehorse. Head to Dawson City for Klondike Gold Rush highlights, take the Top of the World Highway to Alaska (stop at Chicken, population: 14), overnight at Tok, then drive down the Alaska Highway to Haines Junction in Kluane National Park."**

ALEXANDER OZANNE, FLIGHT CENTRE KINGS CROSS, NSW

Photo: Dan Avila.