

The Aurora Borealis

The residents of Fairbanks, Alaska are accustomed to spectacular views of the aurora borealis or northern lights. Most people view from their homes, but many travel out of town away from the city lights for the most spectacular views. A dynamic aurora covers the entire sky, dancing wildly while flashing brilliant colors of green, whitish-blue, and red.

When is the best time of the year to view the aurora?

In Fairbanks, observations of the aurora may be made from middle to late August to middle April. The spring months of January, February, March and April are often the best time to view the aurora because of better weather, however, fall can be just as cooperative weather-wise. The truth of the matter is, the northern lights can occur almost anytime.

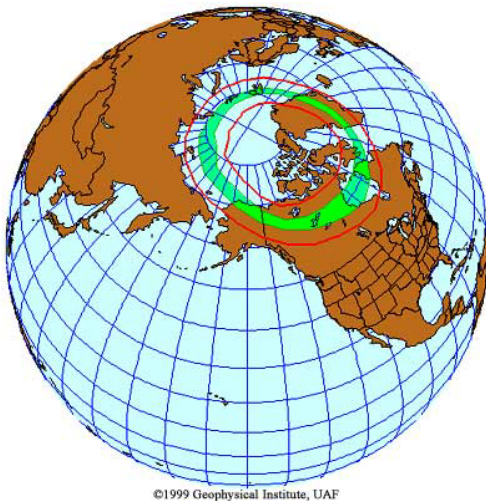
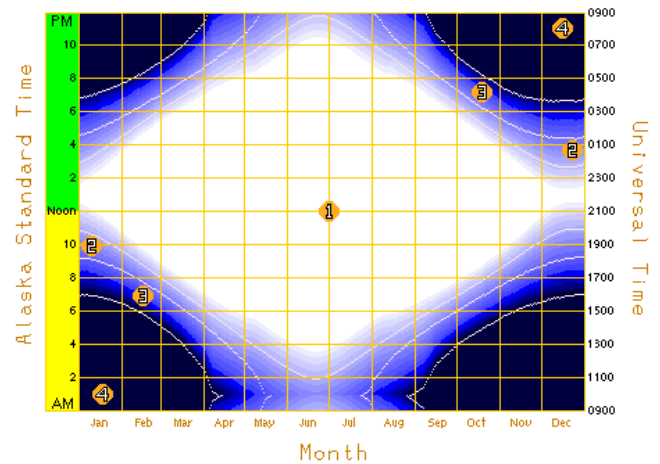
The chart to the right is a good representation of both time of year and time of day in which the aurora is visible. Region 1 represents daylight, when no stars and auroras can be seen. Regions 2 and 3 represent varying degrees of twilight, from lighter to darker. Region 4 represents optimal viewing timeframe, when the sun is at least 18° below the horizon. The chart shows why June is particularly not a good time for the aurora due to the midnight sun phenomenon.¹

What time of the day is the best time to see the aurora?

The time for viewing is between evening and morning civil twilights on clear or even partly cloudy nights. Major storms can occur anytime, and local intensification is most common between 10 pm and 2 am.

Sunrise and Sunset Times

Fairbanks, Alaska



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Why Fairbanks?

Fairbanks sits under what is called the auroral oval, a ring-shaped region around the North Pole where auroras occur. Statistically, Fairbanks averages 243 nights per year when it is possible to see the aurora.

Recommended road accessible sites for aurora viewing around Fairbanks:

- Chena, Circle, and Manley Hot Springs
- Chena Lakes Recreation Area
- Ester, Wickersham, and Murphy Domes
- Haystack Mountain
- Turnouts along the Elliot, Steese, and Parks Highways
- Cleary Summit
- Any place away from the city lights with a good horizon.

For more information on the aurora borealis, check the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Geophysical Institute website: www.pfrr.alaska.edu

¹ Don Rice, Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Source: Dr. Charles Deehr, Aurora Forecaster, Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska Fairbanks.