

# CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

## Chasing the Northern Lights in remote landscapes

Pallavi Pasricha

For those who haven't ticked off the Northern Lights from their bucket list yet, now is the moment. This spectacular phenomenon will be at its most brilliant until March 2026 because the sun's activity, which triggers the spectacle, is at a decade-long peak. However, instead of heading to the usual hotspots in Sweden or Finland, go off grid to remote Arctic outposts where darker skies due to dim town lights make the celestial display more dazzling. Picture watching ribbons of green and purple dart across the sky from a lakeside village deep inside the world's happiest country, a mountain peak in a national park in Sweden, near 5000-year-old stone formations in Scotland or a beach strewn with icebergs in Iceland. So, pack those warm layers and head for a quieter date with the phenomenon called 'Aurora Borealis.'

Image by: Rebecca Gustafsson, Visit Greenland

TRAVEL

NATURE

### NUUK, GREENLAND

Where else in the world can one watch the Northern Lights from the city centre of a capital city? Home to just 20,000 people, lights are muted in Greenland's biggest city allowing the coloured ribbons of purple, pink and violet to shine more vividly. Visit museums like the Greenland National Museum or Nuuk Art Museum and sample local delicacies made with musk ox and seal at restaurants in the day before heading to the centre of town at night to watch the sky come alive. The legends local relate make the experience more magical. According to Inuits, the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic, the dancing lights are the spirits of the dead playing games with a skull. While everything is within walking distance, Qinngorput, about five kilometres from the city centre, is another good spot to hunker down for the display.

#### Closest Airport

Nuuk International Airport

#### Where to stay

Hotel Hans Egede; <https://hhe.gl/en/>

Nuuk is a great place to view the Northern Lights if you want to see it from a city.

**Closest airport**

Fairbanks International Airport

**Where to stay**

Hyatt Place Fairbanks; [www.hyatt.com/hyatt-place/en-US/faizf-hyatt-place-fairbanks](http://www.hyatt.com/hyatt-place/en-US/faizf-hyatt-place-fairbanks) in downtown or Aurora Villa; [www.akaauroravilla.com](http://www.akaauroravilla.com) located outside the city

TRAVEL

NATURE

Fairbanks offers a window of more than 200 days for the Northern Lights; Scotland may not be the most obvious choice to see the Northern Lights but it does have a few interesting spots (Opposite page)

**FAIRBANKS, ALASKA**

If you happen to be in the US anytime till April, include a trip to this Arctic city in your itinerary – there’s no other place in the world that offers a window of more than six months to view the Northern Lights. From August to April, this city sits under the aurora oval – the vast polar region that is the stage for the Aurora Borealis. While the lights may be visible downtown, head to high altitude vantage points in the vicinity for the most spectacular sightings. With a 360 degree view of the horizon, the skies above one of the tallest peaks in the region, Murphy Dome at 2877 feet high, put up a dazzling show. Cleary Summit at 2233 feet high is another popular spot. This year, the Aurora Glass House, a cosy cabin with floor to ceiling windows, where you can enjoy the Northern Lights without feeling cold, has opened here.

Image by Andy Witterman



**ORKNEY, SCOTLAND**

When one of the world’s most celebrated natural phenomena casts its glow on 5000-year old historical structures, the sight is surreal. Lying outside the Arctic Circle, UK is not high on the list of destinations to view the Northern Lights, but press north into an archipelago that sits above mainland Scotland and the skies will light up at a UNESCO world heritage site. The best vantage point is the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney, where ancient stone structures go back nearly 5000 years, making it older than Stonehenge. Watching the “merry dancers” as the aurora is called here, lighting up the 27 surviving stone sentinels, is a dream for both history buffs and nature enthusiasts. Close by lies another ancient site— Standing Stones of Stenness, dating back to 3100 BC. Make Kirkwall, the capital and largest city in Orkney, the base from where the Ring of Brodgar is a short 20 minute drive.

**Closest airport** Kirkwall

**Where to stay** Kirkwall Hotel  
<https://www.kirkwallhotel.com/>

**KIRKENES, NORWAY**

While most people make a beeline for the Arctic capital Tromsø to chase the Northern Lights, it may be a good idea to head out to Kirkenes for an off grid experience. The port town located in northeast Norway, close to its borders with Finland and Russia, is home to just 3,500 residents. Check into a snow hotel carved from ice, sign up for a king crab safari in the Barents Sea, join an ice fishing expedition or explore a slice of history by visiting World War II bunkers during the day. When night falls, join an excursion in which huskies will take you on a dog sledge to a perfect spot where the lights are more brilliant. You can even take a cruise along the Norwegian coast which positions the ships at the right viewing spots during the Aurora Borealis season.

**Closest airport** Kirkenes

**Where to stay** Snowhotel  
<https://www.snowresortkirkenes.com/>

**DIAMOND BEACH, ICELAND**

Here your gaze will not just be fixated on the sky to see the lights, but also move down to catch an extraordinary sight— pieces of glacial ice glowing in many hues on a carpet of black sand. Located in Iceland’s southeast coast near the Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon, this dark sand beach shimmers with ice chunks that have broken away from the glacier and drifted ashore, hence the name Diamond Beach. But at night when the aurora lights sweep across the sky, the ice on the black sand begins to glitter in varying shades of green and purple. Reaching here may not be easy—it is 370 km or roughly a five-hour drive from the capital city Reykjavik. But you will be cruising down Iceland’s famed Ring Road, one of the world’s most picturesque drives that goes past volcanic landscapes. The closest town is Höfn, located about 80 km away.

**Closest airport**

Keflavik International Airport

**Where to stay**

Hótel Jökulsárlón—Glacier Lagoon Hotel  
<https://hoteljokulsarlon.is/>

**YELLOWKNIFE, CANADA**

In the ‘Aurora Capital of North America’ that promises more than 240 aurora nights a year, a spectacular cosmic sighting is guaranteed. Located in the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife stretches along the shores of the Great Slave Lake, the deepest lake of North America and the second largest in the country. While the lights are visible from the town, sign up with an aurora hunting company to go to one of the more magical viewpoints that lie around. Aurora Village is one of them—it is known for its teepees, hilltop viewpoints and heated outdoor seats which keep one warm while the sky glows in shades of green and pink. In the day, plug into the quintessential Arctic life with activities like snowmobiling, ice fishing and of course, dog sledding.

**Closest airport** Yellowknife

**Where to stay**

The Explorer Hotel  
<https://www.explorerhotel.ca/>

Seeing the Northern Lights from a reindeer sledge is an unforgettable experience; Staying at the ICEHOTEL is a unique experience (Below)

TRAVEL  
NATURE



Photo Courtesy: Santa Claus Reindeer

## INARI, FINLAND

If you are sighting the Northern Lights from the happiest country in the world, make the experience truly special. Skip Rovaniemi, the capital of Finnish Lapland, and travel deep inside the Arctic Circle to the tiny village of Inari, located on the shores of Lake Inari, Finland's third largest lake, where the reflection of the dancing lights on the dazzling water body adds to the drama of the celestial display. Many stays in Inari come with lake-facing cabins with large glass windows to virtually bring the unfolding spectacle to your cosy bed. Or join a Northern Lights safari that takes one to distant spots on reindeer sleds to revel in even more breathtaking views. This village is also the cultural heartland of the Sámi—the only recognised indigenous people of Europe. Spend time at the Siida Museum and the Sámi Parliament to understand their history. There's also a beautiful Pielpajärvi Wilderness Church, one of Lapland's oldest structures that dates back to 1760. Make sure to visit a reindeer farm or explore the forests and national parks around this spectacularly scenic village.

**Closest airport** Ivalo

**Where to stay** Wilderness Hotel Inari  
<https://wildernesshotels.fi/wilderness-hotel-inari>



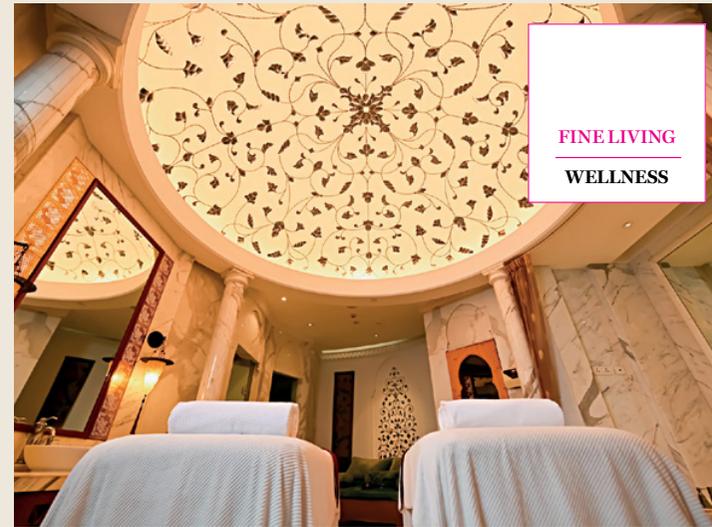
Aurora Sky Station close to the peak of Mount Nuolja. The 30-minute ride in the open chairlift may be bone-chilling, but what awaits at that height is unforgettable—a warm up at the station, crisp Arctic air, view of Abisko Valley and the show of a lifetime as the sky pulsates with colours. During the day, immerse yourself in activities like ice climbing, snowshoe hikes in the forest, and skiing through the vast national park. Do visit the ICEHOTEL in Jukkasjärvi, about 110km away—a one and a half hour drive. Even if you don't end up staying here, just the experience of visiting a hotel that is made of ice blocks is fascinating.

**Closest airport** Kiruna

**Where to stay** Abisko Mountain Lodge  
<https://abiskomountainlodge.se/>

## ABISKO NATIONAL PARK, SWEDEN

In a country which is home to some of the world's most iconic spots to chase the Northern Lights, picking the best place can be challenging. Abisko National Park may well be the answer—watching the aurora from a mountain inside a national park can turn into a near ethereal experience. A chairlift from STF Abisko Turiststation near Abisko village whisks one 900 metres up to the



FINE LIVING  
WELLNESS



Clockwise from top left: The magnificent Moghul Suite; Ayurvedic healing technique, Shirodhara; Bespoke oil ritual; Sound healing

# REJUVENATION, RENEWAL AND RELAXATION

The new Spa menu at The Imperial, New Delhi is a soulful rendition of how life should be—ensconced in meditative balance.

Chumki Bharadwaj

Imagine a world where healing and hedonism don't have to wrestle for attention; where indulgence isn't just the destination but defines the journey; where escape offers the solitude of temporary detachment. It isn't just the hankering for such improbables that lures you into the subterranean cocoon of the Imperial Spa. It is the promise of moments of rationed serenity amid the raucousness of Delhi's daily drama. The soulful renewal begins as soon as you descend into the redesigned spa environs where a refreshing welcome drink, wafting notes of soothing music and a bespoke oil ritual.

The Imperial Iconic Massage at the Moghul suite is the pièce de résistance of the upgraded spa menu that has recently been pushed up a notch. The sublime Moghul suite is a warm embrace of Moorish architecture and Mughal motifs; recuperative therapies notwithstanding. The best part is that their bespoke creations allow you to hand-pick your oils and blends to suit individual whims and wellness needs. I choose a blend of oud and rose to

prepare for the indulgence ahead. The signature massage incorporates a hot moisturising candle massage, western healing, and balancing methods followed by a private sauna and steam, which finally wraps up with a royal rose and milk bath. Did I mention that it comes with a celebratory glass of bubbly and fresh fruit platter on the side, in case the four-hour pampering ritual still leaves you feeling unloved?

While old is gold, the new Spa menu which includes a 120-minute Sound Healing ritual of resonance and renewal is performed with therapeutic singing bowls to harmonise the mind, body, and spirit through the melodic vibrations of hand-crafted bowls. Even if the awakened energy flow and balanced chakras don't inspire healing, the warm comfort of herbs and sensual aromatherapy of the Imperial Iconic massage will restore a lot more than what you bargained or hoped for.

**Price** ₹52,000 (Iconic imperial Massage); <https://www.theimperialindia.com/wellness/the-imperial-spa>