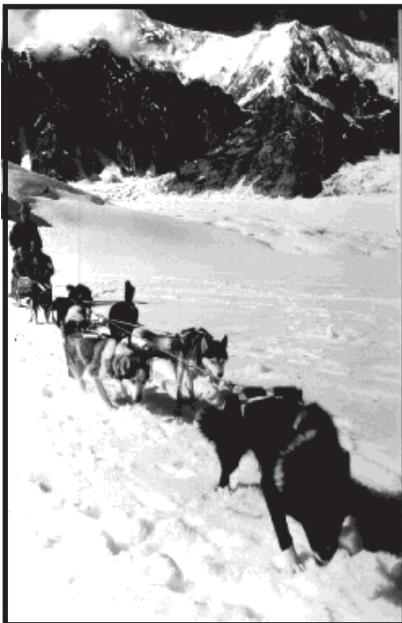


# Iditarod Race Sled Dog Tour

## INTRODUCTION

Come experience the true essence of the Far North, learning to "mush" your own team in the Alaska wilderness, before witnessing firsthand the indescribable "Last Great Race", the 1100 mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome. First, we'll spend three wonderful days progressively learning to drive dogs with an Iditarod musher. And then after attending the Race start, we will fly by ski-equipped bush plane to a remote "roadhouse" seventy miles west along the Iditarod Trail. There we'll overnight and wait for the next day's arrival of the first teams as they navigate up the Susitna and Yentna river systems, to the official checkpoint of Skwentna. Toasty by our bonfire on the river, the succession of teams struggle in through the night, getting their first dose of the mercilessly mercurial conditions that will dictate their lives for the weeks to come. The next day it's back to Anchorage, with a visit to the chaos of Race Headquarters before good-byes in civilized comfort. This very special tour is for those that long to experience the real Alaska, and the reasons so many have chosen to call it home year around --from those that came for the gold rushes and decided not to leave, to those that still spurn the comforts of modern civilization for the adventure of frontier living. Offered only once a year, no experience is necessary for this incomparable tour that guarantees memories that most can only dream of . . .



**7 Day / 6 Night**

**\$4535 p/person**

<u>2017 Tour Dates</u>	<u>Code</u>
Feb 28 - March 6	7W1

## ABBREVIATED AGENDA

**Day 1 Anchorage-Hope:** Gear check and visit to Race Headquarters; travel by road from Anchorage through the Kenai Mountains to overnight in log cabins in the tiny end of the road gold rush village of Hope on Cook Inlet; evening mushing "intro"

**Day 2 Hope-Soldotna:** Morning departure through Kenai Mountains to Soldotna. Afternoon at the kennel of our Iditarod musher, learning the mechanics of harnessing the dogs and the basic skills of piloting canine super athletes. In a graduated fashion, you'll end the day with the satisfaction of having driven your own team. Overnight at lodge on Longmere Lake.

**Day 3 CoHo muskeg mush:** A day of immersion with full teams in the beautiful flats on the edge of Cook Inlet, in alternately wooded and open terrain. Iditarod veterans, local mushers, and snowmachines will assist this exhilarating experience --driving a dog team and a snowmobile --what a day! Overnight back at the lodge.

**Day 4 Soldotna-Hope:** Now it's time to head into the hills of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, on the wonderful trails of the local racing association. By now you're feeling like a veteran, contemplating racing yourself . . . Return to Hope and the cabins on Bear Creek.

**Day 5 Hope-Skwentna Roadhouse:** Travel to Anchorage; attend the start (indescribable) of the Iditarod; early afternoon departure from Lake Hood by bush ski-plane for flight to a remote homestead 70 air miles northwest; dinner and overnight at historic lodge

**Day 6 Skwentna Roadhouse:** Day to explore the neighborhood, watch the checkpoint preparations; dinner and bonfire rendezvous on the Skwentna River as the first dog teams come through the checkpoint (northern lights . . . ?); second overnight at lodge

**Day 7 Skwentna Roadhouse-Anchorage:** Time to hang out at checkpoint; wander amongst the arriving mushers and race chaos; return flight to Anchorage and visit to bustling Race Headquarters

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Trip cost includes all modes of transportation, lodging, meals and instruction. Supplementary arctic winter gear is supplied by Adventure Alaska. Those preferring not to drive their own team have the option of riding in a dog sled. Accommodations range from log cabins to lodges, with shared bath the only option. Weather and conditions can necessitate last minute changes in the above itinerary. Alcoholic beverages and gratuities to guides not included. Group size limited to 8 persons.

**Day 1** Our adventure starts at 9AM, meeting in downtown Anchorage at your previously arranged B&B or hotel. Here we'll make a quick check of gear. We'll then make a stop if necessary at REI, an outdoor gear supplier, if anyone decides that they might need additional items. Before we head out of town, we'll make a stop at the Millennium Hotel, the official headquarters of the Iditarod Race. Located on the edge of Lake Hood, the world's largest seaplane base in summer and home to many that equip their planes with skis and operate from there in the winter. As things build toward the Race several days away, preparations are evident as the phone banks are installed, radio communications set up and of course the Official Iditarod Store doing a brisk business. Afterwards we'll head out of town hugging the edge of the Turnagain Arm, between the Chugach Mountains and the sea. Lunch is in Girdwood at the famous Bake Shop. If conditions allow we'll make a short detour to Portage Lake, where its namesake glacier often provides a stunning backdrop of beached icebergs. Crossing Turnagain Pass in the Kenai Mountains we'll take the 16 mile cutoff to the tiny end-of-the-road town of Hope. The oldest gold rush town in Alaska, (far older than Anchorage) this sleepy little village of 150 souls still has a definite frontier flavor with most of the buildings of log, from the old Social Hall still used for weddings and most town functions to the old church. We'll overnight here in log cabins overlooking Bear Creek and after dinner, have our first introduction to mushing.

**Day 2** After breakfast we'll head through and up and over the Kenai Mountains, descending onto the "shelf" that is the eastern part of the Kenai Peninsula. Our next several days will center about the community of Soldotna as we head to the home and kennel of Iditarod musher Jane Faulkner. In the shadow of the imposing volcano Mt. Redoubt on the other side of Cook Inlet, we'll set about getting conversant with this ancient means of arctic locomotion, the dog team. As the detail and mechanics involved will most likely be new to most of us, Jane and her "right hand", kennel partner Mindee Morning, will lead us through in progressive steps. First we'll start with a detailed hands-on explanation of the equipment and general techniques for driving the dogs. This will be followed by short forays on freight sleds pulled by snowmachine (we've found that the machine is much more willing to stop for the novice musher, than is a fully charged dog team with someone completely unfamiliar behind it!). The short groomed course here is perfect for getting the feel of the "body english" required, and to build in the comfort that anticipates turns and bumps out on the trail. Next step, is learning to harness some exceedingly enthusiastic dogs and "construct" a small (and forgiving!) team. We'll keep at it on the groomed trails out back until we feel we've gotten to that satisfying point of confidence that will set the stage for the next day's trip over wilderness trails. You might be tired by now, but for those game and confident in their skiing, now would be the time to try "skijorring" --dog-powered skiing! As twilight descends we'll drive back east through Soldotna, lodging for the night in the lovely log accommodations of the All Alaska Lodge on a bluff overlooking Longmere Lake. We'll have our hearty and well-earned dinner of Alaskan goodies here as we discuss the big day tomorrow. Later that evening the northern lights will surely see their way fit to give us a display.

**Day 3** With a hearty breakfast in the belly, we'll load up and drive the half hour to meet the "rest of the crew", both two and four-legged, at the kennel of Jane's partner Randy Adkins, a two-time Iditaroder. We'll be supported by lead handler Todd Black, who did the same for Jane on her Iditarod run. By now harnessing up the dogs begins to feel like a natural part of a day's routine (the Call of the Wild is not species specific . . .), though this time the level of energy is multiplied wonderfully by the increased number of dogs. Then it's off down the trail driving your own team as we snake through the frozen lakes and muskeg of the CoHo loop area. The relatively level nature of the terrain aids in this next transition to wide open trails and more dog power up front. These are the principle training grounds for several top mushers, whose dog lots surround Randy's. We'll thus spend the day exploring like denizens of old, sliding over the snow to examine stories told by the animal tracks, and witnessing some of the other seasonal phenomena that are hard to put into words when someone asks, incredulously, why one would enjoy winter. We'll might well cross paths with some other mushers, or, even moose, lynx, eagles, etc. Lunch is on the trail wherever the urge hits, with never an experienced musher far from hand, should you like some additional feedback on your dog driving technique (or maybe just a rest in the sled basket!). Pleasantly fatigued we'll deservedly celebrate a wonderful day with dinner at the St. Elias Brewing Company on the way back to the lakeside lodge. The northern lights will have an opportunity to either top their previous night's performance, or make amends for a no-show.

**Day 4** A rib-sticking breakfast will lay the groundwork for yet another notch in our mushing experience. Today we'll head the few short miles to the trails of the Peninsula Sled Dog and Racing Association, for our foray into the hills of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Again hitching up the teams and mushing might just give rise to thoughts that maybe you could easily get used to a life of . . . just maybe . . .someday . . . As this part of the Refuge is strictly non-motorized, we'll be blissfully on our own without snowmachines in these wooded hills, to appreciate the great views of the Alaska Range in silence (minus the dog panting). It'll be a fine contrast to the days previous, with the wooded trails and undulations of these mountain foothills. (Now that you've mushed the trails, you might even want to join the Association (25 bucks) and get your patch to prove it.) With afternoon good-byes to new friends, both two and four-legged, we'll head back through "civilization" and Soldotna, before retracing the couple hours of road back to Hope. Surely enroute an eagle or two will pose over the blue waters of the Kenai River or with a mountain backdrop behind Tern Lake or Turnagain Arm. Dinner is at Discovery Cabins before an evening briefing on the Iditarod itself via video.

**Day 5** Breakfast is early to hit the road and get to the Race start in downtown Anchorage. The start has an atmosphere all its own as literally thousands of dogs and people are crowded into a tiny area, all focused on the event that for many, is the experience of a lifetime. You'll have lots of vantage points for great pictures or just plain gawking. The perennial contenders have their own professional determination while many others are participating for the first time, though every one of the mushers, spouses, and handlers are concentrating on the grueling and perilous 1100 miles of wilderness ahead. After watching the teams be released at two-minute intervals and taking probably dozens of photos, we'll head to Lake Hood, to board our bush ski-planes for the 70 mile trip to the remote Skwentna Roadhouse on the Skwentna River, just a few hundred yards from the first official Iditarod Race Checkpoint. Landing on a tiny airstrip here you'll see how folks live far from roads and the rest of the world. Dinner is of course sumptuous, after exploring a bit about the neighborhood on foot or maybe snowshoes. Rumor has it that there will be some local dog teams on hand that might need exercise . . .

**Day 6** A great breakfast makes the morning leisurely, with plenty of time to relax by the woodstove, or catch up on your journal. If the weather is clear, Mt. McKinley, North America's tallest mountain should give proof just to the north. In the afternoon we'll wander over to the checkpoint to watch the dozens of Iditarod volunteers busy about preparations, as the dog teams race our direction. After dinner, we'll bundle up and head out by foot or snowmachine to the river bonfire and await the first dog teams, straining our eyes in the darkness for the first glimpse of a bobbing headlamp in the distance. After a short while the checkpoint will be buzzing with dozens of dog teams and mushers, meticulously checking their dogs over, before tending to their own needs. It is evident here the experience of each musher in their efficiency in checking each dog, feeding the team and bedding it down as well as themselves, in preparation for the days and days of sleepless trail ahead. It is a scene that is difficult to put into words and one that will stay with you long afterwards. Hopefully the northern lights will grace us and lead us back to our cozy homestead, with thoughts no doubt of those on the trail, the sled bag their only accommodations.

**Day 7** After breakfast we'll bundle up and head back out to the checkpoint to see who remains; some teams strategically resting, others in despair contemplating the end of their Iditarod dreams. Though weary, the former are often quite congenial and open to chatting about their experience thus far. Lunch is back at the Roadhouse and afterwards we'll await the arrival of our bushplane ride back to Anchorage and civilization, though not without a different appreciation for the unique world of the arctic winter and the people and passions that are so much a part of it. Stopping in at the Iditarod Headquarters for a musher update, your mind might wander to how, that while in so many ways the world has changed, in some ways and places it hasn't much at all. And now, though the trip is officially over, those staying the night might want to get together for a culminating dinner and do a bit of reminiscing . . .



## *Client Pre-Trip Information*

### *7-Day Iditarod Race Sled Dog Tour*

#### **Accessibility/Fitness**

This is a participatory winter trip and though not overly strenuous, clients should be moderately physically fit and not averse to cold temperatures as this is an arctic environment. Clients are provided supplementary arctic clothing and boots, and while comfort is our overriding concern, by nature of our activities we will be outdoors a considerable amount of time. Dog mushing does require some agility but is not overly strenuous, though some of the optional activities such as cross country skiing and snowshoeing can be if pursued vigorously. Those not wishing to emphasize "driving their own team", may opt to ride in the sled basket. We will also be traveling by bush plane to and from the Skwentna Roadhouse Lodge, and those apprehensive about small plane travel will want to take this into account.

#### **Weather/Temperatures**

Always a subject of great interest and occasionally, a few choice words. By early March, Old Man Winter has just begun loosening his hold on things, but has been known to come back with a good swipe or two, to remind us just why bananas don't grow very well here. Temperatures could be in the upper thirties, or, they could be minus thirty. Most typical would be from ten to 25 degrees Fahrenheit, generally being much milder near the ocean where we will be mushing, and potentially colder at the remote interior lodge, with the coldest being during the often cloudless nights. Being well prepared is of course the key, allowing one to enjoy why winter is actually the favorite season of many. Even if these temperatures seem beyond comprehension, you'll be surprised what good equipment will do for you, though we promise that you won't win any fashion contests. Widely available chemical heat packs are great for those prone to cold feet or fingers. Weather is of course a factor in the flying portions of the trip, and it is advisable to allow an extra day in Anchorage in case of possible delays. Besides, when was the last time you had being trapped in a remote winter cabin in Alaska as an excuse . . .

#### **Clothing/Equipment**

Because this is a winter trip and due to the fact that conditions this time of year can on occasion be severe, personal clothing should be chosen carefully to ensure comfort. Adventure Alaska will provide you with the supplementary arctic outer wear to complement the basic clothing that you probably already have, or might need to supply. We provide the following: arctic coveralls (very stylish!) for the very coldest weather; arctic pak boots for the feet; arctic mittens; and a cold weather hat. Items that you will need to supply include the following:

**Clothing:** Two to three changes of warm but versatile clothing are recommended (please refer to luggage restrictions in a separate section) which can be layered if needed. This is a time to throw thoughts of fashion to the wind and consider above all else, the function of each item. Besides, if your stylish in the Bush in winter, you'll stick out like a sore (and cold!) thumb. Relatively loose clothing is warmer than skin tight, with wool or polypropylene pile pants and sweaters ideal. Long underwear should be of medium weight and preferably polypropylene. Several pairs (to allow for changes) of heavy wool and/or polypro socks will help keep your feet happy, and work best if layered.

**Outerwear:** A good, warm winter jacket is a must, with down and some of the synthetics having the best warmth-to-weight ratio. This, coupled with sweaters or pullovers and other clothing, should be sufficient and allow needed flexibility for most of our activities, with the coveralls handy for those times when it is colder or we are inactive. A medium weight hat or stocking cap that covers the ears is a must as well as a pair or two of medium weight gloves; an additional scarf is also preferred by many.

**Footwear:** Sorel-style arctic pak boots are provided for each participant if needed for our outdoor activities (please specify men's shoe size in advance). If you already have your own they probably fit well and you should consider bringing them. Those subject to chronically cold feet (and hands) might want to consider a supply of the disposable chemical heat packets sold at many sporting goods stores. Footwear for indoors and travel should be comfortable and warm, many preferring to throw in an additional pair of down booties or slippers to lounge around in.



## Client Pre-Trip Information - cont. 7-Day Iditarod Race Sled Dog Tour

**Sleeping "Equipment":** Most prefer to sleep in their long underwear as opposed to pajamas (after all, you want to dress the part).

**Miscellaneous:** A good flashlight or headlamp is important; water bottle (quart); sunglasses (UV cutting); camera; chemical hand/foot warmers (available at most sporting goods stores). Earplugs are also helpful, as individual bedtimes and noise levels can vary considerably.

### Luggage

Soft-sided suitcases or duffel bags are preferred. As small airplanes have limited space, total amount of personal gear for the trip should not fill more than approximately two to three standard grocery sacks (four to six cubic feet); suitcases, extra clothing, etc., can be stored in Anchorage during the trip. A small daypack is recommended for in the van and on the dogsled, for items you might want handy such as a camera and water bottle.

### Accommodations

**Accommodations:** Include log cabins in Hope, a lodge, and the Roadhouse in Swentna with a variety of cabins/outbuilding. All established facilities are set up for double occupancy but the remote sites will sometimes necessitate more of a "slumber party" approach, flexibility being the rule in the Bush. Shared baths are the only option, with toilet facilities while mushing decidedly "rustic", either the woods, or the tried and true, non-running water type... (yes, outhouse --part of the experience!).

### Legal Requirements

**Insurance:** Health: Adventure Alaska cannot require participants to provide proof of insurance but it is more than strongly recommended to retain and review your personal policy; NOTE: Adventure Alaska cannot be expected to and will not assume payment liability for medical care or treatment of any kind. Traveler's: It is likewise strongly urged to carry traveler's insurance in case you have to cancel or cut short your trip for any reason as the cancellation policy is quite strict. Or, though remote, the possibility exists also of a delay in our return to Anchorage on the last day due to weather. Cancellation of activities or additional costs incurred due to weather or safety concerns will not necessarily result in refund for that segment, and may require additional payment.

### Pre/Post-Trip Lodging

Many types are available in Anchorage as are independent extensions after the trip. Please advise us well in advance so that we are able to guarantee suitable accommodations. Do remember that the bush plane flight to and from the Skwentna area is dependant on the vagaries of weather —an extra day should be considered at the end of the trip before unchangeable travel arrangements.

### Suggested Reading

The Far North is a story teller's dream of history, wildness, and people. Each client's appreciation will be immeasurably heightened by gaining some background beforehand of Alaska and the areas visited, as well as detailed information on the history of sled dogs and mushing. A wide selection of books and information is available from Alaska Geographic: 810 E 9th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501; (866) 257-2757; [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org) and also from our local bookseller, Title Wave Books, in Anchorage - [www.wavebooks.com](http://www.wavebooks.com); 907-278-9283. Also, the Iditarod's official website - [www.Iditarod.com](http://www.Iditarod.com) - has a book list which is quite extensive.