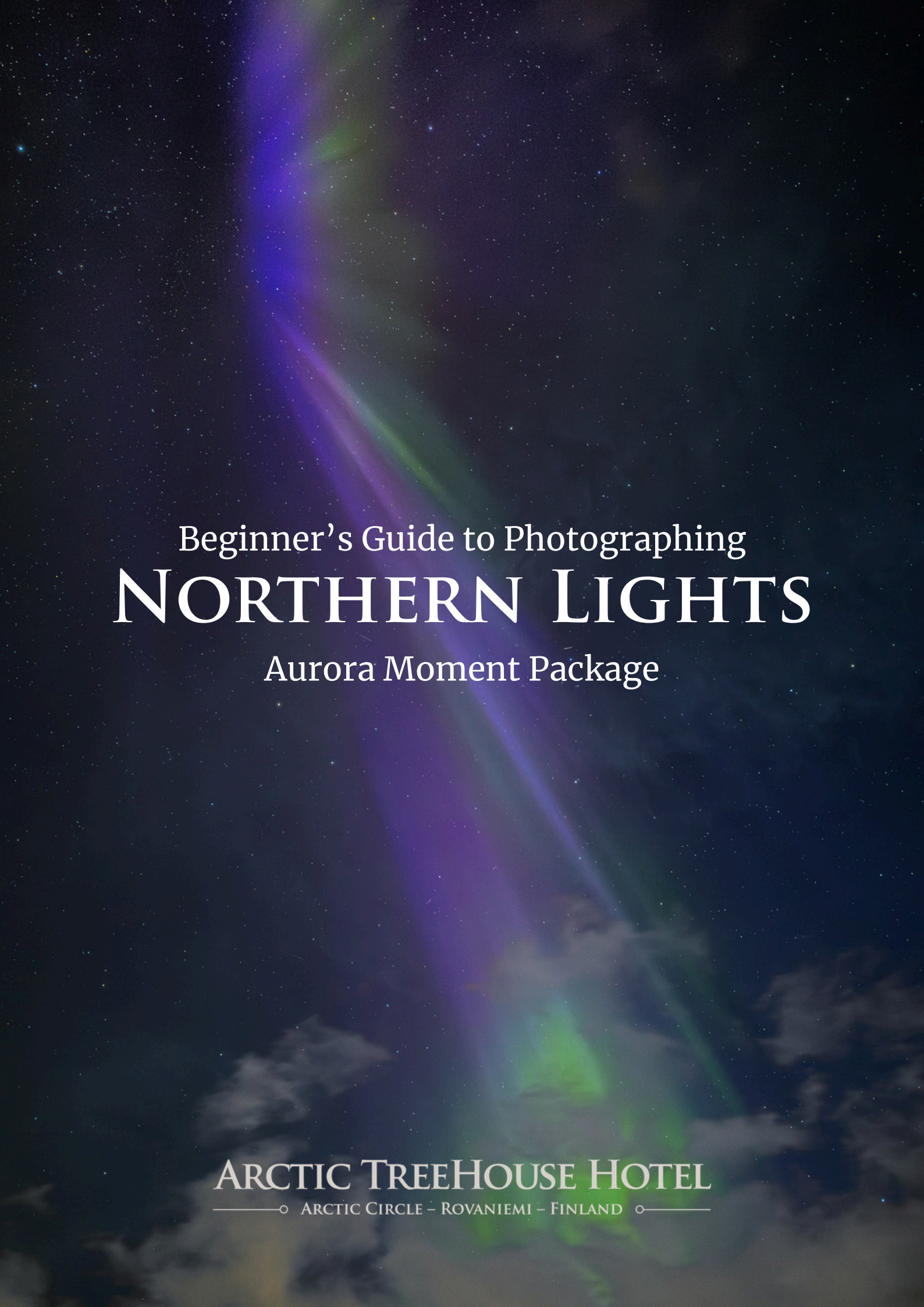


Beginner's Guide to Photographing

Northern Lights

Aurora Moment Package

Arctic TreeHouse Hotel

Arctic Circle – Rovaniemi – Finland





Northern Lights in Rovaniemi

Rovaniemi, the Official Hometown of Santa Claus, offers excellent opportunities to witness the Northern Lights. Known as Aurora Borealis, these natural wonders can be seen on around 150 nights a year, from late August until early April.

The best viewing times depend on the season: in early autumn, evenings are lighter after the Midnight Sun, while in December the Polar Night brings long hours of darkness and, on rare occasions, auroras may even appear in the afternoon sky.



The Northern Lights are born when charged particles carried by the solar wind meet the Earth’s atmosphere near the magnetic poles. As they collide, the night sky comes alive in flowing curtains of green, purple, and red. On rare occasions, people have even reported hearing them, a faint crackle or whisper under the shimmering lights.

In autumn, when rivers and lakes remain unfrozen, the auroras may appear twice, once above you, and again reflected in the still waters.

The weather plays its part: on cloudy nights, the sky may hide its secrets. But when the clouds part without warning, patient guests are often rewarded with unforgettable moments beneath the dancing lights.



According to Finnish folklore, a magical fox runs across the fells of Lapland, its tail sweeping sparks into the heavens. This is why in Finnish the lights are called revontulet “the fox fires.”

At Arctic TreeHouse Hotel, the magic of the auroras is right on your doorstep. Our hillside location on Syväsenvaara means reduced light pollution, with panoramic suite windows facing the northern sky. Just a few steps away, the Birdwatching Tower opens a wide horizon, while nearby forest paths offer serene, secluded viewing spots. Sometimes, the lights even greet you while you watch from the warmth of your bed.



Beginner's Guide to Photographing

Northern Lights

For Smartphones

USEFUL THINGS



Tripod + phone holder attachment



Thin touchscreen gloves / photography gloves



Hand warmers



Aurora forecast app (in our hotel area we recommend Aurora Alert Realtime)

HOW TO CAPTURE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

CLEAN YOUR LENSES

This ensures you get the best contrast and sharpness from your phone's camera.

LOWER YOUR SCREEN BRIGHTNESS

This helps preserve your night vision and lets you judge the exposure more accurately.

TURN OFF THE CAMERA FLASH

The flash is far too bright compared to the Northern Lights and will make them harder to capture.

ENABLE NIGHT MODE (if available)

This allows the camera to gather more light, improving image quality.
If the auroras are moving fast: limit exposure to 1–3 seconds to avoid blur.
If the auroras are dim or moving slowly: use exposures between 5–10 seconds.

ESTABILIZE YOUR PHONE

With a tripod: Mount the phone and set a 2–5 second timer to eliminate camera shake.
Without a tripod: Hold the phone close to your body and hold your breath while shooting. This helps steady the phone during the longer exposure.

Switch to your primary lens. This is usually shown as "1x," which corresponds to a focal length of about 24–28mm. This lens gives the best image quality and lets in the most light

SET FOCUS

If you're using a manual camera app, focus manually to infinity (♾️). This prevents the phone from missing focus in low light.

TAKE THE SHOT

Capture multiple photos so you can choose the best one later.

PRO TIPS

- Shoot in RAW or DNG format if your phone supports it. This captures more data and gives better editing flexibility.
- If the Northern Lights appear too warm, use your phone's editing tools to adjust color temperature toward cooler tones – auroras usually look better this way.
- Cold weather drains batteries quickly. Keep your phone in a warm pocket and fully charged before heading out.
- Apply noise reduction in editing software to minimize grain.



Beginner's Guide to Photographing

Northern Lights

For DSLR / Mirrorless cameras

USEFUL THINGS



Tripod + phone holder attachment



Wide lens with a fast aperture

lowest possible f-number, ideally f/1.2–2.0
Lenses with a focal length between 10–35mm and an f-number between 1.2–2.8 work best
Examples of great lenses for Northern Lights

- 16mm f/1.4
- 24mm f/1.8
- 15–35mm f/2.8



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STABILIZE YOUR CAMERA

With a tripod: Mount the camera and set a 2–5 second timer to eliminate camera shake.
Without a tripod: Place the camera on a stable surface such as a backpack. You can angle the lens toward the sky by propping clothing or another soft item under it.

SET YOUR EXPOSURE

For best results, use Manual mode (M).
Suggested starting settings

- Aperture: as low as possible (e.g., f/1.8 is better than f/2.8).
- Shutter speed: 1/5s – 10s, depending on aurora speed and brightness.
- ISO: 800–6400.
  - Higher ISO creates more noise (grain).
  - Older cameras may struggle above ISO 1600.
  - Newer cameras can often handle up to ISO 12,800.

FOCUS MANUALLY TO INFINITY (♾)

IThis prevents the camera from missing focus in low light. Check sharpness by zooming in on stars – they should appear crisp.

TAKE THE SHOT

Avoid touching the camera while exposing. Capture multiple images to select the best later.



PRO TIPS

- Shoot in RAW format if possible. This captures the most data and gives you more flexibility when editing. (RAW files usually need some minor adjustments to look their best.)
- Use the histogram if you know how – it helps ensure accurate exposure in all conditions.
- Cold weather drains batteries quickly. Keep spares in a warm pocket and make sure they are fully charged.
- If the Northern Lights appear too warm, adjust color temperature in editing software (cooler tones usually look better).