

ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

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MUSH PUPPIES

Take to the Snow with a Team of Husky Companions

By Erin Caslavka



You probably aren't familiar with the names Togo and Balto, but undoubtedly you're familiar with their accomplishments: In 1925, a fatal epidemic threatened the lives of children living in Nome, Alaska and the only way to stop the impending doom was to send a team of dogsleds to deliver the diphtheria serum. The race to get the serum delivered on time spurred international interest in the mushers and their teams, and as a result of their success, lead dogs Togo and Balto became national heroes.

Eighty-five years later, Alaska is still celebrating the accomplishments of the sled dogs (and their mushers) who saved a town from certain death. The Iditarod - held in Alaska since 1973 in honor of the lifesaving race - attracts participants and spectators by the thousands. But what's a traveler to do if all he (or she) wants is to try dogsledding in a more relaxed, less competitive environment?

In a variety of frozen North American settings, it's possible to suit up in your best cold-weather gear and take to the snow with a team of dogs in the lead. So harness up your best "MUSH!" command, and head to where the huskies are.

Denali, Alaska

If your interest in dogsledding is more academic than hands-on, a great option is to pay a visit to Jeff King for his Husky Homestead Tour. King, who used to call California home, has won the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race (the competition's official name) four times - most recently in 2006. His 90-minute kennel tour begins with the chance to cuddle some newborn huskies before you're introduced to some of the adult members of his team. There, a guide will describe how members of the King family and their crew exercise and care for the 75-plus dogs they own. Following that, the man himself will show you the ins-and-outs of training and racing that's made helped make him (and his teams) champions. (Contact Jeff King at

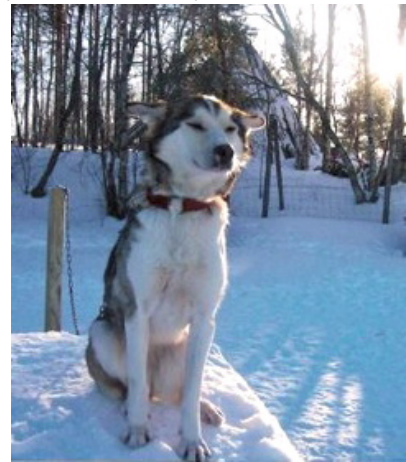
907-683-2904 or for more info visit: huskyhomestead.com)

Madeline Island, Wisconsin

If you're looking for a place to really "get away from it all" (with a bit of creature comforts at the end of the day), there's a small island in Wisconsin with your name on it. Three-and-a-half hours outside of Minneapolis and a short ferry ride across a lake will take you to Madeline Island, home to the log cabin-ish Island Inn. Settle into your room, then let SnowRyder hook you up with a two-person team of pups that will take you out for a run through the forested trails of Madeline Island, or over frozen Lake Superior. Take turns doing the "driving" or let the experienced musher take the lead. (Contact Jim Ryder Dogsledding at 715-209-6789 or jim@jimryder.us for more information.)

Newry, Maine

Professional Master Maine Guides Polly Mahoney and Kevin Slater have a handle on celebrity status; after all, not everyone has the chance to star in a Disney movie. But when the producers of the film *Never Cry Wolf* were looking for a team of dogs that could deliver on cue, they sought out Mahoney. A small, family-run business, Mahoosuc Guide Service provides would-be mushers with the chance to try their hand at leading a team on weekend, overnight trips that provide you with an opportunity to camp out in the snow with the huskies and experience their behavior both on- and off-duty. (Contact Polly Mahoney or Kevin Slater at 207-824-2073 or via email at: info@mahoosuc.com)



Quebec, Canada

You don't have to know how to speak French to take a ride with the Canadian members of a dogsledding team. A traditional method of transportation for the region's indigenous population, dogsledding has been a part of this frozen landscape for centuries. Teams of 4-8 dogs will take you "off the beaten path" outside the modern city of Quebec, where you'll enjoy guided dogsledding. One company to consider is FreshTracks, an outfitter located in Vancouver, BC. They offer an introductory "Dogsledding Adventure in Quebec" that provides two days of guided dogsledding in Saint-Etienne-de-Lauzon where you'll visit a kennel that houses 200 dogs, some of whom you'll be bonding with out on the snow. (Contact FreshTracks at 866-296-5877 or email them at: adventure@freshtracks.ca)

Yukon Territory, Canada

Another tour package offered by FreshTracks allows you to mush your own team of huskies on a 9-day itinerary that provides an intensive course in dogsledding basics. Your adventure begins at the Sky High Valley Ranch, 20 km south of Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway. There you'll meet the teams and learn the basics, then



overnight at the lodge. Dogsledding excursions are planned for the days that follow into the Jackson Lake area, as well as to Boneville Lake and above the Ptarmigan Flats. If you really want to learn how it might



feel to be a part of an Iditarod team,
this is the tour for you. (FreshTracks:
866-296-5877;
adventure@freshtracks.ca)

Photo credits: iStockphoto; Erin Caslavka

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