



My Drift

Title: Coldest City on Earth

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Known as "The Pole of Cold," located near the Arctic Circle, the City of Oymyakon, Russia is the coldest inhabited place on Earth. Winter temperatures average around -58°F — and there are only about 500 residents who brave the chill.



The City of Oymyakon

There is a monument built around the town square commemorating an unofficial reading in January 1924 of $-71.2\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($-96.2\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$). This was shown on the program 60 Minutes in a 2012 documentary. On 6 February 1933, a temperature of $-67.7\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($-89.9\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$) was recorded at Oymyakon's weather station. This was almost the coldest officially recorded temperature in the Northern Hemisphere (Verkhoyansk had recorded $-67.8\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($-90.0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$) on 5 and 7 February 1892). Only Antarctica has recorded lower official temperatures (the lowest being $-89.2\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($-128.6\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$), recorded at Vostok Station on 21 July 1983).



Oymyakon's heating plant runs around the clock with an ever-present plume of smoke rising into the winter sky.



If you visited Oymyakon, you would be struck by the emptiness in the town: The streets are just empty. You would expect that the residents would be accustomed to the cold and there would be everyday life happening in the streets, but instead people are very wary of the cold.



It's certainly understandable when you consider how dangerous the cold can be. For instance, if you were to walk outside naked on an average winter day in Oymyakon, it would take approximately one minute for you to freeze to death. It's no wonder why most of the people only go outside when they have to and then rush back inside as soon as they can.



The Oymyakon General Store

There's just one store in Oymyakon, but there is also a post office, a bank, a gas station, and even a small airport. The town also has its own schools. Unlike other places around the world, these schools don't even consider closing unless the weather drops below -60°F.

Most of these residents are Indigenous people known as the Yakuts, but some are ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. During the Soviet era, the government convinced many laborers to move to the region by promising them high wages for working in the harsh climate. Today, despite the hardships of life in Oymyakon, Russia still manages to persuade people to pack up and move to the coldest city in the world.

An eerie reminder of this past, the highway between Oymyakon and Yakutsk was constructed with gulag prison labor. Known as the "Road of Bones," it's named for the thousands of people who died building it. The distance between Yakutsk and Oymyakon is 424 miles (682 km) by air. The road distance is 587 miles (944 km). Yakutsk is the nearest big city (population 310,000).



Road of Bones (Kolyma Highway)

As you can imagine, it takes an immense amount of mental and physical stamina to work outdoors in a place like this — even if you choose to live in earth's coldest city. Yet people do it every day. Lumberjacks, miners, and other outdoor laborers do their jobs while trying to stay as warm as they can.



The climate makes it impossible to grow crops of any kind, so the only kind of farming is livestock. Farmers must take extra care that their animals keep warm and have access to unfrozen water. A nearby thermal spring remains just unfrozen enough for farmers to bring their livestock to drink.



As for the humans, they drink Russki Chai, which literally translates to "Russian Tea." This is their term for vodka, and they believe it helps them keep warm in the cold (along with multiple layers of clothing, of course).

The hearty meals that the locals eat also help them stay toasty. Reindeer meat is a staple, as is fish. Sometimes chunks of frozen horse blood also find their way into meals.

As cozy as life may be inside their homes, residents do need to step outside every so often — and so they need to be prepared. They usually leave their cars running overnight so they don't completely seize up — and even so, the driveshafts sometimes freeze. Yes, some residents do have cars and trucks but need to keep them in a semi-heated garage during the coldest winter months. There are other means of transportation such as horse or reindeer pulled sleds.



A Russian corporation called Alrosa has its headquarters in the Yakutsk city. Alrosa supplies 20 percent of the world's rough diamonds — and it's the world's largest producer in terms of carats.

Diamonds, oil, and gas are all plentiful in the region, which helps explain why there's money to be made there — and why Yakutsk city is a wealthy and a cosmopolitan city.

Surprisingly, tourism also exists in Oymyakon, the coldest city in the world. While summer is certainly more tolerable than winter — with temperatures occasionally reaching up to 80°F — the warm season is also very short lasting just a couple of months.

Daylight also varies widely throughout the year, with about three hours in the winter and 21 hours in the summer. And yet about 1,000 brave travelers visit this tundra every year in search of adventure. Tourists can ride Yakut horses, drink vodka from ice cups, eat raw liver of foals, slices of frozen fish and enjoy a hot Russian bath, and immediately after – crazy Yakut cold!

Well, I have no desire to go to this god-forsaken place!

What about the United States? What is the coldest city in the U.S.A.?

Here is a hint. It is located in Alaska, and I have been there TDY several times during my working years at Fort Shafter. During my last trip there in December 2010, it was the coldest temperature I have ever experienced. I grew up in Utah and thought it got cold there during the winter but that was nothing compared to the freezing weather in central Alaska. While we were there, the temperature got down to -44 degrees Fahrenheit at night. And since there was only about 4 hours of daylight, it was very cold all of the time.

Yes, the coldest city in the United States is Fairbanks, Alaska.



Here I am visiting the Santa Claus House in the town of North Pole, Alaska



Fairbanks, Alaska (Northern Lights)



Downtown Fairbanks

Fairbanks, Alaska, is the coldest city in the U.S. with the minimum average temperature in the coldest month (January) that is a bone-chilling -16.9° F. The lowest temperature ever recorded there is -66° F. Fairbanks is located in the central interior of Alaska, and has a population of approximately 32,000, making it the state's second-largest city.

Grand Forks, North Dakota is the coldest city in the Continental United States. Bundle up in Grand Forks, which is regarded as the coldest city in the continental U.S. With an average minimum temperature of -3.1 degrees F, it's no wonder this city has earned a chilly reputation. The lowest temperature ever recorded there was -43° F (-42° C), most recently on January 30, 2004.

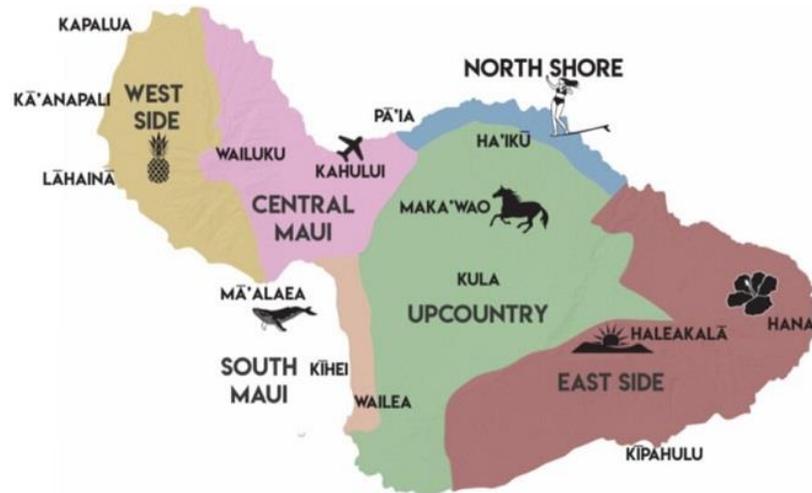


Grand Forks, North Dakota

Okay, since most of my readers and me live in Hawaii, what is the coldest city in the state of Hawaii?

Kula

A town on Maui, Kula, has the coolest average temperature of any town/city in Hawaii at 56 degrees. Unlike every other state, however, Hawaii's record cold temperature is above zero at 12 degrees.



Kula is in the scenic Upcountry Maui region on the slopes of Haleakala Volcano which is known for its colorful flower farms and botanical gardens as well as expansive farmland and ranch land views with the blue Pacific in the distance.



The town of Kula is 3,000 feet (914 m) above sea level making the temperature quite a bit cooler than Maui towns at lower elevations. Kula is home to about 10,000 people.

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