

9 MORE TEMPTING TOWNS

by MELISSA WAGENBERG

Haines (Population 2,500)

Outpost to the Wild Life

Quirky Haines, an isolated swath of civilization near the end of America's longest fjord, is the last outpost to 24 million acres of wilderness, one of the largest protected areas on the planet. To the west sprawls Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, and beyond that the Wrangell-St. Elias wilderness. Canada's Tathshenshini-Asek Provincial Park and Klwane National Park are just across the border. "Big glaciers and tall, spectacular mountains plunge into the ocean right outside Haines," says Bart Henderson, owner of Chilkat Guides, one of the first outfitters to capitalize on the adventure potential of this old logging town back in the 1970s.

Even if—especially if—you've never had a big-mountain or glacier experience, the sheer bounty of massive peaks up here practically obligates you to meet the challenge. During a two-day mountaineering class with Alaska Mountain Guides and Climbing School (\$380; 800-766-3396; www.alaskamountainguides.com), you'll learn the basics of glacier travel and safety and then apply them on an ascent of 6,700-foot Mount Rice.

The heavily glaciated terrain around Haines also provides an excellent ice-climbing classroom. For one thing, it won't be freezing cold (September temperatures range from 40 to 70 degrees). For another, glacial ice can be relatively soft, and therefore easier to kick into than a frozen waterfall. AMG's two-day intro (\$380) starts with anchor, belay, and ice ax techniques; the five-day program (\$860) forges ahead with lead climbing.

Another Haines draw: Every autumn the world's largest congregation of bald eagles—some 3,000—line the Chilkat River flats to feast on spawned-out salmon. A half-day float trip through the Alaska-Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve with Chilkat Guides (\$79; 907-766-2491; www.raftalaska.com/chilkat.html) will afford ample time both to watch the white-capped predators careen for lunch—their diving speeds can reach a hundred miles an hour—and to scout for the grizzlies, black bears, wolves, and moose that also chow along the banks.

Visitor Vitals: Alaska Airlines (www.alaskaair.com) flies to Juneau. Three regional carriers run 45-minute daily flights between Juneau and Haines. Hotel Hälsingland (\$69 and up; 800-542-6363; www.hotelhalsingland.com) is the nicest place in town and has a fine restaurant. If the high price of recreating in these parts has tapped you out, pitch your tent at the waterside Portage Cove State Recreation Site (\$5 a site; www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/units/haines.htm), where it's walk-in or bike-in only. Locally caught halibut (with chips) is the special at the favored greasy spoon, the Bamboo Room (907-766-2800; www.bambooroom.net). The organic fare and shiny decor at the Fireweed Restaurant (907-766-3838) would fly in San Francisco. Residents get their coffee, pastries, sandwiches, and fill of political banter at the Mountain Market (907-766-3340).

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RELOCATION PLAN

WHY STAY? "A typical Haines summer day," says Darsie Culbeck, co-owner of Alaska Mountain Guides, "might involve getting in your kayak and paddling across to Davidson Glacier, hiking through old-growth forest, ice climbing away the afternoon on a pristine, sapphire-blue glacier, and then returning to town for great organic food, bluegrass, and a Haines Brewing Company IPA at the Fireweed."

\$300,000 BUYS: A four-bedroom, two-bath, 2,700-square-foot modern wood home on two secluded acres with breathtaking Chilkat Mountain views, a wraparound deck, sauna, hot tub, sunroom, and raised eyebrows from your new neighbors. (You'll fit in better if you downgrade on the house and spend the cash to make a down payment on a floatplane.)

JOB MARKET: "You move to Haines because it's the place you want to be, and then you invent some way to make a living," says Bart Henderson.

GATHERING SPOTS: Potlucks, beach parties, and (who-hoo!) the post office.

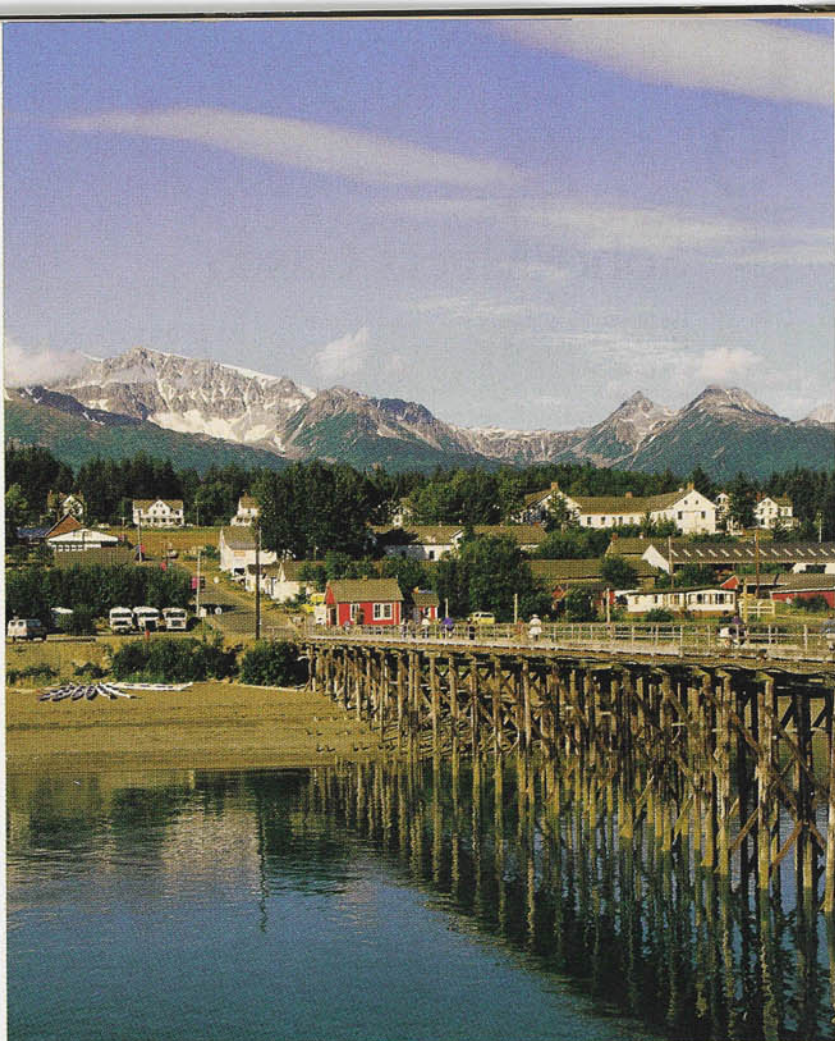
DRESS CODE: Carhartts, raincoats, and Extra Tuff rubber boots (aka Sitka Slippers).

REQUIRED READING: Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*.

NEAREST MOVIE THEATER: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, 251 miles north.

WINTER SALVE: Much of the town closes shop and heads someplace warm—Hawaii, say, or Juneau—from November through March. Everyone else back-country-skis or rides the months away.

* 5 is the most remote, 1 the least



HAINES, YOUR WAY: As many visitors arrive by boat as by car. Left: Escaping the big city.

Alaska