

LUXURY LODGES

Alaska accommodations offer great amenities in beautiful settings

By Eric Lucas

» **Stillpoint Lodge** has all the comforts you'd expect at any boutique luxury resort. Guests stay in one of a dozen custom-crafted spruce-and-cedar log cabins perched above the Kachemak Bay shoreline.

The main lodge is a spacious facility with a small spa, an intimate dining room, a gourmet kitchen and a comfortable relaxation area warmed by a flickering fire. Huge picture windows offer a vantage on the rainbows that light dynamic skies and overlook the lodge's charming kitchen garden. Appetizers such as salmon nori rolls enjoyed with elderflower spritzer precede delicious cuisine such as caramelized scallops. A waterfall feature trickles in the main lodge entry.

This is Halibut Cove, Alaska, a remote community across from the village of Homer off the southwest corner of the Kenai Peninsula. It's accessible only by boat or plane. Sea otters splash in the cove and in a beautiful channel a short kayak paddle from the lodge. Humpback whales ply the main bay. And then there's the matter of the local ursids.

"When you walk up to the viewpoint, keep your eyes peeled for a mother bear with a couple cubs," advises lodge owner JT Thurston as I'm checking in. "We've been seeing them on the beach across the water, looking for clams."

Like a dozen or so such outposts in Alaska, Stillpoint is a remote guest lodge. The fact that it offers both unparalleled natural surroundings and unparalleled luxury exemplifies a unique niche of Great Land travel that's available in few other places.

You can start your day with a fresh-made double cappuccino; go for a stroll to watch foraging bears from a safe distance; fuel up at lunch with gourmet salmon chowder; paddle out to seek sea otters or view spawning sockeye salmon; return for a late-afternoon hot



STILLPOINT LODGE (2)

» **Stillpoint Lodge near Homer** offers guests beautiful cabins overlooking Kachemak Bay and excursions such as helicopter fishing trips. Right, **Sheldon Chalet** is perched on a ridge next to Denali's Ruth Glacier.

stone massage; then savor a gourmet supper and relax in a hot tub beneath the stars. Yoga? Check. Feather pillows and down comforters? Yes. On-site wine cellar? Sure.

Luxury wilderness properties are available across the state. Kenai Fjords Wilderness Lodge occupies its own remote island in Resurrection Bay, south of Seward. Nearby, Kenai Fjords Glacier Lodge perches on a sandy beach across a lagoon from Pedersen Glacier—guests paddle canoes over to the glacier face, and return for warm chocolate-chip cookies.

Brooks Lodge, in Katmai National Park & Preserve, is downstream from Brooks Falls, which may be the most famous bear-viewing site in North America. Winterlake Lodge, along the Iditarod Trail near Denali, and Tutka Bay

Alaska Calendar

Seldovia Summer Solstice Music

Festival: Folk artists perform and hold workshops; June 21–24 (seldoviaartscouncil.net).

Midnight Sun Festival: Celebrate the summer solstice under the midnight sun. About 30 live bands, arts and crafts, and activities such as gold panning and a BBQ cook-off; June 24; Fairbanks (downtownfairbanks.com).

World Eskimo-Indian Olympics:

Athletes compete in traditional events such as the knuckle hop and four-man carry; July 18–21; Fairbanks (weio.org).



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43rd Blueberry Arts Festival: Parades, culinary contests and art exhibits; Aug. 3–5; Ketchikan (ketchikanarts.org/events-programs/blueberry-arts-festival/blueberry-arts-festival).

Golden North Salmon Derby: Anglers compete to catch the largest salmon; Aug. 17–19; Juneau (goldennorthsalmonderby.com).

Alaska State Fair: Headline performers include the Goo Goo Dolls and comedian Jim Gaffigan at an event that also features competitions such as vegetable weigh-offs and cooking contests; Aug. 23–Sept. 3; Palmer (alaskastatefair.org). —*Kaylee Strachan*

Lodge, on Kachemak Bay, are culinary destinations operated by famed Alaska chef Kirsten Dixon and her daughter, Mandy.

A new remote lodge, Sheldon Chalet, is poised on a rock pinnacle (known as a *nunatak*) beside Denali’s famous Ruth Glacier. The lodge features deluxe facilities surrounded by the glacier, inside Denali National Park & Preserve. Guests helicopter in from Talkeetna or Anchorage and land on the lodge’s own chopper pad, which also serves as an observation deck. From the lodge, guests can keep their eyes open for views of Denali’s summit high above, ski or snowshoe on the glacier, and enjoy the sauna tucked into the cliff.

Though Ruth Glacier is formed by the mountain’s prodigious snowfalls, the weather

is less challenging than one might expect. The chalet is open year-round, says co-owner Marne Sheldon, and the lodge has installed solar arrays to supply electricity (though there is still a diesel generator as backup).

“The sun is quite intense—and more common than people think—where we are on the south side of the mountain,” Sheldon says. “That also means there’s a really good chance of seeing the mountain’s summit if you’re there a few days.”

There’s a really good chance of seeing many things at one of Alaska’s remote lodges. Maybe it’s a brown bear hoisting a salmon from a wilderness river. Maybe it’s a dessert sundae featuring handcrafted spruce tips ice cream. All of it makes for a true Alaska experience. ✈