

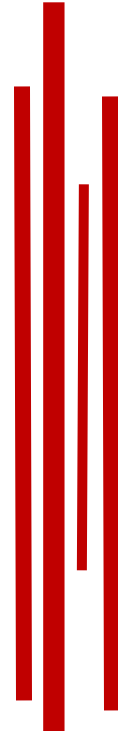


# AIANTA

American Indian Alaska Native  
Tourism Association



*A cruise ship anchors off Icy Strait Point*



## Tribal Agritourism Development

### Icy Strait Point: A Case Study



#### THE COMMUNITY

Surrounded by towering rainforest and the abundant waters of Port Frederick and Icy Strait, Icy Strait Point is a destination that offers unparalleled access to adventure, wilderness, wildlife, and genuine Native Tlingit hospitality. Located in Alaska's largest Native Tlingit village of Hoonah, Icy Strait Point is Alaska Native owned-and-operated by the Huna Totem

Corporation. Icy Strait Point is built at a restored 1912 Alaska salmon cannery, just north of the



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village of Hoonah (about 35 miles west of Juneau). Icy Strait Point features 20+ exciting experiential tours, accessible nature trails, a restored 1912 Alaska salmon cannery and museum, nature trails, restaurants, 100% Alaskan-owned retail shops, and even a beach for “combing”! Eagles soar overhead and whales are regularly seen from the shore<sup>1</sup>.

Hoonah is located on Chichagof Island, the 5th largest island in the United States, and containing the largest brown bear population in the world - approximately 3 bears per square mile. It encompasses 6.6 square miles of land and 2.1 square miles of water<sup>2</sup>. Chichagof Island is located within the Tongass National Forest, the largest National Forest in the US, and classified as a temperate rainforest with over 100 inches of rain annually.

"Hoonah" became the official spelling in 1901, with establishment of the Hoonah branch of the United States Post Office;<sup>3</sup> however, the Village corporation spells it “Huna”. *Xunaa* means "protected from the North Wind" in the Tlingit language.

At the 2010 census, the population was 760<sup>4</sup>, down from 860 at the 2000 census. In the summer, the population increases with the influx of workers to staff the fishing, boating, hiking, hunting, and tourism industries.



*Icy Strait Point is a restored fish cannery*

### THE PROGRAM

Icy Strait Point opened in 2004 and employed 130 people for the 2017 season. Approximately 85% of the staff are year-round residents of Hoonah. In addition to a plethora of Alaska sourced food in Icy Strait Point's three restaurants, there are also two culinary tours offered. “In Alaska’s



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"Wildest Kitchen" treats visitors to stories from former commercial fisher, Dodie Lunda, and a demonstration of how to create iconic dishes out of Alaskan staples such as salmon burgers and grilled local fish.

The second program is more in depth and experiential. "The Tlingit Kitchen: A Taste of Southeast Alaska" shows visitors how to fillet a salmon, how to harvest various traditional foods such as berries and sea asparagus, and the opportunity to sample the unique foods harvested by locals. The tour travels outside the grounds of Icy Strait Point to visit surrounding beaches and forests, as well as the personal smoker of the guide, Johanna Dybdahl. In addition to connecting to the visitor's senses, these programs help connect the visitor to the local culture and people in a way that only food can do.

The goal of these two programs is to provide interesting culinary options for guests. In the case of The Tlingit Kitchen, the goal is to teach guests about the subsistence lifestyle of the local Tlingit people.

"In Alaska's Wildest Kitchen" has been available since the beginning of the tourism program at Icy Strait Point in 2004 and is a very popular program. "The Tlingit Kitchen: A Taste of Southeast Alaska" was added in response to a request from the cruise ships and was first available in 2016. It is primarily booked by higher-end cruises.



*Visitors enjoying the experience of grilling and eating locally caught salmon*





*Duck Point Smokehouse Restaurant*

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Icy Strait Point culinary tourism features three restaurants serving fresh seafood, the Duck Point Smokehouse, the Cookhouse and the Crab Station.

Duck Point Smokehouse Restaurant is their newly renovated signature restaurant, overlooking the beaches of Icy Strait. More than just a name, they smoke salmon at the restaurant and use the ingredients in house-made specialties. Their signature dish the Icy Strait Point Surf and Turf, which features house-made crab tater-tots and Alaskan Blue Sliders. The full menu features innovative items and specialty brick-oven pizzas in addition to favorites like salmon dip, seafood stew, grilled halibut teriyaki sandwich, and more.



*The Cookhouse Restaurant*

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The historic Cookhouse Restaurant has been feeding cannery visitors (and workers) for more than a century! Waterfront dining featuring the freshest local seafood! Alaska Salmon BLT

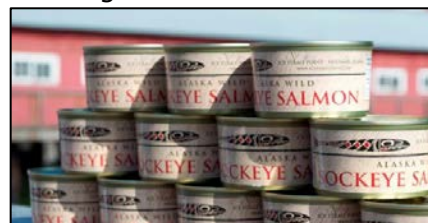


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Sliders are another local staple, featuring Alaska sockeye salmon cakes with flavorful herbs, topped with Alaska house tartar sauce, bacon, lettuce and tomatoes on brioche buns. For a non-seafood Alaska specialty, try the Alaska Blue Burgers made with reindeer meat and mixed with caramelized onions, blue cheese and merlot steak sauce before grilling. Other favorites include our salmon chowder, reindeer chili and fries.

The Crab Station Restaurant serves Alaska's best king, snow and Dungeness crab. When in season, the fresh Dungeness crab is caught in local waters and kept alive until cooked. Seating is available on the dock or you can stroll around the corner to join friends at the open seating Cookhouse Restaurant.

Visitors can buy Icy Strait Point cans of salmon from the gift shop, along with other souvenirs.



*Salmon available in gift shop*

### THE PLANNING PROCESS

Icy Strait Point is unique for a cruise destination in Alaska. Unlike most which are owned by a municipality or government, Icy Strait Point is owned by the Huna Totem Corporation, a village corporation made up of Alaska Native shareholders, with ties to the Hoonah area.

As a major employer for the town of Hoonah, Icy Strait Point is actively engaged with the community. They meet once a month with the Hoonah economic development group. They actively receive business proposals from shareholders for partnership, as well as suggestions from the community.

The overall operation of Icy Strait Point has been developed to incorporate the Tlingit culture and community of the residents of Hoonah. Art and culture are included in all parts of the program at ISP, even the zip line, one of the longest in North America.

All guides and presenters share Tlingit stories and history. As part of training, guides receive two days of cultural training, including Tlingit protocols and introductions, the history of the community, and important aspects for Alaska Natives including the Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.



*Dodie Lunda demonstrates how to filet halibut*





## Tribal Agritourism Development Icy Strait Point: A Case Study

*"As a young child, my father would take me out on his commercial fishing boat into the clear waters of Icy Strait off your rocky coastline and I learned that you would provide us with what we needed. We just needed to be willing to work for it. Our living came from the ocean and our nourishment came from your bountiful land in plants and herbs and the wild animals we hunted."*

Donald Dybdahl, Huna Tlingit Wolf clan,  
Love Letters: Hoonah, Alaska 2014

Prior to incorporating local stories into programming, Icy Strait Point met with local elders and clan leaders to learn what they were willing to share. Even though many of the stories are published and in the public domain, it was out of respect to seek permission.

Elders were very supportive of the efforts to share history and culture. They observed the telling of stories and made corrections to improve accuracy. This protocol has helped gain the support of the local community. Icy Strait Point also works closely with the Hoonah Heritage Foundation to help with cultural perpetuation.



*Sea asparagus (Salicornia virginica) salad*



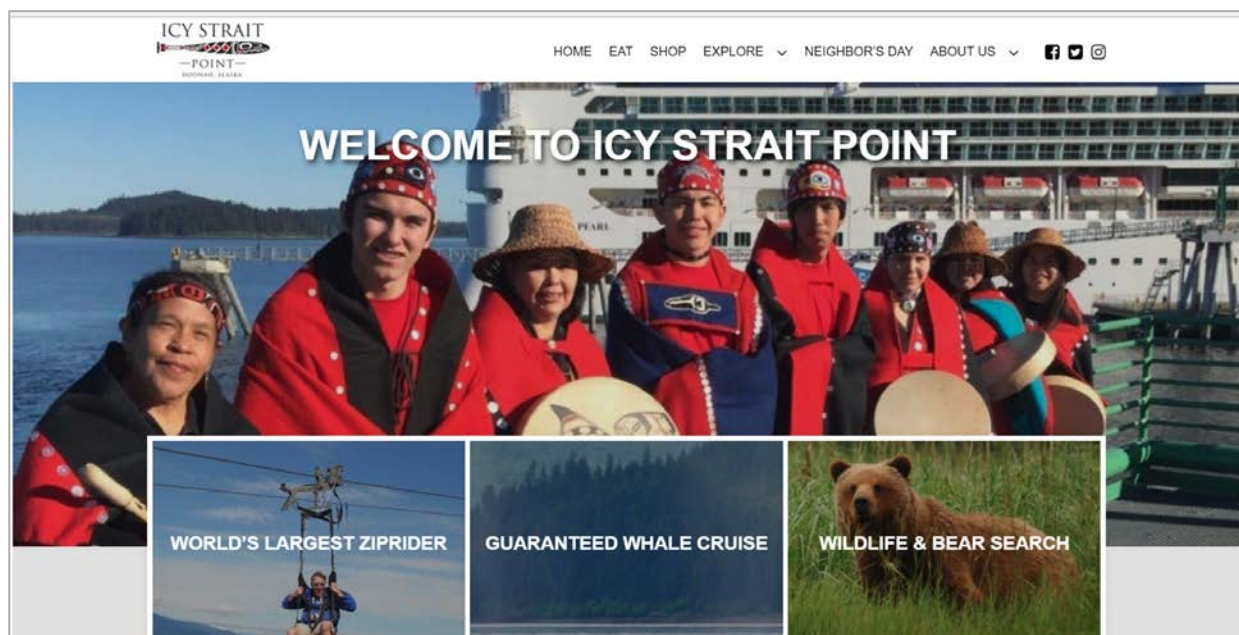
## DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING

The initial build out of Icy Strait Point was funded by the Huna Totem Corporation, who is the sole owner. Prior to breaking ground the corporation got presale commitments from numerous cruise ships for their first few seasons. The two culinary programs, “In Alaska’s Wildest Kitchen” and “The Tlingit Kitchen: A Taste of Southeast Alaska,” were built out entirely by the staff members who deliver the programs (Dodie and Johanna) with funds from Icy Strait Point.

Some of the key challenges to these two programs is they take a lot of prep work to make happen. Cruise lines make allocations for the programs they want offered, but if it doesn’t sell then the program needs to be cancelled. Because of the quantity of fresh local food required for each program, this can be a big loss. “The Tlingit Kitchen: A Taste of Southeast Alaska,” especially cannot be done every day based upon the amount of prep work required. Additionally, it is hard to predict what food will be available for foraging. For example, when we visited it had been an unseasonably cool spring and none of the berries were ready for harvest. Another variable is the high and low tide for foraging on the beach.

## DESCRIPTION OF MARKETING

Since the primary audience is cruise passengers most of the marketing is done directly with cruise lines. The process begins with sending companies tour proposals and images. It is important to make sure the programs are accurately presented. Icy Strait Point does a small amount of marketing on own the website - icystraitpoint.com. Sales people make sales calls during the off seasons to all the cruise lines - minor and major lines. A key strategy is to focus on addressing the needs presented by the companies. For example, it was pointed out that it would be more attractive if they built a dock for cruise ships to dock, versus having to tender passengers back and forth via boats. Now after building a dock they have seen a 20% increase in visitation.



*Icy Strait Point website*





*Johanna Dybdahl explaining local foods*

## THE RESULTS

Icy Strait Point fills 130 positions on site over the summer. That number is likely to increase next summer as they have already booked additional ships. “In Alaska’s Wildest Kitchen” and “The Tlingit Kitchen: A Taste of Southeast Alaska,” each has one lead instructor as well as employing support staff. In the case of “In Alaska’s Wildest Kitchen” there is one assistant, and there is staff that cuts and prepares the firewood for cooking the fish. “The Tlingit Kitchen: A Taste of Southeast Alaska,” employs a driver and there are the people that bring in the fresh fish for the program.

Icy Strait Point brought in 150,000 passengers in 2017. The United States is the top market, however, some cruise lines specialize in passengers from other countries. Each ship has an Average of 2000 passengers. There are some smaller and some larger. Based upon the state of the cruise industry and bookings for 2018 it appears that business is sustainable. Key issues that could impact the state of the business includes another financial crisis. During the 2008 financial crisis Icy Strait Point did not grow as quickly as in previous years. That said, Alaska being domestic is an attractive choice for Americans leery of traveling in Europe or other parts of the world with a perception of instability or security issues. Another threat to Icy Strait Point





is if Alaska or local jurisdictions chooses to increase regulations or fees to cruise lines. Cruise lines may choose to bring their ships to lower cost ports in other parts of the world.



*Local foods gathered included smoked salmon, herring roe, shrimp, seal cracklins, sea asparagus and black algae*

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHERS

In offering advice to other indigenous communities that might want to embark on a project similar to Ice Strait Point, Jennifer Black, Director of Excursions suggests, “be flexible - watch the product and tweak it if it is not working. Get feedback directly from guests to make sure you are meeting their needs.” Additionally she suggests watching costs specifically food costs, which can be quite volatile in Alaska.

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## RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION

Two key areas that has helped Icy Strait Point be successful is their ability to get their key market, cruise lines, onboard early in their planning and development. As a result, when they were operational, they had customers lined up and ready to go. The tourism experience authentically taps into local history and culture to provide an immersive experience for the visitor. Through planning and authenticity, Icy Strait satisfies tourism demand and sets them apart from other cruise ship ports of call.



*Johanna Dybdahl provides tours and instruction on where to harvest shellfish*

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### Special Thanks:

AIANTA would like to thank the Huna Totem Corporation, Dodie Lunda, Johanna Dybdahl and the staff at Icy Strait Point for assisting with this case study.

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<sup>1</sup> [icystraitpoint.com/about-us/](http://icystraitpoint.com/about-us/)

<sup>2</sup> [cityofhoonah.org/visitors/page/fun-facts](http://cityofhoonah.org/visitors/page/fun-facts)

<sup>3</sup> Donald J. Orth, Dictionary of Alaska Place Names, U.S. Gov't. Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1967

<sup>4</sup> [factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk)