



Alyeska, Ak

The heliskier's Chugach on a chairlift scale

Story Chris Anthony | Photos Shayne Lynn

Some resorts are famous for their hardcore scene, some are known for their apres action; remember Alyeska, Alaska, for this — it's the Chugach Mountains on a ski resort scale.

Alyeska is located in Girdwood, an easy 35-mile drive from Anchorage along the Turnagain Arm. And while it's unlikely that you'd travel all the way to Alaska just to log a week here — not that it would be a sub-par week — Alyeska is the perfect way to spend a few down days when you're in Girdwood heliskiing.

The fact that Alyeska is lift-serviced doesn't mean that you won't find the real Chugach here: Alyeska's 1,000 skiable acres are not for the meek. Bring your big mountain skis and backcountry gear only — an average of 742 inches of snow falls every year and almost 75 percent of the terrain is off-piste. This environment punishes those who take it for granted, snapping skis and bones like matchsticks. And with a base elevation of 250 feet, Alyeska's coastal climate keeps the temperatures mild and the snow sticky enough to cling to the vertical walls of the Chugach Mountains.

You'll likely spend most of your time here running laps on a 60-person tram that rises out of the only four-diamond hotel in the state — the Alyeska Prince Hotel — and serves Alyeska's North Face. Two gates at the top of the tram service the vast area of the North Face, and the 2,028 sustained vertical feet it covers. If snow and weather cooperate, head to Chair 6 and make the hike to Christmas and New Year's chutes, two burly Alyeska classics. Even if those chutes are closed, with a 2,500-foot vertical drop and slopes that exceed 55 degrees in places, there's no shortage of good terrain to keep you entertained.

The town of Girdwood, located at the base of the resort, consists of only a few small restaurants and bars. Try a sandwich or hearty soup at the Bake Shop or some affordable Mexican food at Tacos for two sure bets. For lodging, there are also a few B & B's and a youth hostel in town.

The best way to hit Alyeska is by purchasing an all-inclusive package, putting guaranteed heli-vertical, snowcat back-up, hotel and lifts onto one swipe of the VISA card. Chugach Powder Guides flies out of Alyeska, and a few other guides, including your truly, can offer you the all-inclusive trip of a lifetime. Suck it up and buy a package — you'll get sick of Chugach heli-time, snowcat touring and tickets at Alyeska.

I first came to Alyeska eight years ago to train for the World Extreme Skiing Championships on Chugach terrain without having to dip into my pocket to pay for a helicopter ride every run. You may not be competing, but Alyeska is the perfect training ground for the expert skier looking to step it up to an AK skill-level before stepping out of the heli. And in Girdwood, no matter what the Alaskan weather brings (and it will definitely bring something strange) you'll either be flying or riding a chair into some of the best terrain in the world.

www.alyeskaresort.com

- Heli Packages: www.chrisanthony.com
www.chugachpowderguides.com
- Lift Tickets: \$45
- Lodging: Alyeska Prince Hotel — 307 rooms, fitness center, 16-person whirlpool, lap pool, massage therapy & lounges.
- Getting There: Rent a car in Anchorage or catch a shuttle to the resort for \$75 dollars. Most heli/snowcat/Alyeska packages include transportation.