## Main Home Page

### Sitka

Sitka is a small city in south-east Alaska that occupies parts of Baranof Island and Chichagof Island. Old Sitka was settled by Russian explorers in 1799. From 1799 to 1867 this Alaskan was part of Russia, and known as New Archangel (Новоaрхангельск). Russian architectural influence is still evident today. Current population is less than 10,000 people, which can double when cruise ships dock and passengers visit Sitka.

### St. Michael’s Russian Orthodox Cathedral

The original St. Michael’s Russian Orthodox Cathedral was built in 1848 and was the seat of the Russian Orthodox bishop in Alaska. In 1966 the original cathedral was destroyed by fire, which also destroyed the original library of Russian, Tlingit, and Aluet language texts, handmade bells, and a depiction of the Last Supper. The church has been restored to its original appearance, including the onion dome notable in Russian architecture. St. Michael’s Cathedral occupies the center of one of the two large traffic circles in Sitka.

(<https://www.nps.gov/sitk/learn/photosmultimedia/st-michael-s-cathedral-virtual-tour.htm>)

### The Russian Bishop’s House

The Russian Bishop’s House was completed in 1842, prior to the completion of the cathedral. It is an example of colonial Russian architecture. It was closed in 1969 due to disrepair and was in danger of collapse. In 1973 the National Park service took ownership and began restoring the building to how it appeared in 1853. This is one of the four buildings that remain from the time Russian rule in North America. Guided tours are sometimes available. There is a museum on the first floor. It is situated near the east corner of Crescent Harbor.

(<https://www.nps.gov/sitk/learn/historyculture/russian-bishops-house.htm>)

### Castle Hill

The Baranof Castle State Historic Site, commonly referred to as Castle Hill, provides an impressive view overlooking Sitka and the harbor. It is a 60-foot-high rocky outcrop overlooking Sitka Harbor. At the summit is a flat area, approximately 120 by 90 feet. The south face is sheer, but the east side has a more gradual slope with a walking trail that leads to the summit. The top of the hill had been occupied by native Tlingit, then Russia military occupied the hill. After Alaska was purchased by the United States of America, a transfer of power was formalized at Castle Hill and the American flag was raised. Today, the previous structures no longer remain. But cannon is still in place and the view is astounding.

(<https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aspunits/southeast/baranofcastle.htm>)

### The Sitka Pioneer Home

The Sitka Pioneer Home is an assisted living facility. Where it is located was originally a barracks, first for Russian troops, and then for U.S. Marines. The base was closed in 1912 and the Navy Department gave permission to use the barracks to form the Sitka Pioneer Home. The home opened in 1913 to house indigent men. In the 1930s the old barracks were replaced with a concrete building with a capacity to house 170 men. In the 1950s a new wing was added to house women and married couples. The most recent renovations allow housing for residents suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia. Currently, the Sitka Pioneer Home is able to serve 65 men and women.

(<https://dfcs.alaska.gov/daph/Pages/sitka/default.aspx>)

### John O’Connell Bridge

The John O’Connell Bridge, also known as the Sitka Harbor Bridge, spans the Sitka Channel to connect the main town of Sitka on Baranof Island to Japonski Island, where Sitka Rocky Gutierrez Airport and the Coast Guard station are located. This two-lane cable-stayed bridge was named for a former mayor of Sitka. Initially competed in 1971. The main span is 450 feet, with a total 1255 foot length. Prior to the completion of the bridge, access was achieved by ferry. It is the oldest cable-stayed bridge in the United States, and was designated an Alaska Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

(<https://www.akbizmag.com/industry/engineering/oconnell-bridge/>)

### Mount Edgecombe on Kruzof Island

Mount Edgecombe on Kruzof Island, visible across the Sitka Sound, is a stratovolcano featuring a well-defined crater. Captain James Cook named Mount Edgecombe in 1778. The volcano is not active or erupting. However, it has been in a state of unrest, including multiple recent earthquake swarms. In early June, 2023, a team of scientists was brought in by helicopter to study carbon dioxide and heat emissions. Their work was initially disrupted by the appearance of a grizzly bear in close proximity to where the first team members were deployed.

(<https://www.avo.alaska.edu/volcanoes/volcinfo.php?volcname=Edgecumbe>)

## Preservation Page

There are several fascinating facilities in Sitka that focus on wildlife preservation and education.

### Fortress of the Bear

Fortress of the Bear is an educational bear rescue facility that provides protection and care for orphaned bears as permitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The facility is an abandoned paper pulp mill that has been converted into large holding tanks filled with natural features including streams and ponds. The bears who have been adopted were orphaned cubs who had encroached into human populated areas, and were in danger of being destroyed. Because of their youth and their introduction to human population areas, these bears could not survive in the wild. Fortress of the Bear rescues these orphaned bears and cares for them. They are wild bears, though some training is provided to help them interact with the veterinarians and others who care for them. For example, they are taught a form of basic sign language. They are not performers or zoo animals. The facility is away from populated areas, and other wild bears are known to come close to the facility to interact with these protected bears. Tours are available.

(<http://www.fortressofthebear.org/our-mission>)

### Alaska Raptor Center

Alaska Raptor Center rescues treats, and rehabilitates, and eventually releases wild raptor birds who have been injured in the wild. They typically care for about 200 birds every year. For birds who cannot be rehabilitated or released, they may provide long term housing and care as Raptors-in-Residence. Their current 24 Raptors-in-Residence include bald and golden eagles, hawks, falcons and owls. The facility includes an indoor bald eagle flight training center where raptors are provided a safe environment to relearn flight skills. Eventually, they may be moved to outdoor facilities before being released. Tours are available.

(<https://alaskaraptor.org>)

### Sitka Sound Science Center

Sitka Sound Science Center states that its mission is “to increasing understanding and awareness of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of Alaska through education and research.” It is in a building once owned by Sheldon Jackson College, and was erected in 1929. Tours are available which include a tide pool touch tank, aquarium, and the salmon hatchery.

(<https://sitkascience.org/hatchery/>)

## Exploration Page

### The City of Sitka Alaska

The population of Sitka was 8,458 people according to the 2020 census, which makes it the fifth most populated city in Alaska. The total area (including water) is 4,811 square miles, making Sitka the largest city in the U.S. by total area. However, the developed land area is small.

Being on an island, there is no interstate highway system. The longest stretch of road is Halibut Point Road and Sawmill Creek Road which connect together at a traffic circle. This stretches a total of approximately 14 miles with a maximum speed of 45 mph. But, most of this stretch is not developed.

Downtown Sitka provides shopping, eating, and entertainment within a reasonable walking area.

The Sitka Rocky Gutierrez Airport is bounded by water on both ends. Besides the airport, Japonski Island is also home to the U.S. Coast Guard, Mt. Edgecombe Medical Center, and Guardian Flight Air Ambulance.

(<https://www.cityofsitka.com/about-sitka>)

### Totem Park

No visit to Sitka can be complete without visiting Sitka National Historic Park/Totem Park. The park consists of walking trails through a natural rain forest with totem poles featured at various points along the trails. The visitor center provides views of historic totem poles and pole fragments. An educational film is also available to view.

(<https://www.nps.gov/sitk/learn/historyculture/totem-park.htm>)

### Camping

There are opportunities for camping around Sitka. North if Sitka, near the north end of Halibut Point Road, is the Old Sitka State Park and Starrgavin campground at Starrgavin Bay. To the south, at the end of Sawmill Creek Road is the Sawmill Creek campground.

(<https://visitsitka.org/where-to-stay/camping-rv-parks>)

### Canoeing and Kayaking

The beautiful Blue Lake is a reservoir located 3 miles to the east of Sitka. The end of Blue Lake Road accesses the reservoir, which can be used for canoeing and kayaking. Besides the majestic Blue Lake, various excursion companies offer kayaking adventures around Sitka Sound.

(<https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g60966-Activities-c61-t191-Sitka_Alaska.html>)

### Hiking

Mount Verstovia and Harbor Mountain hiking trails provide commanding overlooks, as well as an array of vegetation. It is highly recommended to wear bear bells and carry bear spray whenever hiking around Sitka.

(<https://www.alaska.org/destination/sitka/parks-and-trails>)