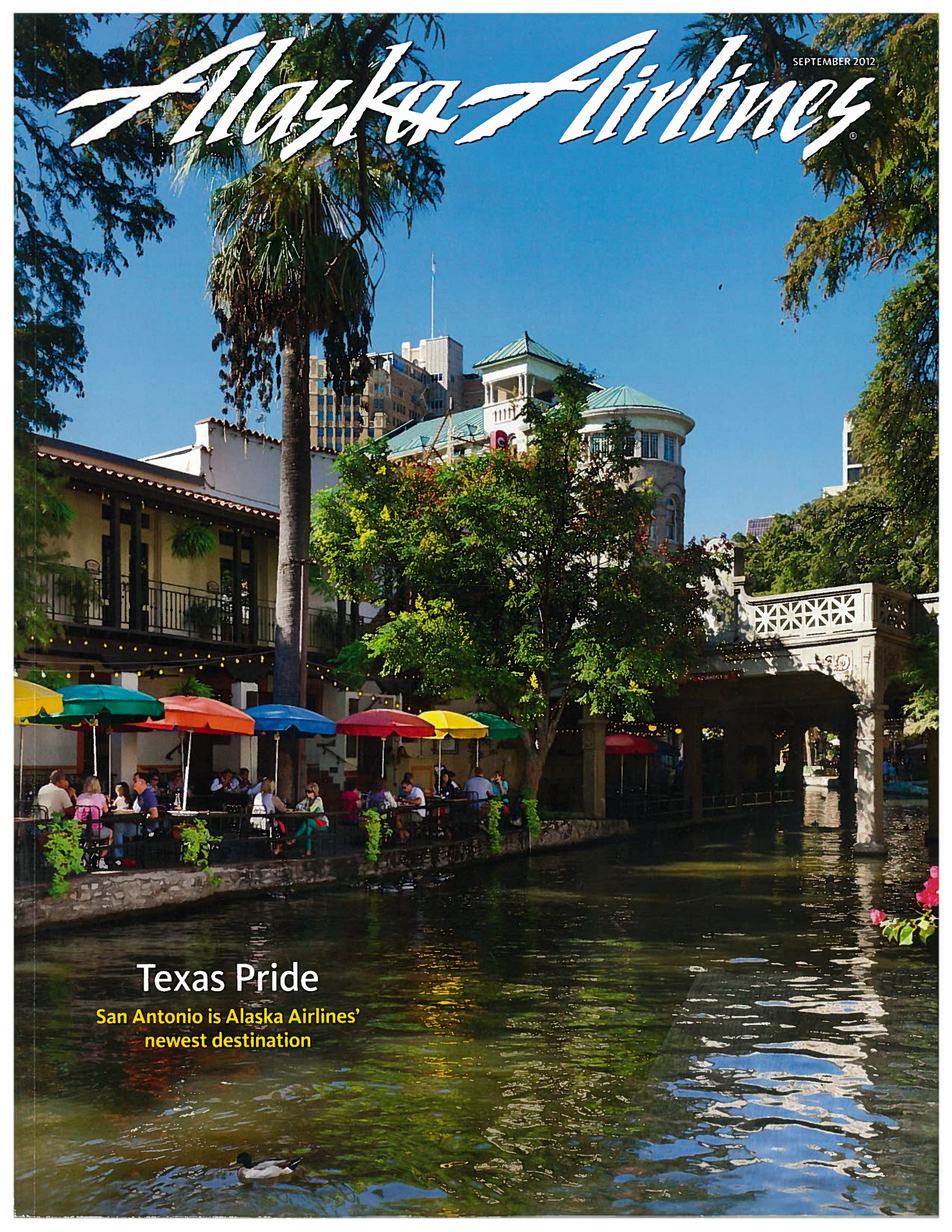


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SEPTEMBER 2012

Texas Pride

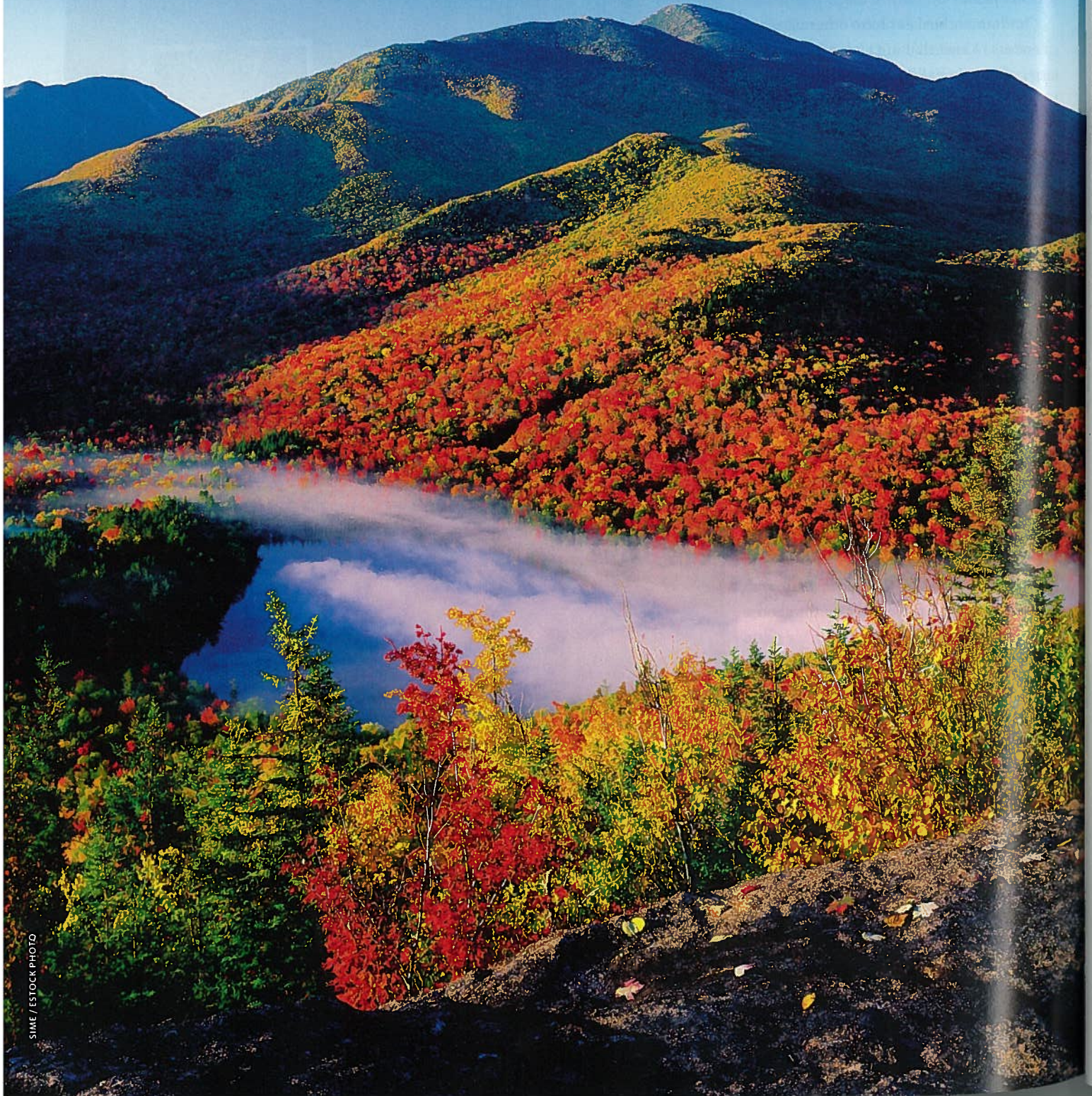
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Natural New York

Adventures in the Empire State's parklands

By David Schmidt



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more civilized path will take hikers to a lookout point on the adjacent rock outcropping, the Near Trapps, in about 15 minutes.

Once at the top of the Trapps, I enjoy a view that stretches for miles. To the south-east, I can see down the Hudson Valley. To the northwest are the Catskill Mountains. Hot-air balloons drift with the prevailing winds, while peregrine falcons and turkey vultures glide by. Deer and foxes are often seen in the surrounding forests of deciduous and coniferous trees. Sitting on this ridge and watching a hawk soar on a rising thermal, it's hard to fathom that New York City is just about 90 miles to the south.

Back in New Paltz, the evening's dinner choices range from classic local restaurants, such as the Village TeaRoom Restaurant & Bake Shop, to brewpubs, such as the Gilded Otter, named for one of the ships that brought to America some of the Dutch, French, German and Swiss Huguenots who were among the original founders of the town in the 1660s.

After dinner, a stroll down Huguenot Street—the oldest authentic museum street in America—offers a chance to step back in history. Now a National Historic Landmark District, the street includes seven original 18th century stone houses that are fine examples of classic Dutch architecture, as well as a burial ground and a rebuilt church whose congregation first assembled in 1717.

You can visit a museum on the street and take guided tours of the homes from May through October, learning about the area's history and what life was like in New Paltz during colonial times.

The Adirondack wilderness

I leave New Paltz and continue my journey north on I-87, which passes through the eastern edge of the Catskill Mountains and the bustle of Albany, until the landscape begins to open up, revealing vast natural lands and rugged mountains made of granite.

I have arrived at the Adirondack Park, about 6 million acres of mixed-use land that represents one of America's most unique land-management programs. The state park's staggering size—larger than Yosemite, the Everglades, Yellowstone and

the Grand Canyon national parks combined—makes it the biggest protected area in the contiguous United States.

One of the intriguing aspects of the park is the way that private property is interspersed throughout the area. While the public parkland is overseen by the New York Forest Preserve, more than half of the acreage within the boundaries of the park is privately held. Small towns and villages punctuate the landscape, and roads crisscross the park, providing access to trailheads, lakes and mountains, and serving as a vital economic lifeline to the estimated 130,000 year-round residents.

Impressively, more than 1 million acres of land in the park was classified by the state constitution in 1894 as "wild forest lands," providing a level of protection and preservation greater than that afforded to national parklands. These areas are described as having a "primeval character" and are to be protected or restored to their natural conditions.

Reaching your peak

The largest of these wild places is the High Peaks Wilderness Area, located in the central part of the park, near the town of Lake Placid. It boasts some of the eastern United States' tallest mountains, including Mount Marcy—the park's ultimate destination for mountain climbers.

If time allows, a multiday backpacking trip into this area affords plenty of opportunities for climbing some of the park's high peaks, including Mount Haystack (4,961 feet), Mount Skylight (4,925 feet) and Gray Peak (4,826 feet).

For those not interested in backpacking, the Adirondack Park offers just about any outdoor activity imaginable, from sailing or kayaking on the numerous mountain lakes to horseback riding, mountain biking and fly-fishing. Families can enjoy accessible wonders such as Roaring Brook Falls, High Falls Gorge and the Ausable Chasm. And thanks to the park's mixed-use management plan, established businesses, guide operations and equipment stores facilitate easy access to the park's spectacular forests and natural lands. The area's charming towns and hamlets offer cozy lodgings, and shops



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