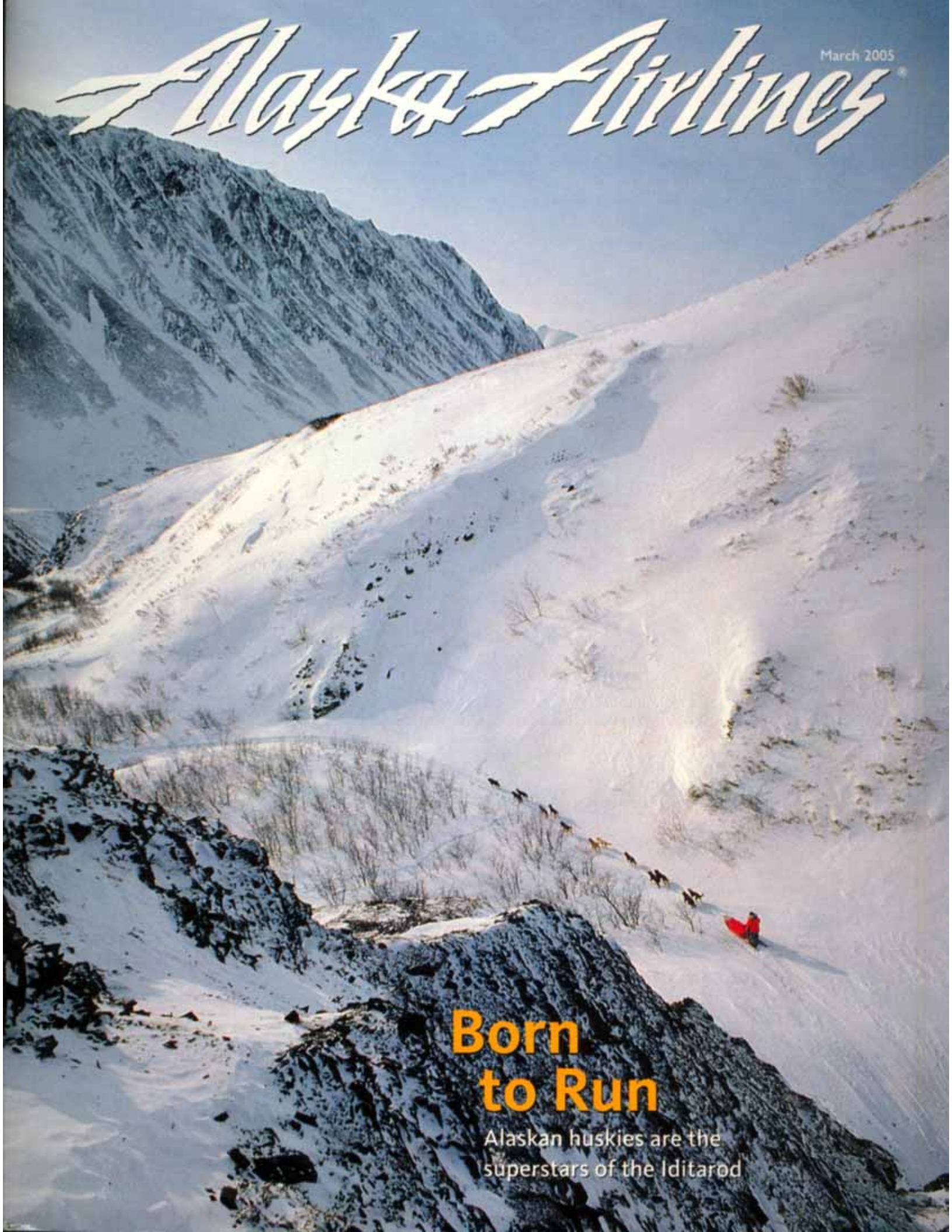


Alaska Airlines

March 2005



Born to Run

Alaskan huskies are the
superstars of the Iditarod

hotel the rain lifts, leaving prismatic drops on frangipani flowers. Rainbows climb the ridge overlooking the city as dusk descends.

"OK, I BRING YOU THIS BY AT HALF-TWO," advises Karen, our housekeeper at The Palms Villa Resort, scheduling the arrival of a pot of *callaloo* soup she's made for us. Karen has walnut skin, a sunny disposition and the musical speech of Tobago that sounds like wind chimes in a bayside breeze. Half-two is 2:30, British parlance. Callaloo is a thick concoction of dasheen leaf, celery, onion, garlic, carrots, chiles and okra.

This is our after-snorkel lunch. With coconut "bake" (a light bread) dipped into the callaloo, drowsiness wraps our bodies like warm flannel. At the Palms, the best lodging in T&T, we have our own entire villa and can nap in the high, colonial king bed beneath the ceiling fan or out on the poolside patio in chaise longues. There are advantages to each: outside, warm sun; inside, cool cotton sheets and teak-trimmed shade. And disadvantages: outside, each hour's rain shower; inside, the potential for oversleeping. And yet more advantages: out-



CHARLOTTEVILLE IS A QUIANT FISHING VILLAGE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF TOBAGO.

side, the querulous songs of bananaquits (little yellow warblers) and the buzz of copper-rumped hummingbirds. Inside, the periodic clean, visceral rhythm of the rain on a tin roof. I snooze out, Leslie in, until the rain returns and we both stand on the veranda to watch.

During the rainy season (June through

November), clouds rise and rain falls here in an almost ceaseless pattern that results in topographic novelties unfamiliar to denizens of temperate realms. In the narrow valley of the Castara River, on the steeply hogbacked northwest shore of Tobago, flocks of parrots busy themselves in the trees as we pick our way upstream past rocks washed so frequently by torrents that they look scrubbed. A hundred yards up, a steep cliff spills the river—a stream, really—into a deep, tourmaline pool. Up on the cliff a young islander, lean and strong as bamboo, a shell strand around his neck, is poised to dive. He grins at us and raises his eyebrows mischievously, then plunges a dozen feet down into the pool like a swan, dreadlocks flying.

On a ridge high above the valleys, in a nature preserve, the stone-and-concrete foundations of an old dairy cling to a steep slope like mine workings. Here at the Eleanor Alefounder Bird Sanctuary, a short, serene hike up the ridge yields sightings of dozens of birds. Green-headed lizards dart across old logs, indigo and persimmon butterflies twirl past and wild lantana curtains the trail's edge. We peer up into the trees for blue-crowned mot mot, red-capped woodpeckers, tropical mockingbirds,

When You Go

Though the hospitality industry in T&T is not as fully developed as in other Caribbean countries, each island offers a range of lodgings, from budget to deluxe.

THE PALMS VILLA RESORT Tobago; 868-635-1010, www.thepalmstobago.com. Rates start at \$325 a night. This is not only the best accommodation in the country, it's one of the finest in the Caribbean. Each of the six neocolonial villas has its own private pool; a splendid wrap-around veranda; spacious bedrooms; and an airy, modern kitchen. The 10-acre surrounding estate is in a quiet ridgetop setting away from Tobago's bustle, but close to beaches, hiking and shopping.

COBLENTZ INN Port of Spain, Trinidad; 868-621-0541, www.coblentzinn.com. Rates start at \$120 a night. Sunny Caribbean colors and a quiet side-street location distinguish this boutique hotel in Trinidad's capital city. The rooftop courtyard hot tub, beneath a mango tree, is a lovely spot to watch the sunset.

Trinidad's best restaurant, **BATTIMAMZELLE** ("butterfly"), is located in the Coblentz Inn, 868-621-0541. Dinner for two is about \$125. Chef Khalid Mohammed has adapted local foods and styles to a fusion cuisine that encompasses astounding delights such as conch-coconut curry, crab-encrusted grouper and a Guyanese-style short ribs pepperpot. If you're lucky, the dessert menu will include the coconut-guava cheesecake. —E.L.