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Grand

luxury travel

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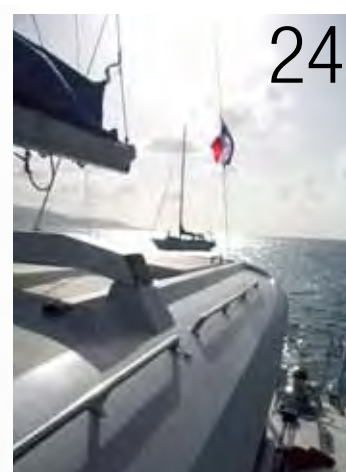
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From 1940, a photographer catches a stylish on ice moment when guests are served drinks on the rink in front of the iconic Chateau Frontenac Hotel.



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The Paro Taktsang monastery in the cliffs of the upper Paro valley, Bhutan. Photo copyright Amit Chail / amitchail.ca



February 2013

World of Wonder

Cool is the word for
a heli-skiing adventure
in BC's breathtaking Cariboo Range

Words and photo
by Mark Sissons

As our Bell 212 twin engine helicopter touches down on the remote mountaintop amid a swirl of blowing snow, I adjust my goggles, take a deep breath, and ask myself: "Are you ready for this?"

Piling out into thigh deep snow, my companions and I huddle together, shielding our faces from the icy blast of the chopper's rotor wash as it lifts off. Beneath us are forests of evergreen, winding glaciers and knife-edged peaks of British Columbia's magnificent Cariboo Range. Half the size of Switzerland, it will be my deep powder classroom for the next seven days.

"If you're comfortable on intermediate runs at most resorts, willing to tackle the occasional black diamond and have a real sense of adventure, you're ready for Powder 101," the Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) representative had assured me. Designed to make the backcountry more accessible to affluent intermediate skiers wishing to venture outside their comfort zones, Powder 101 is an exhilarating immersion into deep powder wilderness heli-skiing.

Ready or not, I can't pass up the opportunity to live the downhill dream of laying fresh tracks down steep and deep glade runs and untracked glacier bowls. That explains why I conjure up the courage to point my fat powder skis toward the fall line and plunge after our guide into a brave new world of outdoor adventure.

Unfolding for thousands of meters beneath me is a natural obstacle course of snow-encrusted fir trees. "Just don't look at the trees and you'll be OK", I remind myself as I awkwardly begin carving S-shapes through the glades, occasionally tumbling into huge pillows of feather light powder. Soon, the whoosh of my boards, yelps of joy from my companions, and our leader's "whoop whoop!" call directing us to our pickup location are the only sounds in this world of wintery white.

Trepidation quickly becomes childlike delight as our novice group whose members range in age from 35 to 79 gradually gets its backcountry groove on. By the afternoon, I'm learning to relax my burning quads and revel in the effortless rhythm of floating on deep powder, leaving jet streams of snow in my wake.

After an unbroken string of runs, the chopper deposits us back at CMH's Cariboo Lodge, which can accommodate up to 44 guests. Many of its guestrooms offer views of its namesake range. The friendly, attentive staff ensures that I feel right at home. The lodge has a spa and also offers a games and exercise room where we'll have yoga class each morning.

Guides and guests dine together in the spacious dining room. The Cariboo Lodge's cuisine is a masterful mix of healthy, hearty and deliciously decadent. There are dishes such as Dungeness crab cake, roasted red pepper and caper salsa with fennel tarragon slaw, and braised veal cheek with

potato gnocchi and San Marzano tomato ragout. Blueberry cheesecake with poached apple and apple gel is sufficient to take seriously the growing tableside talk of developing 'heli-belly'.

Sated and still buzzing from my successful backcountry debut, I crawl under my duvet that first night a changed man. Old fears have been conquered and a new love found. Now I understand why a first-time heli-skiing run is referred to as 'the point of no return.'

IF YOU GO



Cariboo Lodge is located in BC's Cariboo Range. Consistently high levels of snowfall in the North Thompson Valley ensure guests enjoy prime conditions until very late in the season. Heli-skiing season here normally runs from December until the end of April, and occasionally into May. The Powder 101 course is not for novice skiers. It's designed for strong intermediate skiers who are ready to make the transition to deep snow skiing. Each new group consists of up to 10 skiers. CMH trips start and end in Calgary, from where guests are transported by bus and helicopter to the company's lodges. For more information, go to: www.canadianmountainholidays.com or tel. 800-661-0252.