

TLH Heliskiing

not just for experts, and close to Whistler

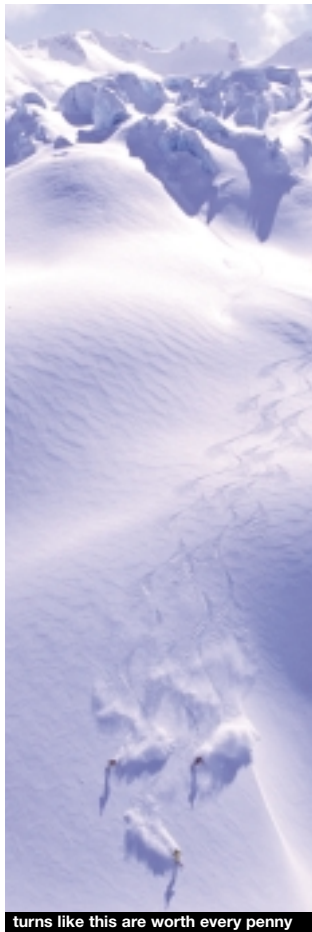
Mention heliskiing and most skiers subconsciously reach for their wallets. But just think about what you get for the money.

It's not just orgasmic skiing, but the memories of orgasmic skiing. The kind that remind you there is a world that is happy and shiny and was once yours - even if only for a day or two.

After you've done it once, heliskiing will clutch at you like the worst sort of drug. And as with all drugs the cost becomes irrelevant, the high is what it's all about. As a man who has spent his whole life looking for the cheapest ski deal going, I would officially now save, steal, borrow or sell my soul to go back and do it again.

I am the classic intermediate. So when I stepped onto the helicopter at TLH Heliskiing for the first time - come to think of it, long before I stepped onto the helicopter - my main concern wasn't so much the cost but whether I could do it. The spectacular wilderness of the Chilcotins is not exactly the place to discover that steep and deep doesn't do it for you. "Can I take an easy groomed run down please" doesn't cut it. There isn't one for hundreds of miles.

TLH is based at Tyax Lodge, a luxurious mountain lodge 60 miles down a dirt track. Arriving there on a Friday evening you are greeted with a quick session on what heliskiing is all about, including serious words like avalanche, rescue,



turns like this are worth every penny

PHOTO: RANDY LINDCKS



come home to a cosy cabin

PHOTO: GEORGE ROSSSET

FACTS TLH Heliskiing

- 65 miles northeast of Whistler, British Columbia
- 830,000 acres of terrain (200 times the size of Vail)
- Accommodates 44 guests
- Uses two Bell 212 helicopters
- Each helicopter services only two groups of 11 skiers plus one guide per group
- Packages all inclusive, food, accommodation, transfers return from Vancouver and Whistler to lodge
- 2,3,4,5 and 7 day packages
- **Online availability**
www.tlheliskiing.com/tours/delu_avai.htm

Last Frontier Heliskiing

- in northern British Columbia north of Smithers
- 1.6 million acres of terrain (600 times the size of Vail)
- Accommodates 30 guests
- Uses two A-Star B2 Helicopters
- Each helicopter services three groups of five guests and one guide per group
- Packages all inclusive, food, accommodation
- Private air transfers to and from Vancouver provided at additional cost
- 7 day packages only
- **Online availability**
www.lastfrontierheli.com/packages/availability.htm



just two groups per Bell 212 helicopter

PHOTO: WWW.INSIGHTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

and transceiver. In case you're worried about what to do should you be involved in an avalanche fret not: you'll be up at 6:30am the next morning to learn.

Arising before light and walking around in -10C is best glossed over here. The real fun begins a few hours later after you have been supplied with an avalanche transceiver and fat skis and assigned to your group. (Based on ability levels, I was surprised to find that I wasn't in a group labelled "Rubbish".)

Having consumed a hearty breakfast you climb into one of three helis. In moments you're passing over true backcountry wilderness, and within 15 minutes you're coming to land on unnamed peaks and glaciers. Deep blue skies, dazzling sunlight and deep, untracked powder, yet strangely you don't notice all of this at first. Exiting a helicopter in ski boots, with snow blizzarding all around and adrenaline coursing through your body, there are way too many things going on to calmly stand and appreciate the impassive, indifferent beauty of the mountains.

No ski lift in the world could take you to a place like this. Smooth, untracked fields of powder tailing thousands of feet below. Yet even with 3,500 square kilometres of terrain and only 11 skiers to share it with, it's impossible to shake the Pavlovian desire to get down it before anyone else. Our guide Cliff bid us follow him and I, like everyone else, couldn't get there quick enough. Sure there were a few hiccups and a few falls, but after a couple of runs I found myself floating through airy snow and the steeper the run the easier it seemed. This was some of the finest powder in the world, and you get what you pay for.

Among the other things you are paying for is skiing all day long in angel dust, looking back up an empty mountainside and seeing your own deep S-turns cut in the snow, and realising that with the right conditions and the right equipment powder skiing isn't hard - though being rich does help. But please, please don't whinge about not being able to afford it. Between a week in TLH and week in an average European resort, there's only one you'll remember for the rest of your life. AA