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Helicopter gives ultimate ski-lift

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WHISTLER, Canada (CNN) -- Oleg, Dmitri and Anton have come a long way from St. Petersburg, Russia.

First there was the 12-hour flight to Vancouver on Canada's west coast. From there, a two-hour helicopter trip south to the Chilcotin mountains -- or a three-hour drive from Whistler -- one of North America's most popular ski resorts.

But these skiers don't want what a traditional ski resort has to offer. They've come for untamed slopes and unlimited access to them -- all 830,000 acres -- via the ultimate personal ski-lift: a helicopter.

There are those who might question why they've come to Canada when there are some amazing slopes and resorts in Europe.

"Well, it's really the wilderness and space you don't have in Europe," says James Moreland of Elemental Adventure, a company that caters to thrill-seekers in different parts of the world.

"In Europe, there's no space. Here you can look out in one direction and know for thousands of miles, there's not a lot."

The St. Petersburg group is paying for the platinum package -- private chalet on Tyaughton Lake, meals prepared by a personal chef and personal service from a chalet host.

Each chalet also boasts a Jacuzzi on the front deck with a lakefront view so you can soak your muscles as you soak in the view. And if you're still feeling sore after a long day of skiing, a personal masseuse is always on hand.

But it's the unlimited helicopter runs rather than the luxury that has convinced them to pay \$20,000 each for a week of skiing.

"You've got an area probably 50 times the size of an average resort in Europe," says Moreland, "and you've got the place all to yourself."

Horst Moosburger is another heliskiing convert, although his group is staying in the less expensive accommodation nearby at



Skiers can make as many helicopter runs as they like -- with 830,000 acres of wilderness to explore.



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He hails from Munich, Germany, but has shunned the slopes of Europe in favor of Canada.

"One reason is heliskiing and the next reason is heliskiing and the third reason is heliskiing," Moosburger says.

"I've been in France, I've been in Italy, Austria, all over European great ski stations, but this you don't have. You have it once, you have it 10 times a day."

There are, of course, dangers to heliskiing -- the weather conditions are constantly monitored and each team consists of an experienced pilot and at least one guide.

But for skiers like the group from Munich the excitement of being on the edge only enhances the enjoyment.

The growing popularity of heliskiing has seen Elemental Adventure Heliskiing extend its range of packages to include the Himalayas, Russia, and Greenland.

But Canada is where heliskiing began and with its excellent weather record and first-class resorts, it remains a favorite among heliskiing enthusiasts.

"You cannot do it better anywhere else in the world," Moosburger says.

-- *Monita Rajpal contributed to this report.*

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