

LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

# Condé Nast Traveller

A LUXURIOUS  
SAFARI HOLIDAY IN  
SOUTH AFRICA



TRUTH IN TRAVEL

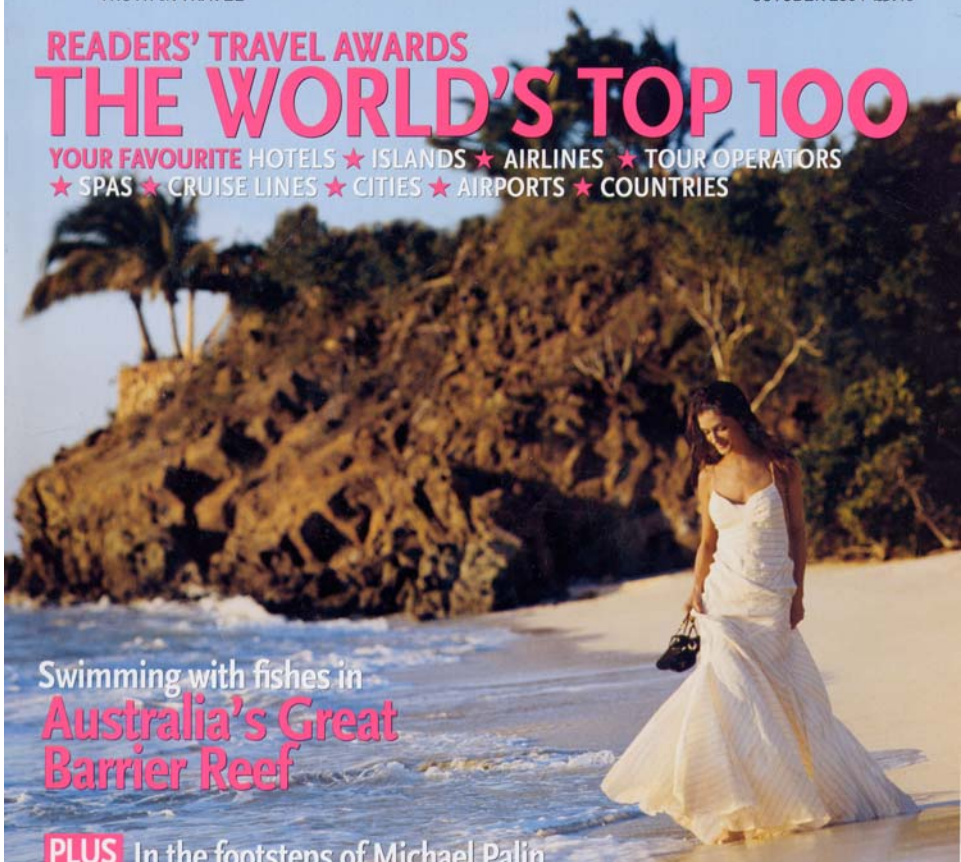
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## READERS' TRAVEL AWARDS THE WORLD'S TOP 100

YOUR FAVOURITE HOTELS ★ ISLANDS ★ AIRLINES ★ TOUR OPERATORS  
★ SPAS ★ CRUISE LINES ★ CITIES ★ AIRPORTS ★ COUNTRIES

Swimming with fishes in  
**Australia's Great  
Barrier Reef**

**PLUS** In the footsteps of Michael Palin

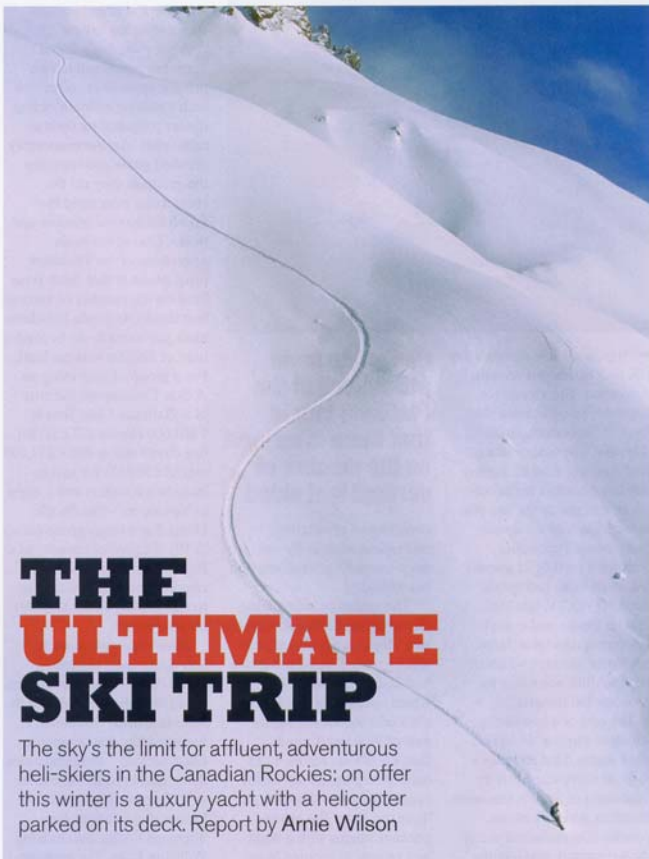


Aircraft cabins get a makeover See LA's best neon signs What is a five-star hotel?

**H**ELI-SKIING IS the *ne plus ultra* of an already expensive sport. In British Columbia, the centre of the heli-skiing world, a week of being flown to and from remote mountains to ski on pristine, 'powder' snow costs around £3,500 – and that doesn't include the air fare from the UK. Yet recently heli-skiing has been cranked up a few notches in terms of price and exclusivity. The big innovation is a sort of mini aircraft carrier.

This season a Canadian company, Sea To Sky Helisports and MegaYacht Adventures, is inviting skiers and snowboarders to base themselves on a 230ft yacht, the *Absinthe*, instead of in a conventional heli-ski lodge. One helicopter capable of carrying four skiers and a guide will be parked on the yacht's heli-pad, with another on standby for larger groups. The helicopters will ferry skiers to untracked descents in remote mountain wildernesses often little more than 15 minutes' flying time from the yacht's mooring on the British Columbia coast. And once the helicopters have returned at the end of the day, the yacht can move further along the coast to access a fresh ski area.

True, another vessel has been running heli-ski trips from Bella Coola, British Columbia, for the past three years, its



## THE ULTIMATE SKI TRIP

The sky's the limit for affluent, adventurous heli-skiers in the Canadian Rockies: on offer this winter is a luxury yacht with a helicopter parked on its deck. Report by Arnie Wilson

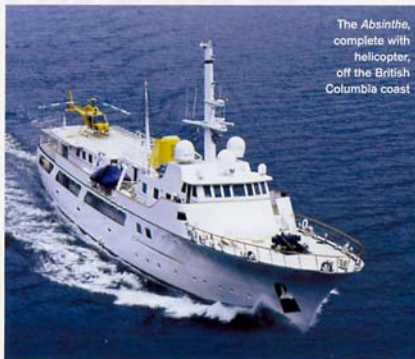


## ON THE WING

From their birthplace in south-western USA, low-cost airlines have migrated to the rest of the world. For the benefit of plane spotters and budget travellers alike, Bulletin reveals exotic examples of the species, none of which visit these shores



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The *Absinthe*, complete with helicopter, off the British Columbia coast

► trips bookable through the UK tour operator Elemental Adventure. But *Ocean Explorer*, an expedition ship, has little in common with *Absinthe*. The latter has a staff-to-guest ratio of at least one-to-one, and a luxurious interior to match the five-star service. Each of the dozen 'staterooms' (providing beds for a total of 21 guests) has an en-suite bathroom, stereo/DVD/TV, satellite/cellular phone and e-mail/Internet access (plus 'large portholes' through which to view wildlife, according to promotional material).

The cost of a trip on the *Absinthe* starts at £6,663 for eight nights. That includes a night at a five-star hotel in Vancouver or Seattle, limousine transfers, gourmet meals, powder skis, unlimited use of the helicopters, and—in the event of unfavourable flying

### One of the main attractions of the Platinum tour is that there is no limit on the number of vertical feet skied

conditions—alternative recreations such as fly- or deep-sea fishing, jet-skiing and sea kayaking.

The guides accompanying clients of Sea To Sky Helisports and MegaYacht Adventures will be from a well-established heli-skiing operation, TLH, which operates in the South Chilcotin mountains north-east of Whistler, Canada's best-known ski resort. TLH itself is refining its top-of-the-range Platinum Class Private Tour this year. The group package begins with a flight in a private helicopter from Vancouver to TLH's Tyax

Mountain Lake Resort, followed by five or seven nights in the luxurious, chalet-style log cabins.

After each day's skiing, Platinum guests can have a private, après-ski session with a visiting masseur before dinner prepared by their in-cabin chef. An internationally certified guide accompanies the group as they ski the spectacular runs amid the South Chilcotins' glaciers and peaks. One of the main attractions of the Platinum programme is that there is no limit on the number of vertical feet skied. (As a rule, heli-skiers must pay extra to ski beyond a limit of 100,000 vertical feet). For a group of four using an A-Star Eurocopter, the cost of a Platinum Class Tour is C\$63,600 (about £27,652) for five days' skiing and C\$77,400 (about £33,652) for seven, including transfers and a night in Vancouver's Pan Pacific Hotel. For a larger group (of up to 10), the greater capacity of a Bell 212 helicopter would be required, pushing the cost up to C\$173,900 (about £75,609) for seven days.

Also adding glamour to heli-skiing is an operation called Peace Reach Adventures, based 90 miles west of Fort St John in British Columbia. It has introduced an Emperor Class package, which includes flying clients from Vancouver or Calgary in a Lear Jet to a local airfield near its base Torwood Lodge, overlooking Williston Lake. The package also includes unlimited vertical

feet, a dedicated Eurocopter, private lodging and a free massage service, on top of the private-jet transfers.

Isn't this all a bit excessive, when skiers could make do with the old, £3,500 heli-skiing packages? Not according to James Orr, a UK tour operator who specialises in Canadian heli-skiing. 'The Lear Jet service makes a remote unspoilt wilderness accessible in less time than it takes to get to Whistler from Vancouver International Airport. An hour on the jet, 10 minutes in a helicopter and guests are safely installed in Peace Reach's magnificent lodge. And not having to fit in with airline schedules means not only minimising travel time but also maximising the amount of skiing possible in a week.'

More generally, Orr explains that the big sea-change in heli-skiing has been the emergence of the small A-Star Eurocopter. 'It is, he says, both more powerful and manoeuvrable than the old Bell 212. Hence the innovation of heli-skiing from a boat. 'That is a novel idea,' says Orr. 'But it's difficult to see where else heli-skiing can go.'

**Sea To Sky Helisports and MegaYacht Adventures** (00 1 604 935 3228; [www.SeaToSkyHolidays.com](http://www.SeaToSkyHolidays.com)). (The UK contact is Frontier Ski: 020 8776 8709; [www.frontier-ski.co.uk](http://www.frontier-ski.co.uk)) **Elemental Adventure** (0870 738 7838; [www.eladv.com](http://www.eladv.com)). **TLH Heliskiing** (00 1 250 558 5379; [www.tlhel.com](http://www.tlhel.com)). **Peace Reach heliskiing** (00 1 250 787 6406; [www.peacereachheliski.com](http://www.peacereachheliski.com)). **James Orr Heliski** (01799 516964; [www.heliski.co.uk](http://www.heliski.co.uk))

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