

OVER THE TOP

TAKE EXTRAVAGANCE TO *the extreme* ON YOUR WHISTLER GETAWAY

story by CINDY FILIPENKO

Imagine \$10,000-a-night accommodations, \$65,000 week-long touring packages and luxury transportation that picks up where the private jet lets off. Whistler, Canada's ultimate winter resort, has always been a town where excess can be as expected as it is exciting.

Being a luxury destination, Whistler offers an array of spectacular accommodations, superb restaurants and concierge services that run the gamut from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Need your walking shoes delivered to your après location? No problem. Want a mountaintop igloo built for your romantic proposal? It's been done before and it can be done again.

Even the resort's most accessible over-the-top experience, skiing or boarding our powder-covered mountains, can be amped up from incredible to truly amazing if you've got the cash. Visualize travelling to the backcountry by helicopter to ski, board, trek or snowshoe in the pristine alpine. After a day exploring the mountain, you top

it off with a champagne toast more than a mile up — the perfect cap to a perfect day.

And perfect days are what Whistler specializes in. Here are a few extravagant ways to ensure your vacation is filled with them.

GETTING HERE IN STYLE

For most, the trip to Whistler really begins with a two-hour drive north from Vancouver International Airport and into the beautiful Coast Mountains. Some choose to make this final, 140-kilometre leg of a trip to Whistler as luxurious as possible.

"Our guests determine their experience," says Sean Wells, owner of transportation provider VIP Whistler. "Whatever a guest can imagine, we can make it happen. What we specialize in is excellent personal service."

For most, winding along past Howe Sound on the Sea to Sky Highway while taking in some of the most spectacular scenery on B.C.'s southern coast is enough. Other guests require a little more. How about a little fine dining along the way?

"We have an excellent relationship with the Bearfoot Bistro

and they provide our catering," says Wells. "We can even have a chef on board serving and discussing the dishes, or we can stop along the way, cook a meal and enjoy it while taking in some amazing views."

With a fleet of seven vehicles, from SUVs to executive buses >>

Clockwise from upper left: Exterior of \$70,000 per week heli-ski in, heli-ski out house in Stonebridge; The Bearfoot Bistro's superbly stocked wine cellar; Enjoying a champagne heli-picnic; The interior of the Stonebridge rental.



CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: AMANDA OSTERPROVOKKE STUDIOS, COURTESY BEARFOOT BISTRO, BONNY MAKAREWICZ, AMANDA OSTERPROVOKKE STUDIOS

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Top left: Learn to sabre a bottle of champagne from Andre Saint-Jacques at the Bearfoot Bistro.

Top right: Enjoy a night in a romantic mountaintop igloo, provided by VIP Mountain Holidays.

Bottom left: Touring the spectacular Ipsoot Glacier with cWhistler.

Bottom right: The perks of a private package with Coast Range Heli-Skiing.

suitable for rock stars (or the Real Housewives of Orange County, as seen on a recent episode) the company prides itself on excellent service since that's what their clients expect. A nice SUV is a nice SUV, but a well-managed, memorable experience is what keeps people coming back.

CHECKING IN?

Whistler has no shortage of excellent hotels and lodges that can provide a comfortable home away from home on any vacation. But anyone looking for the ultimate in private accommodations won't have any trouble finding them — if they're willing to open their wallets a little.

"The 'Best of the Best' is this heli-ski in, heli-ski out house in Stonebridge — it's \$70,000 for one week, including a driver, butler, housekeeper and 24/7 private concierge service," says Ben Thomas, owner of VIP Mountain Holidays.

The company specializes in putting well-heeled guests into the resort's most amazing homes.

If you're not quite up to paying \$10,000 a night, they also offer luxury condos in the main Village for around \$2,000 per night and detached homes in adjacent neighbourhoods billing out at between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per night.



PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: COURTESY BEARFOOT BISTRO, BONNY MAKAREWICZ, COURTESY COAST RANGE HELI, COURTESY OWHISTLER

“These properties are for people who are used to the best whenever they travel,” says Thomas. “It costs \$100,000-plus to fly a private jet from Europe to Vancouver. If people are spending that kind of money to get here, then they are looking to spend at least that on their accommodation.”

Thomas also offers a variety of concierge services and can arrange anything from building a romantic, mountaintop igloo (like he did for pop star Seal when he proposed to his now ex-wife Heidi Klum) to delivering kids to ski school so parents can sleep in.

“We make it possible for our guests to be able to come and go as they please and not have to pre-plan because their private concierge can get them into wherever they want to go at a moment’s notice,” says Thomas. “Not many people can get a table for 10 at 7:30 on Dec. 28 at the best restaurants in town. We can.”

SKIING WITHOUT LIFT LINES

Imagine: no lift lines, no crowded runs, just boundless terrain waiting to be carved up — a ski hill all to yourself in the backcountry.

This is the world Coast Range Heli-Skiing has opened up to thousands of visitors since 2002. Coast Range Heli-Skiing provides more than just spectacular downhill — there’s also snowshoeing, snowboarding, ski touring and backcountry adventures.

Although the company offers an array of products, its high-end offering is the Powder Elite Private Package. Not your everyday fare, the cost of this package varies depending on the client’s wants and party size, but can easily add up to more than five figures.

“With the Powder Elite Private Package, clients get their own >>

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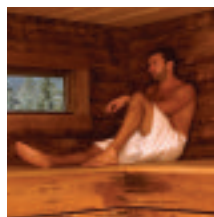
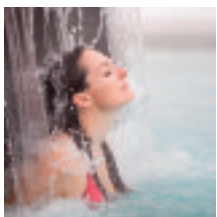
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helicopter and guide and travel anywhere they want in our 200,000-acre tenure,” says Freed. “Essentially, this gives them free reign on pacing, the amount of skiing they’re doing ... it’s just them and their group. It’s very intimate.”

PLANNING FOR PERFECTION PLUS

What would a vacation be like without the stress of having to plan every detail? Imagine just letting someone know that you wanted to come to Whistler and that was the extent of your holiday planning. No flights to arrange. No hotels websites to pore over. No hassles.

Celine Villeneuve’s clients pay upwards of \$65,000 to ensure a hassle-free week’s vacation through her concierge service, cWhistler. With the help of an extensive network of colleagues, the company is able to offer clients extremely personalized service by focusing on one client at a time, and by treating them to unique experiences.

“Whatever it is, we’ll get it done, whether it’s planning a multi-day Santa Claus treasure hunt or getting a restaurant in the Village to open in the afternoon for a two-person meeting,” says Villeneuve.

“People come here and they go out on ziplines, ATVs — the organized things — I want to take people outside of that,” adds Villeneuve. “I want clients to experience the Whistler I know. I want to take them to see what I love.”

THE FINEST FINE DINING

Bearfoot Bistro, one of Whistler’s most consistently creative and innovative restaurants, is a perennial favourite for wealthy visitors looking for attentive service, brilliant food, inspiring wine and a something a little different. Ultimately, it is owner Andre Saint-Jacques’s commitment to theatre-infused excellence that makes dining here a must. For example, there are many places in Whistler to sip and savour, but the Bearfoot is the only one that allows patrons to sip, savour and sabre!

Patrons can have Saint-Jacques take them to the cellar for a lesson in how to sabre a bottle of champagne. The magnificent, 15,000-bottle cellar features more than 2,000 labels, the two most expensive of which are a 1985 Pomerol Chateau Pétrus and a magnum of 1962 Moët & Chandon Vintage Collection champagne at \$5,500 each. This environment adds to an exhilarating experience that leaves the sabre-wielder with a glass-ringed champagne cork in a box emblazoned with the Bearfoot logo and a strange sense of accomplishment.


“The most important thing we do here is entertain,” says Saint-Jacques. “People come back because they’ve had a good experience — we’ve made them happy.”

One way the Bearfoot ensures its guests’ happiness is through executive chef Melissa Craig’s cuisine. With an emphasis on local ingredients, Craig creates balanced, inventive and beautifully executed dishes. And sometimes she just adds fun to the menu — how would you like nitro ice cream prepared tableside by a waiter reciting the opening scene of Macbeth?


A lot of guests save their “wow” for the Belvedere Vodka Room. Kept at a brisk -28 C, a trip to the ice-encased vodka room requires donning a down-filled parka. Guests can then select samples from more than 50 perfectly chilled craft and classic vodkas from around the world.

“We love giving the guests an experience they’ll remember,” says Saint-Jacques. Indeed. [W](#)



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