



I want to try heli-skiing, but I'm nervous. Any advice?

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The question: I want to try heli-skiing, but am feeling a bit nervous. Any advice? And can you recommend where to go?

TRAVEL CONCIERGE: Ski Canada editor Iain MacMillan once found himself clad in ski gear, strapped into a helicopter beside a 70-year-old Briton. The cliché about Canadians is true in skiing, he says. We often underestimate our skills, while Americans overestimate. And the British? Well, they just go for it!

Helicopter ski operations, which zip you up and down remote terrain, employ guides who are often happy to help you out on the first run. And besides all that untracked powder, the sport offers another high. "You just feel better about it when you've done a level above what you thought you can do," he says.

As for where, you must go west, where heli-skiing basically began. Options range from resort-based day trips to a week at a fly-in lodge. (Check out hellobc.com for some listings.)

First-timers need to be able to ski at an intermediate level and be comfortable with backcountry terrain, the deep powder, tree-skiing bliss of it all, says Michelle Meerse, marketing co-ordinator for Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing (wiegele.com), based in Blue River, B.C.

"If the skier is experienced, then they would find heli-skiing to be no problem. We have the cat-skiing option for those that may feel very hesitant to jump right into it. To be honest, most people that are keen to heli-ski are fine without first trying out the cat."

And for reassurance, there are plenty of safety measures in place, starting with highly trained guides.

Ready to jump out of the chopper?

"Our experienced pilots land safely in the mountains, guests step out one at a time and the guide unloads the skis/boards," Meerse says. "Once the heli leaves, the guide instructs the group where they are going, what to expect and how to proceed."