

FEBRUARY 2013

Grand

luxury travel

HIMALAYAN HIGH

Tapping Bhutan's bliss and beauty

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Hitting the powder in BC's Cariboo Range

COLONIAL ECHOES

Singapore's shop houses stand tall

SAILING IN THE GRENADINES

Magic of St. Vincent, Mustique and more

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& WHY I LOVE VENICE

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On the Cover
The Paro Taksang monastery in the cliffs of the upper Paro valley, Bhutan.
Photo copyright Amit Chail / amitchail.ca



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World of Wonder

Cool is the word for a heli-skiing adventure in BC's breathtaking Cariboo Range

Words and photo by Mark Sissons

As our Bell 212 twin engine helicopter touches down on the remote mountaintop amid a swirl of blowing snow, I adjust my goggles, take a deep breath, and ask myself: "Are you ready for this?"

Piling out into thigh deep snow, my companions and I huddle together, shielding our faces from the icy blast of the chopper's rotor wash as it lifts off. Beneath us are forests of evergreen, winding glaciers and knife-edged peaks of British Columbia's magnificent Cariboo Range. Half the size of Switzerland, it will be my deep powder classroom for the next seven days.

"If you're comfortable on intermediate runs at most resorts, willing to tackle the occasional black diamond and have a real sense of adventure, you're ready for Powder 101," the Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) representative had assured me. Designed to make the backcountry more accessible to affluent intermediate skiers wishing to venture outside their comfort zones, Powder 101 is an exhilarating immersion into deep powder wilderness heli-skiing.

Ready or not, I can't pass up the opportunity to live the downhill dream of laying fresh tracks down steep and deep glade runs and untracked glacier bowls. That explains why I conjure up the courage to point my fat powder skis toward the fall line and plunge after our guide into a brave new world of outdoor adventure.

Unfolding for thousands of meters beneath me is a natural obstacle course of snow-encrusted fir trees. "Just don't look at the trees and you'll be OK", I remind myself as I awkwardly begin carving S-shapes through the glades, occasionally tumbling into huge pillows of feather light powder. Soon, the whoosh of my boards, yelps of joy from my companions, and our leader's "whoop whoop!" call directing us to our pickup location are the only sounds in this world of wintery white.

Trepidation quickly becomes childlike delight as our novice group whose members range in age from 35 to 79 gradually gets its backcountry groove on. By the afternoon, I'm learning to relax my burning quads and revel in the effortless rhythm of floating on deep powder, leaving jet streams of snow in my wake.

After an unbroken string of runs, the chopper deposits us back at CMH's Cariboo Lodge, which can accommodate up to 44 guests. Many of its guestrooms offer views of its namesake range. The friendly, attentive staff ensures that I feel right at home. The lodge has a spa and also offers a games and exercise room where we'll have yoga class each morning.

Guides and guests dine together in the spacious dining room. The Cariboo Lodge's cuisine is a masterful mix of healthy, hearty and deliciously decadent. There are dishes such as Dungeness crab cake, roasted red pepper and caper salsa with fennel tarragon slaw, and braised veal cheek with

potato gnocchi and San Marzano tomato ragout. Blueberry cheesecake with poached apple and apple gel is sufficient to take seriously the growing tableside talk of developing 'heli-belly'.

Sated and still buzzing from my successful backcountry debut, I crawl under my duvet that first night a changed man. Old fears have been conquered and a new love found. Now I understand why a first-time heli-skiing run is referred to as 'the point of no return.'

IF YOU GO



Cariboo Lodge is located in BC's Cariboo Range. Consistently high levels of snowfall in the North Thompson Valley ensure guests enjoy prime conditions until very late in the season. Heli-skiing season here normally runs from December until the end of April, and occasionally into May. The Powder 101 course is not for novice skiers. It's designed for strong intermediate skiers who are ready to make the transition to deep snow skiing. Each new group consists of up to 10 skiers. CMH trips start and end in Calgary, from where guests are transported by bus and helicopter to the company's lodges. For more information, go to www.canadianmountainholidays.com or tel. 800-661-0252.

TIFFANY & CO. ATLAS CHRONOGRAPH, \$19,800

In case you thought Tiffany & Co. was all about diamond baubles and Audrey Hepburn wannabes, consider the Atlas Chronograph your education. In 18k rose gold with a brown dial, brown alligator strap and fold-over clasp, this 42 mm Swiss-made beauty happens to be blessed with brains, too, in the form of ultra-reliable mechanical movement with automatic winding. There's no need to be overly precious with this investment, since it's water-resistant to 100 metres and the strap will only get better-looking with sun, sand and age.



BREITLING CHRONOMAT 44 GMT, \$9,240

With its new Chronomat 44 GMT, Breitling has scaled down its classic traveller's watch to a slimmer 44 mm diameter, making it an ideal option for trim wrists — or anyone who appreciates a svelte makeover story. Chronometer-certified by the COSC (Swiss Official Chronometer Testing Institute), this model boasts a rotating bezel with a 24-hour third time zone reading, so you can set the time and date of your intended destination while keeping track of all the meetings you're happily missing back at the office. It's also user-friendly: just pulling out the crown and turning forwards or backwards will set the watch to island time without losing any precision in tracking minutes, which could be useful after a margarita or six.



By Gabrielle Johnson

time travellers

Wow factor watches help you travel with style

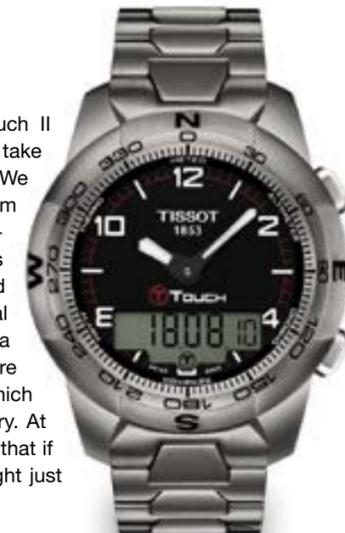
When the whole point of a vacation is to get away from it all, the last thing you want to worry about is keeping an eye on the clock. But there are surfing lessons to take. Dinner reservations to make. Trains to board. Puddle jumpers to fly. As much as you'd like to believe it's possible, time can't be ignored altogether.

What you need is the perfect travel watch. Forget the flashy designer arm-party accessories that stop working at the first sniff of saltwater. Vacation-worthy watches are well built, functional and come equipped with features as practical as they are impressive. Did we mention they've got to look good, too?

We rounded up four of the best so that all you need to focus on is booking that private villa. And with timepieces this stylish, you'll wear those tan lines on your wrist with pride.

TISSOT T TOUCH II, \$1,095

Gadget freaks, rejoice. Tissot's T Touch II might just nudge out the iPhone 5 to take pride of place in your nerdy heart. We won't go into detail about the titanium case and bracelet, or the scratch-resistant sapphire crystal. This baby's appeal lies in its 13 touch-activated digital functions, which include dual time zones, a compass, an altimeter, a thermometer, a barometric pressure reader and a hibernation mode, which lengthens the life of its five-year battery. At only 115g, it's also lightweight enough that if it weren't so incredibly handy, you might just forget you had it on.



VICTORINOX SWISS ARMY DIVE MASTER 500 MECHANICAL, \$1,250

There's nothing wrong with lounging poolside and working on your tan — if you happen to be a 12-year-old girl. When you're ready to man up and conquer uncharted waters, strap on the Dive Master 500 from Victorinox Swiss Army and get ready to rumble with those ocean waves. We love its deep-set bold red dial, flat gunmetal bezel wall and matching red high-grade rubber strap, but this sporty watch is so much more than a pretty face. Water resistant up to 500 metres, it also features luminous hands and markers, a rotating bezel and a 42-hour power reserve, so it'll keep on ticking while you're out there meeting mermaids.

