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GOING TO EXTREMES

Adrenalin junkies with a taste for luxury are spoilt for choice, writes **Tessa Chan**.



JADED FIVE-STAR travellers will be glad to hear there's another side to luxury travel; one that delivers all the adrenaline rush of adventure travel, while conveniently bypassing the blisters, risks and discomforts along the way.

Take heli-skiing; an increasingly popular sport amongst the rich and intrepid. It offers access to untouched slopes, without the need for a ski lift, an uphill trek, or in-depth knowledge of the areas. "For heli-skiing and heli-trekking, we helicopter into remote sites, and offer fine European sheets, down pillows, feather duvets, Moulton Brown toiletries, bathrobes and slippers, fine French wines, personal chefs, masseuses and personal photographers to document it all," says Catherine Heald, co-founder of Remote Lands (remotelands.com), which offers offer extravagant adventure itineraries, ranging from skydiving Mount Everest to Komodo Safaris in Indonesia. "It sounds over the top, but we do this for adventurous billionaire clients, who want to go to very remote locations without giving up their creature comforts."

Elemental Adventure (www.eaheliskiing.com) also offers exclusive heli-skiing holidays in British Columbia, Canada, known for its majestic mountain ranges, abundant dry powder snow and sunshine. With a private helicopter and mountain guide at their disposal, skiers or snowboarders of all levels can enjoy 336,000 hectares of heli-ski terrain at their own pace, whisking through towering trees, wide open bowls and massive glacial runs, before stopping for a gourmet mountain picnic lunch prepared by their private chef.

Uma Paro (www.uma.como.bz), a stylish retreat in the Kingdom of Bhutan, gives guests the opportunity to experience high-altitude freewheeling in the Himalayas. Except that instead of having to tackle the arduous ascent on foot, they are dropped off at the top of Chele La; Bhutan's highest road pass at 4,000 metres, snaking through blue pines and rhododendrons. After taking in the sweeping views of the sacred Mt Jhomolhari and the unspoilt Haa valley, they ramble downhill to an ancient nunnery, described by Uma Paro as "as far off the beaten path as you can get". Then it's time to saddle up on a mountain bike and embark on an intoxicating 35-kilometre freewheel descent all the way to Paro Valley. After crossing the Paro Chhu river, a car or horseback ride takes guests back to the

retreat, where a private two-bedroom villa with panoramic views of the valley awaits them. The villa comes with a personal butler to attend to any needs, and has a spacious living area, private spa treatment area, an outdoor hot bathtub and a courtyard with a fire pit.

Luxury travel specialists Quintessentially Escape (www.quintessentiallyescape.com) offers a variety of what it calls "once in a lifetime" lavish experiences, that range from rubbing shoulders with Masai tribes and visiting mountain gorillas in Kenya to a high-octane *Day of the Jackal*-type experience in Britain (which apparently involves learning the skills of assault combat and taking part in a full-scale Special Forces operation). Its White Desert escape offers an exclusive, hardship-free experience in Antarctica. Guests are flown across the Southern Ocean to a special ice runway in the Arctic Circle, where a designer ecological camp awaits. Aside from absorbing the infinite landscape of glaciers, mountains and arctic wildlife, guests can engage in activities such as abseiling down ice cliffs into crevasses, kite-skiing, picnicking on a mountain cliff overlooking Antarctica and visits to Emperor penguin colonies.

For those looking for a different kind of adventure, **Urbane Nomads** (www.urbanenomads.com) offers what it calls the "most luxurious trip in the world": a horseback falconry trip to Mongolia, recreating the lavish hunting expeditions of Kublai Khan. Travellers are led through the western part of Mongolia by an award-winning filmmaker, local guides and eagle hunters of Bayan-Olgii. As they try their hand at falconry their experience will be captured in an oil painting by a famous painter (whose patrons include Queen Elizabeth II, the president of the UAE and members of the Gulf royalty).

Throughout the journey, guests are accompanied by a private chef and butler, and stay in private *gers*, which deliver a new and luxurious take on the nomadic experience. Designed for minimum environmental impact, the movable *gers* include a separate one that serves as a library and business centre, a dining *ger* and another offering "in-*ger*" spa treatments.

If there's one thing that luxury adventure travel specialists have in common, it's that they pride themselves on offering bespoke experiences, tailored to the whim of every client. The possibilities are only as limited as your imagination ... and budget. **S**