



Travel | Culture | Adventure

Escape

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR



EARLY RISERS

Slope off to new heights in our ski special

Heaven and HELI

Icelandic heli-skiing, then champers, hot springs and Northern Lights will leave you buzzing, says **Abi Butcher**

ET'S buzz the farm, shall we?' shouts Alan with a mischievous grin, providing just enough warning for me to hold on to my hat before our pilot, Gabe, dips our helicopter. It banks so close to the lodge that I can see

people through the windows. The manoeuvre simultaneously makes my stomach lurch and red-lines the fun-o-meter. Flying in a helicopter never grows old and today has been particularly

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TRY NOT TO Rub it in

IN ASSOCIATION WITH BRITISH AIRWAYS

There's nothing quite like posting an envy-inducing picture of your travels online, so here are the most jaw-dropping spots to snap in some of Europe's best cities...

VENICE

Begin your tour of this beautiful city with the Grand Canal. Lined with colourful houses, this strip is an iconic scene and a must-see while you're staying. From here, head west to the famous Rialto Bridge, the oldest along the entire canal. Get a few snaps from the canal bank, then wander across it and visit its boutique shops. Finally, make your way to the grand St. Mark's Basilica for that winning holiday picture.

Flights + 2 nights hotel from £99pp



The incredible colours of Venice's Grand Canal will astound you



The jaw-dropping Basilica de la Sagrada Familia is a must-snap on your visit

BARCELONA

Steer away from the crowds and dive in to the breathtaking Barri Gòtic, or Gothic Quarter, bursting with architectural wonders and history. If you can pull yourself away, go south to photograph the weird and wonderful Parc Güell, a UNESCO World Heritage Site boasting Antoni Gaudi's surrealist and colourful creations. Round-off your tour with Barcelona's most famous building, the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia, a sight that's guaranteed to leave a long-lasting impression.

Flights + 2 nights hotel from £109pp

BUDAPEST

Make your first stop in Budapest the stunning Castle Hill of the Danube to capture some amazing views across the city. Just across the water is the parliament building, which is surrounded by winding cobbled streets and home to the Hungarian Crown Jewels. If you're not too entranced by these treasures, walk down the river bank to see the shoe sculptures, a touching and memorable tribute.

Flights + 2 nights hotel from £99pp



Hungary's parliament building is both imposing and impressive

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Shin-deep: Abi Butcher, left, didn't see a single soul all day while heli-skiing in the Troll Peninsula, northern Iceland

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special. Gabe, appropriately, is short for Gabriel and this man is indeed some kind of angel. Better-looking than any James Bond and dressed in a black jumpsuit, he has piloted the shiny black A-Star chopper that's flown me, mountain guides Alan Bernholtz and Steve Banks, and another skiing guest around the Troll Peninsula in northern Iceland all day.

I'm in Iceland with Eleven Experience, a US-based adventure travel company that has recently opened Deplar Farm, a former sheep holding in the Fliot Valley

I found myself eating supper dressed in a psychedelic onesie and curly orange wig

that has been refurbished to the height of luxury.

Eleven is named after the phrase 'turning it up to 11' from the film *This Is Spinal Tap* and the company has succeeded in spades. Skiing here is more or less limited to ski touring or heli-skiing and we haven't seen another soul today. We've simply experienced drop after drop after drop, skiing pitch after gentle pitch – nothing over 40 degrees and all of it in shin-deep, soft, light powder.

In a good year it's possible to ski from summit to sea but last spring the snow was thin in Iceland so we've had to stop a few hundred metres short of the



Serene skiing

See the light: Guests enjoy superb views and a private chef's dishes at Deplar Farm



beach, where snow turns to yellowy-green moss. But this so-called lack of snow hasn't stopped our enjoyment – we've had ten

drops (to put this in perspective my only previous heli-skiing experience involved one drop, in Italy, in very dodgy conditions) followed by champagne and charcuterie in the sunshine.

On arrival at Deplar Farm, Eleven's managers have all your kit – including boot covers, a fleece-lined waterproof onesie, hats and water bottles – waiting in your locker.

I am skiing mad and with a helicopter at our disposal I want to ski for the whole three days but a snowstorm grounds us for two. Instead we 'make do' with taking snowmobiles around the valley, riding Icelandic ponies and visiting the town of Siglufjörður to see a fishing museum and brewery. I also hit the state-of-the-art gym to work off a bit of frustration.

Smith The Roll Pack 15L
£90, snowandrock.com

GEAR UP FOR THE BIG TRIP

RUTH GAUKRODGER FINDS THE BEST KIT FOR THE SEASON

Angie snowboard and ski helmet
£95, roxy-uk.com

Men's spring break pant
£119.95, planksclothing.com

Suunto traverse amber wristwatch
£260, hsjohnson.com



Eleven-plus: A helicopter 'drop' is a big thrill for skiers who travel with Eleven Experience in Iceland

CHEAP AND CHEERFUL HELI-SKIING

Heli-ski in reverse

Instead of jumping out of a helicopter, you can use Tignes' lifts to reach the summit, go off the beaten track and then get a ride back from your remote location at the end of the day. This keeps prices low and ensures that chopper experience. **£134 for half day with guide, valheliski.com**

Wild Italy

A short break helps keep heli-skiing costs down. In the charming Alagna resort, there are 30 drop points, the most in Europe. A four-night break with one day's heli-skiing, ski pass and three days of off-piste touring costs £1,485. Alagna is within easy reach of Milan's airports. **heliski.co.uk**

Silverton, Colorado

Silverton, in Colorado, is the United States' equivalent of France's La Grave – an off-piste mecca. It is usually on every adventurous skier's bucket list. Silverton Mountain, the heli-ski specialist, offers one drop for £161. **silvertonmountain.com**

for high-flyers

Being grounded means I have plenty of time to scoff private chef Jonas Oddur Bjornsson's dishes, from red beets with tenderloin, to lamb with fennel. Guests spend much, if not all, of their time at Deplar Farm, where most of the staff are local, so they can experience a bit of culture too. The lodge's manager, Birgir Stefánsson, is a former fisherman and he regales us with tales of a different life.

Back to that helicopter landing: once we touch down back at base after the fly-by, it's time for pre-dinner drinks in the Eleven bar. Here, there's a full set of instruments (should you fancy an impromptu jamming session), table football, a pool table and a large open fire. There's also a fancy-dress box.

And so I find myself eating supper dressed in 1970s-style psychedelic flared onesie and curly orange wig.

Just as we are finishing our desserts, Birgir announces that the Northern Lights are putting on a spectacular show, so in fine Eleven tradition we all disperse to our rooms, quickly change into bathers and reconvene in the spa's outdoor pool – heated by thermal springs that run beneath the farm.

I finish my day by lying back in the hot water, sipping champagne and watching the Northern Lights. Heli-skiing is an expensive pastime but ten heli drops a day, unlimited champagne and the Eleven Experience make it a once-in-a-lifetime bargain.

From £1,915 per room per night, based on two sharing, includes guide service, activities kit, all meals, alcohol, minibar, and transfers. Heli-skiing £2,120, per person per day (four days minimum). elevenexperience.com



Prophecy OTG goggles
£95, smithoptics.com

Tuktu sweater
£205, perfectmoment.com

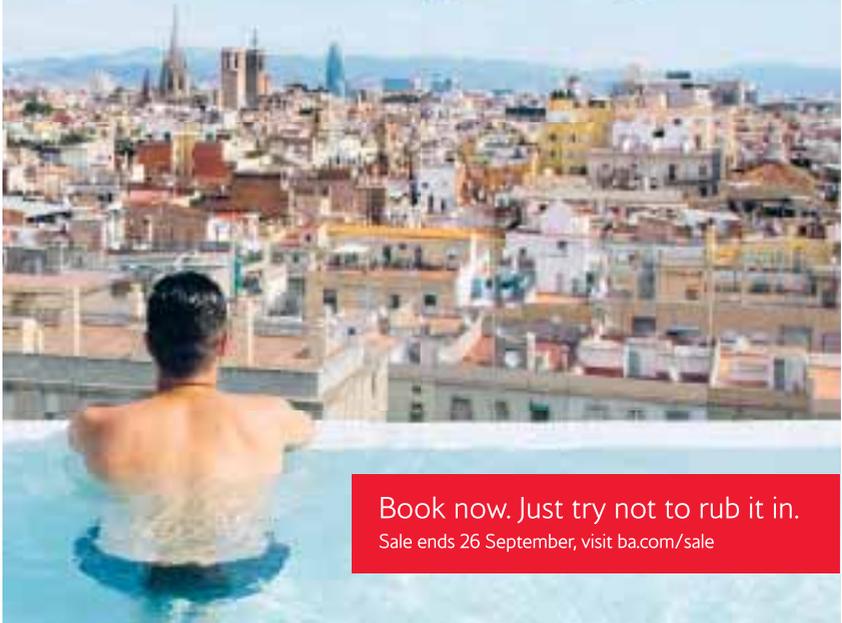
Alpha 3.0 jacket
£380, hellyhansen.com

Women's Out N About rain boot
£100, sorelfootwear.com



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"I probably won't get to see much of the city, though."



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Availability may be extremely limited, particularly during peak periods. Holiday prices include taxes, fees and carrier charges, correct as of 22 August 2017. Prices include return economy flights from London Heathrow to Nice, Venice, Prague or Barcelona and are based on two adults sharing accommodation in a minimum 3-star hotel on a minimum room only basis for selected travel dates between 1 November 2017 and 28 February 2018. Flight and hotel must be booked together as 'flight + hotel'. Cars or hotels added to flights after a flight has been selected will not be eligible. Sale prices discounted from lowest price available in the 29 days before 30 August 2017. Bookings must be made by 23:59 GMT 26 September 2017. Other Sale fares are available to book for selected dates for travel between 31 August 2017 and 30 June 2018. Minimum stay periods may apply. Some destinations may require bookings to be made up to a minimum of 28 days before the date of outbound departure. Bookings are non-refundable. Some payment methods may attract a handling fee. Holidays are ATOL protected by the British Airways Holidays number ATOL5985. For the sale destinations, eligible travel dates and full terms and conditions visit ba.com/sale. Cannot be used with any other promotion. Full terms and conditions apply. For changes and refunds additional fees may apply, visit ba.com/sale for full terms and conditions.

