

# HOT + COLD THERAPY



Indulging in **hot-spring** bubbles and **cold-smoke** on a Kootenay ski trip comes hangover free. (But don't forget the **Ibuprofen**.)

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As my husband approached 40, I found myself screening for the symptoms of mid-life crisis. Especially when he started to talk about buying a Porsche. It was clear I needed to do something to distinguish the moment, switch off the autopilot light, arrest a potential slide into melancholy. But champagne and cigars were not going to cut it. We needed shock therapy.

For a skier, a perfect day is as easy to define as it is difficult to attain: a mountain to oneself. Great snow conditions. Food that is so good that conversation falls off as plates are laid before you. The view of moon-rise over mountains from the steam and churn of an outdoor hot-tub.

There was only one place for it: we headed for the Powder Highway in the heart of the Kootenays. The Kootenay Rockies region is the birthplace of heliskiing and cat-skiing. The terrain and its legendary “blower” champagne snow conditions have attracted more than 50 cat, heliskiing, resort and backcountry lodge operations, all concentrating in a south-eastern corner of British Columbia, where the Purcell Mountains, the Selkirks, the Monashees and the Valhallas drain down into the Columbia River Valley.

Unlike the mega-operators, who can cater to 120 guests at a time, Snowwater Heliskiing is one of the region’s boutique operators, a cluster of timber-frame cabins with radiant in-floor heat, wood stoves, micro-hydro and generator power that accommodates 12 guests at a time, perched at 5,200 feet on a west facing slope in the Selkirks.

Owner-operator Patric Maloney is a bon vivant, the incarnation of his latest idea for a TV show: how to live like a millionaire without being one. He welcomes guests to the lodge with hot towels, champagne and the look of a man who has found his place in the world, in a kingdom he’s built by hand, that allows him to indulge his own champagne tastes, and stock the place with big-boy toys: Patron, fine wine, a personal chef, dynamite, snowmobiles, a bio-diesel fuelled snowcat (that serves as back-up for bad-weather days) and an A-star helicopter.

The A-star’s 700 horsepower jet engine is our ticket to living like a millionaire. We are free of the frenzy one feels on a powder day in a ski resort, to get to the best terrain before it’s tracked out by the masses. It’s just three of us and a guide. Our legs will give out before the powder does. We ski 30 minute laps. The helicopter picks us up at the bottom like a chauffeur, turbo-boosting us up for another run so quickly the lactic acid doesn’t get a chance to disperse. After nine runs of roughly 1000 vertical feet each, my husband pronounces himself cured of his life-long powder-chase: “I could never ski again.”

It’s only temporary. The addiction surges, and we rally. Our approach is holistic: we’re targeting midlife malaise from every angle. After all, variety is the spice of life.

Snow-lovers joke that catskiing is a poor man’s heliskiing, but it feels more like the alternative for social democrats, with less of the alpha-aggression and rush-rush-rush that can mark the heli-experience.

Catskiing is an inherently social experience, and 12 is the magic number. If you book your own cat, you can even control the chemistry. We’re lucky to slide in to a group that is so full of chemistry, they’re practically a periodic table. They call themselves the Powder Pachyderms: “We might be fat, but we still give’r,” and the jokes come fast and furious, giving laughing muscles as good a workout as the legs get.

As the beast lurches up improbable roads through a tenure that is over 21,000 acres, group members chat, joke, and pass around containers of home-made sandwiches, cookies, snacks. “This doesn’t suck,” someone announces and we share out the one-bite brownies and donut holes. The tailguide, riding the bench seat, probes through the other lunch treats. “Anyone want any vegetable sticks?” There are no takers. Skiing 15,000 vertical feet of untracked snow is heart-friendly enough.

The hang-over comes the next day—a localized sensation in the thighs that insists: get me to the hot springs. We lower ourselves into 42 degree natural mineral baths, surrendering to an age-old remedy for joint pain, muscle fatigue, high blood pressure, circulatory and digestive issues. Whether it can cure a mid-life crisis is yet to be determined.

But if, as the deep ecologist Dolores LaChapelle claimed, the essence of life can be found in deep-snow turns, it’s better to turn forty eating pow than birthday cake.

As LaChappelle wrote in her classic *Earth Wisdom*: “One can never be bored by powder skiing because it is a special gift of the relationship between earth and sky. It only comes in sufficient amounts in particular places, at certain times on this earth; it lasts only a limited amount of time before sun or wind changes it. People devote their lives to it ‘for the pleasure of being so purely played’ by gravity and snow.” Everything passes. Skiing powder makes that ephemerality a cause for celebration, rather than regret.

In the end, my husband bought the Porsche as well. But that’s a whole other story. ●

if you go

**SNOWWATER’S KOOTENAY SAMPLER** takes all the elements of your dream ski trip and super-sizes them into a seven-day package: cat, heli (with unlimited vert and back-up cat-skiing in case of no-fly weather), and resort skiing, exquisite food, funky towns to explore, and a good balance of free time, natural mineral hot springs, champagne snow. [snowwater.com](http://snowwater.com)

Valhalla is the old Norse for “the hall of the slain,” or warrior’s heaven... luckily, skiers don’t need to wait until they die to taste the pleasures of the Selkirk’s Valhalla range. **VALHALLA POWDERCATS** offer single day, multi-day and Powder Safari packages, as well as the group option of booking your own cat. [valhallapow.com](http://valhallapow.com)

The **AINSWORTH HOT-SPRINGS** attract worked-over snow-tourists and grey-haired, slow-gaited locals in equal numbers, drawn to the restorative powers of the natural hot springs and the high mineral content of the water. [hotnaturally.com](http://hotnaturally.com)

**NELSON, BC**, is a funky interior town, population 10,000, full of hip-pies, artists, green-thumbs and counterculture types. And, for some reason, great chefs. Nelson is a town worth experiencing through your belly. Oso Negro coffee and incredible baking. Grab breakfast at the Red Fish Grill for the world’s best hash browns. Stay at the Prestige Hotel on Kootenay Lake. [discovernelson.com](http://discovernelson.com); [prestigehotelsandresorts.com](http://prestigehotelsandresorts.com)

