

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

HAVE PRIVATE CONCIERGE – WILL GUIDE
TO UNIQUE WHISTLER HOLIDAY OF YOUR CHOOSING



As the helicopter set down on the snowfields above Whistler, Heidi Klum had no idea what was in store for her. Her boyfriend, international recording artist, Seal had been very mysterious, giving her no hint about why he had brought her there. But, when he took her hand and led her down a red carpet into a glacial-blue ice cave, she knew this was likely to be a day to remember – even for a supermodel for Sports Illustrated and Victoria's Secret.

No one but Heidi and Seal will ever know what exactly transpired in that mountain ice cave. All we can be certain about is that when they entered, they discovered a romantic, candle-lit hideaway strewn with rose petals and red carnations, and that when they emerged, they were engaged to be married. The story was a “celebrity explosion heard round the world.”

“Seal knew the kind of atmosphere he wanted to create for making his proposal,” says Ben Thomas, partner with Matt Ball in VIP Mountain Holidays. “We simply offered him some options he hadn't thought were possible, and then helped him make his vision a reality.”

In a real sense, this statement sums up pretty well what this unique Whistler-based company is all about: providing a personalized, hassle-free, private concierge and guiding service whose sole goal is to help guests experience the truly unforgettable Whistler holiday of their own choosing. Enthusiastic word of mouth recommendations have enabled VIP Mountain Holidays to build the reputation that today not only attracts celebrities and entertainment personalities, corporate executives and even Russian oligarchs, but everyday families from around the world who are looking to experience the winter vacation of a lifetime.

In hindsight, Matt and Ben's partnership in this legendary

Whistler venture now seems inevitable. The two grew up “almost as brothers”, when their families shared the same house in Ottawa. After graduating from the University of Western Ontario, Matt headed west to teach snowboarding in Whistler, while Ben crossed the Atlantic to England to work for ScotiaBank. Naturally, when Ben decided to take a six-month break to ski Europe before returning to Canada to do his MBA, he invited Matt along. The two soon found themselves in Courchevel in the French Alps working for a ski concierge service. The inspiration for VIP Mountain Holidays was born when guest after guest, upon discovering the boys were Canadian, expressed their desire to one day ski in British Columbia's “Super, Natural” mountains. Taking courage to hand, Matt and Ben moved to Whistler in April of 1999 to start their new business.

“We had high hopes and an initial list of 200 potential clients. Unfortunately, our first mailing netted us only one booked vacation. But what the heck,” remembers Matt, “one booking was better than none, and on the strength of that first guest we resolved to push ahead. With very few resources we build our first web site just when the internet was beginning to take off. We've never looked back since. I'm please to report that the guest who gave us our first booking has since been back twice, and has become one of our good friends.”

Today, with three fulltime and one seasonal guide, VIP Mountain Holidays provides a total, tailor-made personalized concierge service, fully managing logistics to craft unique Whistler vacations for their guests. Matching accommodations to guests' requirements' be they for hotel suites, bed and breakfasts, town houses and condos or private luxury homes' is just the beginning. Guests decide what

Guests decide what level of attention they desire and VIP is there to serve them as they wish: from providing transportation to arranging for lift tickets and sliding lessons, from buying the groceries and making sure the wine bar is fully stocked to recommending restaurants and night spots, from facilitating day excursions to creating unique adventure experiences.

“Our goal is to make sure every holiday is as relaxing and hassle-free as possible,” says Ben. “For some our guests that might mean helicoptering them into the back country for a romantic picnic in the pristine high mountains. Or taking them on a guided dog-sled trip. For some it might mean organizing an après-ski cocktail or spa party at the Mushroom House. But it could just as easily mean simply taking the kids to ski school so Mom and Dad can enjoy the opportunity to sleep in as late as they wish.”

Recognizing that heli-ski excursions may often be beyond the skill level of guest families with children, or even most corporate executive parties, VIP began offering “heli-tobogganing” trips in which guides

would fly guests into safe, avalanche-controlled areas for a day of exciting sliding and picnicking that everyone could enjoy together.

Recognizing that over-nighting in an ice igloo might be appealing to the adventuresome like Heidi and Seal, but not necessarily to a family with three kids under the age of ten, VIP began building fully-equipped igloos in the backyards of Whistler chalets so that whole families could enjoy a memorably exciting, safe and comfortable winter experience together.

Matt Ball is quick to add, “Although many of our guests are prominent people and celebrities, VIP isn’t so much about catering to an elite, as it is about being there for whatever our guests want to do, whomever they may be. We try to be flexible and open to make sure that everyone has fun. Because, the truth is, we have fun right along with them. The beauty of our job is that we start out with clients, but always end up with our guests becoming friends....friends who, through their positive experiences, come to trust us and who come back to vacation with us again and again.”

Given that the best description of VIP Mountain Holidays’ service may very well be that “No is not an option”, we asked Ben Thomas if there were one thing he was just itching for a guest to request. He replied, “I’ve always wanted to offer the “ultimate Whistler ski-in vacation”, where we would pick up our guests at Vancouver International and helicopter them right to the top of the mountain so they could ski down to the door of their chalet where the fire would be on and the champagne would be chilling. If there’s anyone who wants that experience – all we need is your boot size to make it happen.”

Incidentally, that MBA that Ben was planning to return to Canada to complete – he tells us it’s still on hold. Can you blame him?

For more information about VIP Mountain Holidays, visit www.vipmountainholidays.com. Anyone who would like to have their home considered for inclusion in VIP’s Accommodation Inventory, should call Matt or Ben at (604) 935-1VIP or send an email to service@vipmountainholidays.com.

students. This will insure the maintenance of a 10:1 student-teacher ratio, whereas, the national average ratio at most Canadian universities is in the 30:1 range. The teaching staff (called tutors) has been handpicked from hundreds of applicants from blue ribbon institutions of higher learning such as UBC, Columbia and MIT.

It has long been Dr. Strangway’s conviction that “people are becoming excessively specialized too early in their careers and their lives.” What characterizes Quest’s approach to learning, therefore, is a general arts and sciences curriculum that focuses not on specific disciplines, but how those disciplines interact and mesh in the world at large. As the University describes its academic program, “Interdisciplinary learning is the best preparation for today’s rapidly changing world.”

Around a core of 16 mandatory foundation courses, the Block program of Quest’s integrated curriculum will be divided each year into three terms consisting of four blocks per term, with 32 blocks required for graduation. Rather than taking multiple semester-long courses, Quest students will concentrate, without distraction, on one course at a time for a period of three and a half weeks. “General areas of specialization” will include imagination and expression; self, community and the world; life and the natural environment; and science, technology and societies, reflecting the more traditional

disciplinary clusters of the arts and humanities, the social sciences, the life sciences, and the physical sciences. At the end of four years of study, successful Quest undergraduates will be granted a Bachelor of Liberal Arts & Sciences degree, that will meet the standard recognized by universities around the world for acceptance into graduate and professional programs.

Quest University Canada’s network of eighteen “founding partner” universities, including the University of London in the United Kingdom, Colorado College in the USA, the University of Hong Kong, and Siam University in Thailand, further support the credibility of its degree. These international universities will offer exchange programs to Quest students, and each year will send academic council members to Quest to offer critical advice and to assist in continual improvement of its programs.

Combined tuition, residence (room and board) fees and textbooks for each Quest undergraduate will cost in the neighbourhood of \$36,000 per year; high by Canadian standards, but considerably less than comparable US schools, such as Williams College of Williamstown, Massachusetts, which is consistently ranked as one of the top liberal arts colleges in America.

Based on the economic impact of construction alone, Quest University Canada is already having a

significant effect on the community of Squamish. Having another post-secondary institution in addition to Capilano College will certainly give more students the opportunity to study close to home. But what the impact of Quest will have on the quality of life in Squamish is more difficult to gauge. By way of a measure, I offer a personal anecdote.

In 1939, my father went overseas with the Royal Military Corp of the Canadian Army, leaving a small Ontario agricultural community that could boast little in the way of cultural amenities. After six years of service in England and the Netherlands, where every little village benefits from having at least one bookstore, he returned to Canada convinced that a town that could not support the intellectual and cultural aspirations of its young people was truly impoverished. He remained frustrated by the limitations of his and my hometown well beyond the day twenty years later when a secondhand bookstore finally opened its doors.

If we grant that my father was even partly correct in his belief about what creates enduring value in a community, we can only imagine the effect the opening of Quest University Canada – with its injection of youth, vitality, optimism and unbounded energy – will have on the quality of life up and down the Sea to Sky corridor.

Were I a betting man, I would say that future looks very bright indeed.