



It was called the Snow Ferrets Tour 05-06. Mission: to spend Snow Ferret number one's 140,000 Canadian dollars in ten days. Location: Whistler, Vancouver. Tour operator: Vipmountainholidays.com...



Background info: There are six Snow Ferrets. Four had been on the recent trip to Ischgl in Austria which you may have read in my column last month. Snow Ferret number one, who was paying for the whole trip, had transferred £75,000 into VIP Mountain Holiday's account. The rest of us were blissfully in the dark as to what to expect. Lucky for me, really, as I only had seven pounds on me.

We were greeted by Ben who was our organiser from VIP. Our transport was a Ford F650 stretch pick-up with a trailer on the back for luggage. It was 52ft long and apparently it was the longest limo in Canada; I had to get on someone's shoulders to get into it! Once inside, I was confronted by neon lights, plasma screens and bottles of champagne. My heart rate was picking up.

Ben ceremoniously pulled out a laptop and connected it to a screen. He grabbed our attention. We watched a short film in which our criterion was presented. We were staying in a twelve million dollar house that had several bedrooms. We had a private chef at our beck and call. After each days activities on our return to the house we would have girls waiting to massage us. One of the days we had a ski run sectioned off for an afternoon where we would race each other. We had an igloo built especially for us in the mountains. We had parties, snowmobile races and helicopter trips lined up. We had VIP areas booked in all the clubs. At this point I double-checked to see if I had seven pounds still... yes, I did.

Ben then explained that we were leaving Whistler a day early to drive back to Vancouver and stay in a top hotel for an exclusive party. Included was a private box for the upcoming hockey match between the Vancouver Canucks and the Calgary Flames. Ben went on to say that they had hired an exclusive lodge that was isolated in the mountains. He and members of his company had been hand-picking guests for the trip and giving them invites which revealed they would be picked up by snowmobiles and taken into the mountains to spend the night partying with us before being brought back by helicopter the following afternoon. At this point, I triple checked my pockets. To my dismay, I found a hole which had filtered away two of my pound coins... I was left with five. Oh dear! I was completely in Snow Ferret number one's hands!

As we pulled up to the house and walked in we were so impressed that there was a lot of back slapping and cheering for Snow Ferret number one. Another nice touch was being greeted by six Jagermeister bombs lined up on top of the stairs. On walking around we discovered the vast garage had been interior designed with velvet drapes. There were three poker tables fitted for a mini tournament later in the week...lovely.



Vancouver is the largest city in the province of British Columbia and the third largest city in Canada. It is a ten hour flight from London and the time difference is eight hours behind. It's surrounded by water on three sides and is nestled alongside the Coast Mountain Range. Vancouver is home to spectacular natural scenery and a bustling metropolitan core, and boasts one of the mildest climates in Canada.

The resort of Whistler/Blackcomb is 72 miles from Vancouver and has about 10,000 residents. It is basically two spectacular mountains, Whistler and Blackcomb, which have 8000 acres for skiing. It boasts the greatest vertical and largest above tree line terrain in North America. It will joint host with Vancouver the 2010 Winter Olympics.



Comparing it to European resorts it's worth noting that there is a stronger emphasis on safety in Canada; they employ more ski patrols on the slopes. The geography is somewhat different as well. The mountains are more sweeping and less jagged. I also found that the chair lifts were faster.

It got me thinking. This could be a good opportunity to start snowboarding. All the Ferrets were boarders apart from one other and I thought it looked cool. The first day was so bad I had to borrow a helmet. The second day was the race.



As I mentioned before we had the top half of the old Olympic men's downhill sectioned off so the Ferrets could make fools of themselves. I had one day's experience and I was as good as Eddie the Eagle on a skateboard. There were five reps with walkie talkies at the top with another at the bottom. The idea was to pair us off and race and then all the times were monitored. There were gates to negotiate and it was very steep. As the reps were preparing for the next race I was thinking of all those Ski Sunday moments. I could hear the cowbells and the chants of Oi, Yoi, Yoi... I had visions of skiing greats like Franz Klammer and Alberto Tomba. The rep motioned to us to manoeuvre to the starting line and we stood there balanced over the precipice. My number five race vest was noted, my helmet was on, the goggles were lowered..... 3, 2, 1, go! We took off, collided, fell over and took out the first gate. I continued sliding on my back taking out the next three gates... I couldn't see a thing as I picked up speed tumbling down the piste like a small child in a washing machine. I had acquired so much snow that the race had to be abandoned. In one fell swoop I had 'smashed the place up'.



But for me, the highlight of the trip was racing around in the mountains on the snowmobiles. These are big machines and capable of hitting 100 kmph. You steer them using handlebars and by throwing your weight from one side to the other. In fact, when you start losing it you try and steer with your jaw! If you have never been on one I would recommend it, it's fantastic. It's the fastest you'll ever get to go on snow!