

travel



Heli-skiers in Turkey's Kaçkar mountains can expect to be set down in remote areas, ski to their hearts' content and then be air-lifted to a new location for yet another adventure. George Robbi for The National

The rotary club

Being dropped from a helicopter on the snow-covered slopes of Turkey's Kaçkar mountain range and heading downhill at speeds of up to 40kph under the constant threat of avalanche is [Geoffrey Riddle's](#) idea of a wonderful time

I could barely move. I didn't know if it was through the nervous fear that expectation had built up within me, or whether it was because I had just stepped out of a helicopter and found myself up to my hips in light powder snow. The whirring and chopping of the rotary propellers filled the air as my guide unloaded the skis. He gave the pilot the thumbs up, and as the big bird pulled up and roared away the icy downblast threw snow everywhere. It seemed to block out the sun, it filled up my goggles and a sizeable proportion of it went down the back of my ski jacket.

And then, quiet. Stillness. I looked around me and the three Swiss skiers in my group huddled beside me were similarly covered in a heavy dusting. Our guide, however, had avoided the fallout and calmly set about pointing out some

of the scenery that I had ignored over the last few minutes.

"If you look over there you can see the Caucasus," said Basul, who was sporting a typical ski-instructor perma-tan despite this being the first week of the heli-ski season in Turkey. "If you look really closely, you can see Mount Elbrus. It's beautiful here, no?"

Set beyond this traditional alpine setting of jagged peaks and pine trees was the shimmering Black Sea, and in the distance did indeed lie Mount Elbrus, Europe's highest peak, 256km away.

The sightseeing was quickly over though, and Urs Angst, a financier from Zurich, was hard-pressed to take his photograph of the scenery. "Be careful Urs," said Basul, "the chopper is returning, we need to get out of the way."

I quickly went through my routine. Set

skis out. Check. Clean snow off boots. Check. Clip in. Check. Plug in ABS air-bag backpack, so that if I am caught in an avalanche I might float on top of it if I remember to pull the cord. Um, check.

"OK," said Basul. "We ski 50 metres apart. I take the middle path and you can ski around 20 metres on either side of those tracks." As only a French ski guide can, he added in the most nonchalant manner possible: "we go?"

And off he went. He sashayed down the untouched powder field in front of us as if he were walking down a Paris catwalk, cheered on by us four men, stood on top of a peak in the Kaçkar mountain range in a remote corner of the world.

Heli-skiing, continued on 4 →



Villagers in Ayder have enjoyed ideal ski conditions for years. Mario Colonel for The National

India's pink city is the perfect setting for a book festival t6