



HELICOPTER TOURING – DESTINATION
AWE ABOVE AND BEYOND

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LOOK AGAIN, LOOK UP

There it is - the sound has the ability to break silence, break through thought, and break into the deepest of conversations, without any warning. The immediate response to its instant recognition: heads turn up, eyes widen, smiles widen even more.

Helicopters. Like huge dragonflies they float high above a destination, buzzing over the raised heads of those below. With their unique design, dramatic wings cutting through the air in loud rhythmic beats, and nimble ability to dive and dodge through the sky, they remain one of the most exciting and imagination inspiring forms of transport. Travelling with sharp, sudden, almost artistic movements, these incredible works of aviation were once purely the reserve of traffic reporters, safety & security services, and the privileged lifestyles of the rich & famous.

That was then. Today, the tourism industry, an industry offering continuous inspiration when it comes to how we see our world, has become a part of this community of travellers at 1,000 feet. Across the globe, helicopter touring has established itself as one of the most sought after experiences in a destination.

Thankfully, this growth in touring supply and traveller demand has also brought pricing down to earth.

Bringing a new perspective to seeing destinations, helicopter touring brings to life the truism that regardless of how many times a person has seen a place, visited its array of locations, attractions, environments and enviable spots, leaving terra firma, one can only get the full picture when seeing the destination from the air. Whether it be:

- venturing out over Ireland's Cliffs of Moher or getting touch-close to the jagged edges of the Grand Canyon;
- soaking up the vast expanses of brilliant blue of the Great Barrier Reef or Polynesia's remote island chains;
- seeing the night lights sparkling from up above New York City, Hong Kong, Rio or Las Vegas;
- exploring the otherwise inaccessible active volcanoes of Kona as they sputter out red hot lava, or cloud cutting summits of the Alps;
- watching Mother Nature's mastery as the cherry blossoms transform Tokyo into a canvas of soft pinks and whites, the desert soils of Namaqualand bursting into a radiant array of colour as the Spring rains fall in South Africa's Northern Cape, or the plains of East Africa transform into a migrating masterpiece,;
- feeling the thundering vibrations of millions of litres of river waters cut through earth to crash down in the form of Brasil and Argentina's Iguassu Falls, Canada and the USA's Niagara Falls, or Zimbabwe and Zambia's Victoria Falls; or
- seeing the skyline rise up to the clouds as mega-projects further change the visionary, ever-changing landscape of the greater UAE or Macau;

wherever it may be, whatever may be the view, and whatever the reason for taking off, a helicopter view simply cannot be beat in intensity of beauty, or penetration of memory. Helicopter tours are deserving of their top-10 positions on *moments of a lifetime* and bucket lists.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

What is it that makes helicopter touring so special, so memorable, and so must-do?

As described by Deon Wessels, one of the pilots of Sport Helicopters in South Africa, who clearly is in love with his job,:

"It is hard to put into words how excited tourists get when they see Cape Town from up here. Everything is different. Even for me, no two trips are alike. The routes can differ, but even with the same flight path, what you see can be completely different. Today the colour of the sea is shades of blue I have never even seen before. It's because of the sunlight. If we were up a few weeks ago, we may have been able to see the whales. I love taking people up. Until you have done a helicopter tour you can never really appreciate it. It tells such a better story. Just look at this."

The ability of helicopters to travel into tucked away places and spaces where other air, sea and land vehicles simply cannot reach, to respond to routing wishes of passengers, and to open up an almost 360 degree view of the here and now is a critical part of the priceless nature of a helicopter view of a place. And, of course, there is the simply so-cool feel of the helicopter experience. Together, these have turned this niche of tourist travel into a precious gift in the sector, literally and figuratively. As the view lifts, so too do mindsets and spirits.

THE MOMENT IS ALWAYS RIGHT

Interestingly, for the helicopter touring industry, the sky is the limit when it comes to opportunities to show off a destination. While scenic tours are the traditional offering and request (often combined with other adventure / luxury experiences, ie fly/ski, fly/shark dive, fly/dine), helicopter touring showcases so much more than simply the beauty of sights – it reveals the forces of change underlying and inspiring a destination.

Helicopter touring is a sensational way for visitors, and residents, to gain a heightened understanding and appreciation for a destination as it travels through the seasons of a year, and the seasons of its lifetime.

'Now' is always perfect timing.

The changing of the natural seasons within a destination offers an array of opportunities to see a place in a different light, with different spectrum of colours, at a different stage of natural growth and development.

Springtime with its flowers and freshness, Summertime with its vivid and vibrant colours, Autumn with its red-yellow-gold-orange lead-in to bare branches and darker days, and Winter with its fifty shades of grey and white – each and every season allows one to see a destination anew.

The same can be said for the timing of major events in a destination, be they celebrations of sport, culture or other development-inspiring efforts. Sport Helicopters' Deon Wessels continues:

"During the World Cup in 2010 we had so many foreigners here and they loved seeing the new stadium from the sky. I did so many trips over the fan zone and stadium itself. There were so many visitors in Cape Town from across the world, and even across

South Africa. They all wanted to see the stadium. Today there's cricket at Newlands. There's the stadium. They have just broken for lunch, that's why you can see so many people on the field."

An unexpected source of interest and awe for passengers is often the understanding gained of the actual physical and development make-up of the destination, seeing:

- transport systems map out how train lines weave into roadways or connect to nearby ports;
- new housing, industrial and infrastructure developments stretching out as new opportunities emerge;
- historical spots of cultural, natural or political significance; and
- how mountains, seas, city skylines and open plains tame urban creep to keep all in balance.

This x-ray of the anatomy of a destination turns passenger awe into genuine understanding of how the destination truly comes together as a natural, social and economic order.

For the visionaries and engineers of destinations across the globe, when it comes to offering a world-class experience that leaves visitors with a lifelong impression, blue sky thinking is best turned into sustainable, equitable, and destination brand building impact when undertaken through the window of a helicopter.

While some tourists may question if helicopter touring is really worth it, is really safe, the technical stats and tourist smiles all yield the same result: the only risk of helicopter touring for travellers? Missing out.

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