

PLAY SMART: STAY SAFE IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

# SKI

2022  
GEAR  
PREVIEW

## INDEPENDENT STREAK

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*Moves to Extend Your Season*

### **Share Winter Foundation**

*Getting 'Generation Next' on Snow*

### **Bluebird Backcountry**

*Colorado's Newest Un-Resort*





## Dial It to Eleven

ELEVEN EXPERIENCE'S NEW RIO PALENA LODGE IN THE HEART OF CHILEAN PATAGONIA AIMS TO OUTDO YOUR BUCKET LIST.

By Crystal Sagan

"Have you ever seen the movie 'This is Spinal Tap?' Where they turn their amps to 11?" asks Alan, our ski guide. "They dial it up a notch to take it to the next level. That's what we're doing here at Eleven Experience, we take everything to the next level." He's not wrong—in all my years of traveling to ski in amazing places, I've never experienced anything like the Rio Palena Lodge.

Opened in late 2019, the lodge is located in Chilean Patagonia on the banks of Rio Palena, a three-hour drive from the nearest commercial airport in Chaitén. Surrounded by lush greenery, it feels secluded and far from anywhere. Especially after taking four flights to get there. I'm tired, hungry, and less-than-fresh as I walk in the door of an über-luxurious yet cozy and unpretentious lodge in the middle of nowhere. But then we're greeted with hugs (this was back when hugging strangers was still a thing) by a small team composed of what you might think are long-lost relatives, and I'm handed a Pisco Sour as the Grateful Dead plays from hidden speakers in the background. The experience is completely surreal.

Eleven's ski guides butter Chilean spring corn on a high alpine descent with views of the Rio Palena river valley below.

The next day we boot up for heli-skiing in the jungle in 80-degree heat. We load into an A-Star and head up over the mountains just on the other side of the river to discover amazing terrain—tall pillars of rock reaching skyward, with the rich green of the Patagonian jungle forming the backdrop in the distance. The terrain here is so remote that it's never been skied—until now. We nab a few incredible first descents on spring corn and head back to the lodge as the weather starts to turn.

At this point in a heli-skiing trip, you're at the mercy of the weather gods and may end up spending your waking hours in the bar waiting for a weather window. But Eleven, and Chile as a whole, don't abide sitting around and waiting. To clarify, there is a lovely bar with a talented bar manager waiting to satiate your liquid desires. But there is so much more to experience in Patagonia. Here, weather days are filled with world-class down-day activities. It's when I find myself halfway out of my ski gear and halfway into fishing waders that the extra decibel of the Eleven Experience hits me. Here, heli multisport days are in a league of their own.

The days at Rio Palena Lodge go something

COURTESY OF ELEVEN EXPERIENCE

like this: You ski a line that has never been skied by any human before. Next up, you're going to white-water raft the Futaleufú River, one of the premier whitewater rivers in the world. If that's not enough, spend the afternoon heli-fishing with your private guide who has former U.S. presidents on his client list. After that, hop in the heli to have a picnic, which is actually a chef-prepared meal you'll enjoy on the banks of the Futaleufú as sheep graze at the proverbial table next to you. Looking for more options? There's paddle boarding, mountain biking, and yoga. This, don't forget, is all after you've worked your legs into a gelatinous state from as much heli-skiing as you can handle. This is a place you visit to check items off your bucket list in bulk.

Alan, who's official job title is Global Experience Director and Minister of Fun, takes all of this in stride. His main responsibility at Eleven Experience is to design vacations that will blow guests' minds. Perhaps that's why he casually mentions to me after an already action-packed day that there's the option of going on an afternoon hike, if I'm interested. Hiking is not my first choice of activities and his pitch is so nonchalant I almost don't go. But then I remember that everything here is turned up a notch. Sure enough, at the pinnacle of the hike, I find myself standing on a hill above the jungle treetops in the mist of a 100-foot waterfall while a rainbow sparkles overhead.

With so much adventure to tackle throughout the week, the full experience doesn't hit me until the last day as I sit in the lodge's woodfired hot tub during golden hour. Soft light filters through the trees where the A-Star is tucked in for the night; "Sugar Magnolia" plays softly from hidden speakers while I sip local sparkling wine. That one extra level, I decide, is everything. ●

FROM TOP: A rainbow frames Eleven's Rio Palena Lodge, located in the lush forests of Chilean Patagonia; the Rosselot room, one of seven private rooms at the lodge; Alan, Eleven's Minister of Fun, gives the heli the all-clear; winter guests at Rio Palena get to claim first descents while heli-skiing in the Patagonian Andes.



#### TRIP PLANNING

**Getting there** Fly to Santiago, Chile via Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, New York-JFK, or Miami. From Santiago, connect farther South to Puerto Montt. Spend the night on the edge of Lake Llanquihue in Puerto Varas (a quick 30-minute drive from Puerto Montt), overlooking two active volcanoes. The next day, take a third flight to Chaitén where you'll be met by Eleven Experience transportation for an easy three-hour ride through dazzling Patagonian Chile. **Cost** Six-night, all-inclusive heli-skiing trips start at \$21,845, based on single occupancy. Reserve the entire lodge for \$178,707. Heli-skiing season runs from Oct. 1–Dec. 14, 2021 [Info Elevenexperience.com](http://Info.Elevenexperience.com)

14

▲  
MAXIMUM CAPACITY

7

▲  
NUMBER OF ROOMS

871

▲  
DISTANCE FROM SANTIAGO (MILES)

