

Big Brother on the ski slopes with Redpoint

Mikey Hughes, runner up in Channel 4's Big Brother 9 and totally blind from the age of 23, describes his own personal, challenge with Redpoint – to prove that anyone with a disability can ski.

If you've never been skiing before, it can be a daunting experience. So, imagine how much more nerve wracking the whole prospect is if you can't even see where you're going. Whilst it may be frightening looking down the slopes at your first red run, the prospect of launching yourself off an incline when you are totally blind is a whole different ball game. This was the challenge facing Glasgow based radio presenter Mikey Hughes on his first ever skiing holiday, which he took with Redpoint.

Mikey, who is probably best known for being on the Channel 4 'Big Brother' TV series, was born with Sticklers' Syndrome and went completely blind after an operation at the age of 23. He is now a reporter and producer on Insight Radio, a station for the blind and partially sighted.

Meeting a new challenge

When presented with the opportunity to try skiing for the first time, Mikey was intrigued by the chance to experience something different. "It was a new challenge and being totally blind, it also offered the chance to prove that blind people could ski, even if they had never done it before," he comments. "However, I'm happy to admit that I was a bit apprehensive, especially of falling over and breaking a leg or wrist. I also had some concerns about the other skiers crashing into me."

All Redpoint's adaptive guides are qualified BASI Adaptive Ski Instructors (level 2 or 3) and are trained to use special equipment and strategies as and when necessary. With a blind or partially sighted skier, the learner wears a fluorescent vest with 'blind skier' written on it.

"My instructor Dave gave me expert assistance, guiding me by skiing backwards and holding onto my hands, then I skied myself and he called out instructions. Safety was always a priority which I found very reassuring," explains Mikey. By the end of the week, he was delighted to find that he could ski independently and turn confidently. "I learned that falling is all part of the experience, and at least the snow is soft!"

Making memories

Mikey found the trip memorable for many reasons, not least for having the chance to ski in real snow in a great resort. "When I was at school and only had sight in one eye, my parents wouldn't let me go on school skiing trips, in case I damaged my good eye, so I always felt like the kid left out. But with Redpoint I was able to participate fully. There were many great experiences over the week, but perhaps the most memorable was tobogganing down a 7km icy mountain with Steve, one of the instructors, guiding at the front. It ended up with a spectacular fall but was really exhilarating."



5 words that Mikey uses to describe his Redpoint holiday are...

“Escapism
Exhilaration
Snow
Strudel
Unique”

The personal touch

As an independent company with 15 years of experience running holidays in the region, Redpoint pride themselves on offering great service and treating their guests as individuals; a claim which Mikey endorses. "The Redpoint staff were all great, instructing and helping me get about the resort. They provided entertainment at night, whilst the office based staff on the phone were really helpful, answering all my questions in advance. I really felt that they knew the holiday and the resort. I also liked the fact that Redpoint picked us up in their minibus at the airport, so we immediately felt like individuals rather than a large package holiday crammed full of holiday makers."

Mikey's experiences on the slopes brought home the importance of good quality ski tuition, particularly for anyone with a form of disability and this would be a priority should he choose a skiing holiday in the future. "I would love to go skiing again, but only with someone who could provide expert ski training - an adaptive ski instructor with experience of teaching blind skiers like my Redpoint guide Dave. If anyone has sight problems, I would advise them to skip the indoor ski session and just start from the beginning with an instructor, as you will be with them all week. Because you can't see, other skiers might seem closer than they actually are, or they might be close but you aren't in danger so you need to trust your instructor. It's also useful to take a friend or sighted guide as it will make things a lot easier in resort."

An inclusive experience

One of the main plus points of the trip for Mikey was the inclusive nature of the holiday. Disabled skiers are often separate from the able bodied members of their party, but the Redpoint ethos is to keep everyone together as much as possible so it is an experience that can be shared. "I enjoyed being with the other Redpoint non adaptive skiers," comments Mikey, "they were all supportive. I really liked the fact that they could ski along side the disabled skiers; it just depended on how able each individual skier was. This means that people at differing levels can enjoy the same holiday, especially if both of you are just beginning."

So would Mikey recommend his experience to other blind and partially sighted would be skiers? "If you want an active holiday with some truly unique and special activities at night this is definitely for you. I would wholeheartedly recommend Redpoint to anybody - whatever their ability. Their focus on safety and quality of instruction is fantastic."

Are you a 'Redpoint Regular?'

If so, we would love to hear from you.
Email helen@idealmarketingcompany.com if you have a story to share.



"I would wholeheartedly recommend Redpoint to anybody - whatever their ability. Their focus on safety and quality of instruction is fantastic."

Redpoint Holidays Ltd,
BCM Box 1785,
London WC1N 3XX

Sales Tel: 0845 680 12 14
Email: sales@redpoint.co.uk
Customer Service Tel: 0845 680 12 16
Email: customerservice@redpoint.co.uk



Registered in England No. 3577563
Registered Address: 60 The Spinney, Wolverhampton, WV3 9EU

Creating ski and activity holidays to Austria since 1995