

EMERGING ski destinations

When you've done Aspen, know Whistler and are on first name terms with St Anton it's time to look further a ski field. Rachael Oakes-Ash shows you how you can be the first to experience the emerging hot spots in the world of cold, and seriously impress your friends.



KOREA

Who knew South Korea was so ski mad? The country has thirteen resorts with the most challenging in the mountains of Gyeonggi-do Province, a few hours east of Seoul.

Most famous is the Yong Pyong Ski Resort which has been operating since 1975 on the slopes of Mt Balwangsan which sits 1458 metres above sea level.

Yong Pyong has hosted three World Cup Alpine Ski Games and a Winter Asian Games, so expect a world class set up. The resort offers 1700 hectares of skiable terrain, 31 ski runs and 14 lifts and a gondola. The snowfall doesn't reach the depths of Japan but it is a healthy 250cm average per annum, providing plenty of base for piste lovers.

Yong Pyong is less than an hour to the coastline if you want some winter beach action. If culture is more your thing then the nearby Odaesan National Park is known for its historic temples and is a mere half an hour from the resort for 'down' days off the slopes.

Dragon Plaza is a three-storey wooden ski house at the hub of Yong Pyong, it houses ticket booths, ski rentals, ski storage and restaurants. The resort was the location for filming of one of Korea's most popular television dramas, *The Winter Sonata* and it's possible to take an hilarious tour of the various television scenes of love throughout the resort.

How to get there: Asiana Airlines fly daily from Sydney to Seoul. Cathay Pacific fly to Seoul via Hong Kong daily. Yong Pyong is a 2.5 hour drive east of the city. www.cathaypacific.com

Where to stay: The Dragon Valley Hotel on the slopes of Yong Pyong for luxury suites, traditional Korean matted rooms or western-style lodging. From AU\$260 per night. www.yongpyong.co.kr/eng

SLOVENIA

This former state of Yugoslavia turned independent EU country has a long history of alpine skiing – such activities were reported as early as the 1700s.

The ski fields here are smaller than neighbouring Austria and Italy but they are home to two annual World Cup events. So if it's good enough for elite athletes, then ...

The Men's Downhill is held at Kranjska Gora in the Julian Alps. Perhaps the most famous ski resort in Slovenia, Kranjska Gora is a low altitude peaking at 1295 metres, and offers 125 hectares of mainly beginner and intermediate terrain. The more challenging Podkoren trail hosts the Vitanc Trophy World Cup. There are 19 lifts and around 20 kilometres of groomed trails.

Slovenia's second largest city, Maribor, is home to Mariborsko Pohorje Ski Resort with a gondola from the valley to the slopes accessible by city bus. Maribor sits on the River Drava with wineries and spa retreats all around. It is here, at Mariborsko Pohorje, that the World Cup Women's Alpine Skiing competition is held. The resort has impressive snow making facilities, 220 hectares of skiable terrain, 20 lifts and a gondola.

Skiing in Slovenia is considerably cheaper than the rest of Europe and there is a thriving après ski scene in the more developed resorts and those close to cities such as Mariborsko Pohorje. Expect fortresses, castles and medieval romance, do not expect swanky boutique hotels or designer anything.

How to get there: Emirates fly from Sydney to Vienna via Dubai. Slovenia's Adria Airways flies from Vienna to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. www.emirates.com www.adria-airways.com

Where to stay: Five star has yet to hit Slovenia so book through your agent into either the Grand Hotel Prisank in Gora or the Hotel Habakuk in Maribor.

opposite page: Revelstoke, Canada (courtesy Revelstoke Mountain Resort); this page: Yong Pyong Korea (© Yong Pyong Korea); Ibex, Julian Alps, Slovenia



RUSSIA

There's a lot of new money in Russia right now and it's heading for the hills of Mt Elbrus in the Caucasus region. The tallest mountain in Europe at 5642 metres, Mt Elbrus was once used by Russian astronauts for high altitude training.

Elbrus is a powder Mecca with few marked trails. Free-riders abound here but make sure you take a guide as this backcountry is unpredictable. Fourteen lifts, often with long lift queues, haul skiers and boarders up to the 3780-metre top lift and from there it's one long ride down over a 1680-metre drop of vertical metres. Terrain is evenly spaced between beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Neighbouring Mt Tcheget, also known as Cheget, is one of Russia's largest ski resorts. Skiers stay in Prielbrusye in the Balkan valley between the two mountains. Don't expect the glitz of St Moritz and Lech, Cheget is still frontier style skiing in this region. The lift system, again, is basic, a mere three chairs and two drag lifts, but prices are ridiculously cheap (\$12 a day) to schuss the 16 kilometres of ski runs.

How to get there: British Airways flies to Moscow from Sydney via Bangkok and London. Fly from Moscow to Nalchik with a local air provider then a 2.5 hour drive to Cheget. www.britishairways.com

Where to stay: Hotel accommodation is very basic but it's possible to get rooms with en-suites in private hotels such as the Hotel Verzhina close to the cableway.

INDIA

Henry Ford's grandson, Alfred Ford, is investing US\$300million into the ski area of Himachal in India's north. Himachal is already a popular heli ski destination and plans for the Himalayan Ski Village Resort include 700 five-star rooms, 300 chalets, retail outlets, conference facilities, spa and food courts.

Former Vail Resorts Design Director, Mike Larson, will design the ski runs that range from 7500 feet to 14,000 feet with a high-tech gondola taking 500 passengers an hour up the mountain.

Future plans include international ski tournaments and a bid to host the Winter Olympics. Seventy instructors began training in December 2006 at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in preparation for the new resort, which is scheduled to open in time for the 08/09 season.

Where to stay: By the time the resort opens there should be a 700-room hotel, a series of private condominiums and villas for rent. Stand by. www.himalayanskivillage.com

How to get there: Malaysia Airlines fly from Sydney to Delhi via Kuala Lumpur. Manali in Himachal is a flight from Delhi to Bhunter airport then a two-hour drive. www.malaysiaairlines.com

JAPAN

Those in the know have been singing Japan's powder praises for years. Australian developers have got in on the action in the northern island of Hokkaido at Niseko Ski Resort where every second accent is from down under. So head south to the resorts of Honshu on the main island of Japan for serious kudos.

Nozawa Onsen in the Nagano prefecture a few hours from Tokyo is a feudal town founded in 724 AD and has retained its old world charm with cobbled laneways leading to volcanic onsens for traditional Japanese style bathing.

It's also considered the birthplace of skiing in Japan with a ski museum as testimony. A rocking ski mountain filled with open bowls, moguls, steeps and deeps, groomed piste perfection and metres and metres of the famous Japanese powder snow.

Stay in one of the town's traditional Ryokans, which are passed down through generations of families, for a unique and authentic experience. Better still, make your way to Nozawa mid January for the Dosojin Fire Festival, a crazy night filled with flames, fireworks and barrels of sake. www.vill.nozawaonsen.nagano.jp/info/english/start.htm

Where to stay: Sakaya Ryokan is a luxury traditional Japanese style guest house close to the village hub and the slopes. From around AU\$170 a night including breakfast and dinner. www.japaneseguesthouses.com

How to get there: Qantas flies direct from Sydney, Melbourne and Cairns to Tokyo. Nagano is a 1 hour, 40 minute bullet train from Tokyo and Nozawa is a two-hour drive from Nagano. www.qantas.com.au

WHAT'S NEWS IN CANADA

Canada certainly has the big resorts. Whistler Blackcomb is the largest in North America with over 8000 acres of skiable terrain, then there are the resort towns of Banff and Lake Louise. They have their place but if you want something different then head to any of these three.

REVELSTOKE

Revelstoke is a revolution in Canadian skiing with a combination of back country, off-piste and on-piste ski and snowboard opportunities.

The resort plans a CA\$1billion development, the first phase opening last December with a \$22-million gondola taking skiers to a plethora of open bowls, tree runs, steeps 'n deeps and cruiser-style groomed runs.

With a combination of Cat Powder skiing and helicopter skiing the three-in-one resort literally has over 500,000 acres of terrain including 100 established on-mountain runs.

Found in the Kootenays mountain range between the Selkirk and Monashee Mountains in British Columbia, Revelstoke, when fully completed will boast twenty lifts and North America's longest skiable vertical of 1829 metres.

The purpose-built resort offers big real estate value with a long term goal of 5000 high end homes and a series of designer hotels, restaurants, cafes and entertainment facilities. The first phase of development includes 200 ski-in, ski-out condominiums.

Did we mention the area receives 16 metres of snowfall a season? Watch this space. www.discoverrevelstoke.com

from left to right: Mt Elbrus, Russia; Revelstoke, Canada (courtesy Revelstoke Mountain Resort); Nagano Ski Resort (courtesy JNTO); Himachal, India



RED MOUNTAIN

There's a rule at Red Mountain Resort - keep it quiet. Those who have traversed Red's slopes and who know its two mountain peaks and all they deliver, tend to keep it to themselves. There is however, plenty to go around with 1685 skiable acres, 87 ski runs and 800 plus metres of vertical.

Serviced by the charming small town of Rossland a mere ten minutes north of the USA/Canada border in British Columbia, Red Mountain Resort receives an average of 7.5 metres of snow each season. Beginners are well catered for but if you're intermediate and advanced then you've come to the right place.

Big Red Cats (www.bigredcats.com) is run by an Australian couple who now call Red home. Explore the impressive 18,000 acres of back country terrain at Red Mountain by cat snow mobile with a small group of like-minded skiers and boarders. No lift queues, just you, the cat and plenty of untracked powder waiting to be pummeled.

Romantics will love Le Petit Fromage, a guided moonlight ski and fondue dinner or the plethora of dining options on and off the mountain from Chianti's Italian Bistro to the Old Fire Hall for urban tapas and wine. www.redresort.com

SILVER STAR

Picture a fairytale mining town in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia with Victorian architecture and multi-coloured store fronts all surrounded by snow and you've got Silver Star Resort. Add over 1,240 hectares of skiable terrain across 115 established ski runs and a large grooming fleet dedicated to creating corduroy snow every day.

If you want romance then the lush accommodation at Snowbird Lodge has your name on it. So does the Brewers Pond outdoor ice skating rink and the Beyond Wraapture Spa and the sleigh ride to dinner at Wild Horseman's Cabin. Need we go on?

Back to the skiing. The longest run is eight kilometres and the terrain across the resort is split 20% beginner, 50% intermediate, 20% advanced and 10% expert so no one goes home empty handed. The vertical drop is 760 metres and there's even 60 kilometres of cross country trails.

On Friday nights there's night skiing followed by fireworks, all for \$5.00. Snowboarders will love the natural half pipes of Putnam Creek and the free-riding on the backslopes of Silver Star and the TELUS terrain park with its pipes, rails and boxes. www.skisilverstar.com

There's only one question. Are we there yet?

Getting to Canada: Air New Zealand fly direct to Vancouver via Auckland with full flat beds in Business Premiere and more room to recline in Pacific Premium Class. www.airnewzealand.com.au

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Left to right: Rossland (courtesy Tourism Rossland); Silver Star (© Tourism BC Don Weixl)