

# Snow doubt where the fun is



**Cruise control:** launch your hunt for Tom Cruise at Colorado's Telluride.

It's warm here, but icy cool on the mountains of the northern hemisphere.

**Rachael Oakes-Ash** finds one for you

IT'S official. Snow has fallen, especially in Austria, and the northern-hemisphere ski season has begun.

If you're into piste groomers or have a penchant for off-piste back country, a passion for moguls, adore apres or are obsessed with celebrities, there's a snowsports resort for you.

And the strong Australian dollar is making skiing in the US and Japan especially attractive.

## L-PLATES

SO IT'S your first time and you want to do it overseas.

Most European and Asian ski fields have English-speaking instructors, but you can guarantee you'll be sharing your instructor with fellow anglophones in Canada and the US.

You can't beat Whistler Blackcomb for diverse learning opportunities ([www.whistlerblackcomb.com](http://www.whistlerblackcomb.com)). Two mountains make up the biggest ski area in North America, which means you'll never get bored.

In the Ski Esprit programs of three, four or five days, you learn from the same instructor with the same group each day.

The Supergroup Beginner ski or snowboard package involves one ski instructor and three students. It's a hybrid between private and group teaching without the high cost of one-on-one instruction.

## FAMILY AFFAIR

BRINGING the grommets? Head to Big White ([www.bigwhite.com](http://www.bigwhite.com)), also in Canada, for its award-winning Kids Centre. Kids in ski school get complimentary helmets, an onsite kitchen bakes their lunches and snacks, and entertainment and activities are provided.

The Tot Town Day Care centre is for those not big enough to ski.

There's even an After Dark program for hot chocolate and ice skating, so parents can have a night out for themselves.



Canyons Ski Resort in Park City, Utah ([www.thecanyons.com](http://www.thecanyons.com)) is a ski-in, ski-out resort with excellent family facilities.

Club Med family ski resorts in Tignes in France, Cervinia in Italy, St Moritz in Switzerland and Sahoro in Japan have English-speaking instructors, a full kids club, separate kids' dining areas, entertainment, nightly shows and lifelong friends. Visit [www.clubmed.com](http://www.clubmed.com)

## BOO! SCARED YOU

LA GRAVE in France is pure lift-accessed, off-piste terrain with major boasting rights and a vertical drop of more than 2km. It's best taken on with a guide ([www.la-grave.com](http://www.la-grave.com)).

The Vallee Blanche is a glacial run

on Mont Blanc accessed from Cham-onix. Prepare to dodge crevasses on the 17km downhill ski run and don't try it alone ([www.chamex.com](http://www.chamex.com)).

Sunshine Village's Delirium Dive in the Canadian Rockies is super-steep, free-ride, expert terrain accessible from the ski resort, but you'll need an avalanche beacon and a partner ([www.skibanff.com](http://www.skibanff.com)).

Silverton, in Colorado, is an off-piste extreme zone accessed by lift and based on New Zealand's club fields ([www.silvertonmountain.com](http://www.silvertonmountain.com)).

Gulmarg, in the Himalayas, is avalanche-prone and near a disputed border zone, but has some of the most exciting undiscovered terrain in the world ([www.gulmarg.org](http://www.gulmarg.org)).

## READY TO ADVANCE

JACKSON Hole, in Wyoming ([www.jacksonhole.com](http://www.jacksonhole.com)), dedicates half its terrain to advanced skiing and has more than 1214 ha of back country.

Aspen Mountain, Colorado, has no beginner terrain (though there are other, easier areas within the four-mountain region). All trails are marked from intermediate. Most are dedicated black and double black diamond — a dream experience of steeps, bumps and jumps ([www.aspen-snowmass.com](http://www.aspen-snowmass.com)).

If you like your powder deep, Asahidake in the north of Hokkaido in Japan serves it up by the metre. There's no ski patrol. The stand-alone mountain is accessed via a ropeway, but if you're well trained in the art of back country, have the gear and go with a guide, it could be for you ([www.hokkaidopowderguides.com](http://www.hokkaidopowderguides.com)).

## NON SKIER

IF YOU have a non-skier or non-boarder with you, choose St Moritz in Switzerland. Its shops rival those of Paris and there are day spas galore, restaurants, ice skating and events on the frozen lake for serious people-watching ([www.stmoritz.ch](http://www.stmoritz.ch)).

At Park City, Utah, snow hounds can play in the powder of Deer Valley, the Canyons and Park City Mountain Resort — all within minutes of Park City — and others can explore or take a day trip to Salt Lake City ([www.parkcityinfo.com](http://www.parkcityinfo.com)).

## CELEBRISKI

THE British royals holiday at Klosters in Switzerland; Oprah and the Cruises schuss Telluride in Colorado; Goldie Hawn and Johnny Depp go to Aspen; Paris Hilton, Robert Redford and Toni Collette have been seen at Park City during the Sundance Film Festival.

## SNOW CULTURE

INNSBRUCK, with its palaces, castles and cathedrals, is capital of the Tyrol ski region in Austria and a mecca for European culture vultures. The town was settled by the Bavarians in the 6th century, so expect 13 centuries of history. And it has nine ski areas.

Japan is the cultural destination of choice. Stick to the main island of Honshu. Nozawa Onsen in the Nagano prefecture is a traditional feudal village with 50 private and public onsens, or hot springs.

Stay in a traditional ryokan for authentic Japanese hospitality

([www.vill.nozawaonsen.nagano.jp/info/english/start.htm](http://www.vill.nozawaonsen.nagano.jp/info/english/start.htm))

## PARTY TIME

WHEN it comes to apres, no country does it like Austria ([www.austria.info](http://www.austria.info)). It's not uncommon to be dancing in your ski boots after midnight — most snow lovers simply ski into the bar and forget to go home. St Anton ([www.stantonamarlberg.com](http://www.stantonamarlberg.com)) is the Austrian ski resort most famous for partying, but don't ignore European celebrity haven Obertauern ([www.obertauern.com](http://www.obertauern.com)) and make your way to the Lurzeralm party hut.

## CASH-STRAPPED

MOST snow-specific travel agents offer good package deals for the northern hemisphere if you get in early.

Japanese resorts have the best value for money. Lift passes average \$40 a day and lunch \$7 for a katsu don with rice. The really cheap stuff is in Eastern Europe and beyond. Russia's Mt Elbrus has \$15 lift passes. Did we mention it costs a mere \$20 for a lift pass in Slovakia?

## BEST IN SNOW

SNOW isn't known for its commitment. Austria experienced 16C on Christmas Day last year, but has already received more than 2m in some parts this season.

It's fair to say geography ensures the snow in Colorado and Utah is super dry and super light. It's also fair to say Japanese powder is abundant even in a bad season, because of its proximity to Siberia.



**White heat:** horse racing is, well, not quite like Flemington in the Swiss resort of St Moritz.



**Skis the limit:** (above) a dramatic view at Aspen in Colorado.

**Skill centre:** (right) Wyoming's Jackson Hole is one for the experts.

**High anxiety:** (below) snow-covered pines on Mt Zao in Japan's Yamagata Prefecture.

## COMPETITION



BE THE coolest cat on the mountain, regardless of your ability, with a pair of Realm goggles from Anon Optics.

Anon goggles are a favourite with boardsporters. They have "spherical lens technology" to enhance peripheral vision and "channelled top venting", which prevents fogging.

Anon is giving *Travel* readers the chance to win one of three sets of goggles, each worth \$189.95. Check them at [www.anonoptics.com](http://www.anonoptics.com)

To enter ph: 1900 999 110 or SMS the word ANON, your name and address to 1993 3300.

Competition calls cost 55c (including GST). Higher from public or mobile phones. Competition closes midnight tonight. Winners published in next week's *Travel*.



## THE DEAL

→ **Ski season:** The northern hemisphere ski season runs November to April. Prices are influenced by peak times.

→ **Japan:** Value Tours has seven nights at North Country Inn, Furano, Japan, with six-day lift pass and breakfast for \$673 a person, land only. Travel Dec 8-14, Feb 15-Apr 1. [www.valuetours.com.au](http://www.valuetours.com.au)

→ **Canada:** Skimax Holidays has a Lake Louise, Canada, package from \$3129 a person plus taxes. Includes seven days' accommodation, six-day lift pass and flights from Sydney. Travel from Feb 1-March 31. [www.skimax.com.au](http://www.skimax.com.au)

→ **US:** Mogul Ski World has packages for Sun Valley Idaho, "America's first and finest all-seasons resort", including a January family special: seven days in a two-bedroom apartment, with two six-day adult lift passes and two six-day children's passes from \$2726. [www.mogulski.com.au](http://www.mogulski.com.au)

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**Winter wonderland:** the ice magic of a street scene in Aspen.