

All downhill from here

The last of our snow is melting, but it's just getting icy up north. Rachael

Oakes-Ash has the inside run on northern hemisphere ski spots

British Columbia, Canada

CANADIANS love the outdoors and with outdoors like these there's a lot to love. Think ice-blue lakes and rivers surrounded by mountains begging to be conquered.

Whistler/Blackcomb: www.whistlerblackcomb.com

Where: Two hours from Vancouver.

Stats: 3237ha, 100 trails, 33 lifts, longest run 11km

This is one big swanky resort, which means apres for all, from pubs and clubs to fine dining, and the swish new Four Seasons for the seriously cashed-up. Whistler is celebrating its 40th anniversary with almost \$16 million spent on improvements, including 445ha of new terrain.

Hot Deals: Seven nights at Alpenglow, return flights to Vancouver & six-day lift pass from \$2979

www.skiexpress.com.au, ph: 1300 130 525

Fernie: www.skifernie.com

Where: Southeast corner of British Columbia Rockies, 3½ hours from Calgary

Stats: 1014ha, 107 trails, 10 lifts, longest run 5km

Terrain: 30 per cent beginner, 40 per cent intermediate,

from \$2969pp.

www.skiexpress.com.au or ph: 1300 130 525

Colorado, US

TALK to a Colorado local and he'll tell you it only snows at night, claiming every day a bluebird day. It's not far from the truth. With more than 300 blue-sky days on average a year, you'll be working on your snow tan while schussing the powder slopes.

Aspen: www.aspensnowmass.com

Where: Aspen Resort is four mountains in the heart of Colorado.

Stats: 2106ha, 44 lifts, 339 trails, longest run 8.5km

If you want glitz, glam and celebrity spotting, then don't miss Aspen. Hotel Jerome is the place to be seen, a member of Small Luxury Hotels, this is where Hollywood congregates come winter. If you can't get in, then try Little Nell for some serious profile people. Both offer ski concierge who clean, wax and store your skis

30 per cent advanced

A true mountain village, Fernie's small-town feel attracts skiers wanting more bowls and less bling bling. Five powder-filled bowls provide snow sport fanatics with a natural playground 5km from town.

Hot Deals: Return flights to Calgary, transfers, seven nights at Wolfs Den Mountain Lodge, six-day lift pass. From \$2610pp plus taxes

www.skimax.com.au. Ph: 1300 136 997

Red Resort: www.redresort.com

Where: 10 minutes north of Canada-US border

Stats: 1585ha, 83 trails, six lifts

Red Resort is a family resort made up of two mountains, Red and Granite. Club Red offers youth programs catering for kiddies to teens with Club Red Kinder and Club Red Junior three-day ski camps.

Hot deals: Fly with Air Canada from Melbourne, transfers, seven nights at Thrift Lodge, six-day lift pass

nightly, returning them buffed the next morn.

Hot deal: Return flights ex Melb to Denver, transfers, seven nights at Boomerang lodge and six-day lift pass from \$2288pp plus taxes.

www.skimax.com.au or ph: 1300 136 997

Steamboat: www.steamboat.com

Where: Northwest Colorado just 30 minutes from Hayden Airport

Stats: 1176ha, 142 trails, longest run 4.8km

IT'S pure winter wonderland at Steamboat with hot-air balloons, sleigh rides and hot springs. Perfect for groups of varying level, Steamboat is a complete mountain range of six peaks, providing a terrain of trademarked Champagne Powder. This means it's drier and fluffier

than any other US resort, as tested by meteorologists. Over-50s get guided skiing daily for free with the Over the Hill Gang.

Hot deals: Seven nights at Snowflower Condominiums flying United Airlines ex Melb to Hayden, transfers and six-day lift pass. Depart Feb 1 for \$3556pp

www.travelplan.com.au or ph: 1300 130 754

Crested butte: www.skicb.com

Where: 30 minutes from Gunnison/Crested Butte airport

Stats: 455ha, 15 lifts, 121 trails, longest run 4.2km

Off the beaten track and with more double black diamonds than any other Colorado resort, Crested Butte is an original mining town with no pretensions.

Known for its Extreme Limit terrain, Crested Butte is Colorado's best-kept secret. The kids' ski school is made up of Cubs (3-4 years), Polar Bears (5-7), Grizzly Bears (8-12) and Teens while the Crested Butte Day Care program takes care of Baby Bears and Cuddly Bears so you can hit the slopes.

Deals: Fly United Airlines to Gunnison, transfers, seven nights at Grand Lodge, six-day lift pass from \$3535pp including taxes.

www.travelplan.com.au or ph: 1300 130 754

Ski resorts around the world do their best to recreate the atmosphere of Europe's ski resorts. The real thing is a massive buzz.

Val D'Isere, France: www.valdisere.com

Where: 220km from Lyon. Closest airport is Swiss Geneva.

This is a true French chalet-style town with chaud chocolate and brioche and Dick's Tea Bar for dancing

\$2399pp including taxes.

www.travelplan.com.au or ph: 1300 130 754

on tables with young Brits on gap year. The Espace Killy (name given to the combined area of Val D'Isere and Tignes skiing area) has 90 lifts and 300km of slopes

Hot deals: Return flights to Geneva with Austrian Airlines, seven nights at Alpina Lodge, transfers, six-day ski pass from \$3234pp.

www.travelplan.com.au or ph: 1300 130 754

St Anton, Austria: www.stantonamarlberg.com

Where: 100km from Innsbruck, the closest airport.

Austria invented alpine skiing and the apres that goes with it. Take your dancing shoes because, come winter, the cosy town of St Anton and its 2500 inhabitants go off. Add the sister towns of St Cristoph and St Jakob and you have enough terrain to keep you busy from dusk to dawn.

Hot deals: Return flights ex Melbourne to Zurich, seven nights at Hotel Valluga, daily breakfast and dinner from \$2810pp.

www.skimax.com.au or ph: 1300 136 997

Verbier, Switzerland: www.verbier.ch

Where: 150km from Geneva, the nearest airport.

It's a hard choice in Switzerland. There's the showy glamour of St Moritz or the car-free resort of Zermatt and its mighty Matterhorn. Not to mention Verbier, home to five resorts in one, with more than 400km of trails and 100 lifts capable of transporting 40,000 skiers an hour. More than a third of the terrain is beginner, ideal for the kids just learning. The rest is split evenly between intermediate and advanced.

Hot deal: Fly Austrian Airlines from Melbourne to Geneva, transfers, seven nights at Hotel Alba from



Glitz and glamour: if you want to see stars — the showbiz kind — head for Aspen in Colorado.

Hokkaido, Japan

JAPAN is hot for skiing right now, so get over there before the word gets out internationally and the lift queues begin. It's closer to home than the big resorts of Europe and North America and the snow doesn't stop falling, which means more months of ski time.

Niseko: www.niseko.ne.jp

Where: 2½ hours from Sapporo airport on Hokkaido Island

Stats: Three resorts, Annupuri, Higashiyama and Grand Hirafu on the one mountain.

Hokkaido's sub-arctic climate means Niseko gets more snow than any other resort in Japan, up to 12m of powder a season, with dumps of a metre reported overnight. Only two hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time means no jetlag and, with direct flights to Sapporo from Australian Airlines, it's easy to get to. **Hot deals:** From \$2045 plus taxes. Japan Airlines to Sapporo return, transfers, eight nights at Australia House, seven-day lift pass, breakfasts.

www.skimax.com.au. Ph: 1300 136 997

Sahoro: www.clubmed.com.au/sahoro

Where: Hokkaido Island, two hours northeast of Sapporo.

Stats: 9 lifts, longest run 3km.

Stay at Club Med Sahoro and almost the entire mountain is yours with little if any lift queues. The all-inclusive lift passes, lessons, accommodation and three meals a day

including beer and wine make it a smart choice for those wanting to experience both Japanese culture and powder snow without the language barrier. And there's the Club Med kids club to ensure junior gets comfortable on sticks and boards.

Hot deals: Seven-night Sahoro all-inclusive package with return airfares from \$3399pp.

www.clubmed.com.au. Ph: 1300 669 837

Kashmir, India

Last week's earthquake should be considered, but the Kashmir side of the Himalayas, better known for climbing than for skiing, is an emerging area worth noting.

Gulmarg

Where: The Pir Panjals, the westernmost mountain range in the Himalayas, 56km from Srinagar, with connecting flights to Delhi. Be among the first to carve it up in Kashmir. Gulmarg is India's highest ski resort and the only place to heli ski the Himalayas. With a base altitude of 2650m, Gulmarg offers a gondola, chairlifts, poma tows and snowcats to get snowriders up the mountain. Prices are cheap, no need for your Prada jacket here. It's basic, fun and uncrowded.

For more information about tours and accommodation visit www.skihimalaya.com

Hokkaido, Japan

JAPAN is hot for skiing right now, so get over there before the word gets out internationally and the lift queues begin. It's closer to home than the big resorts of Europe and North America and the snow doesn't stop falling, which means more months of ski time.

Niseko: www.niseko.ne.jp

Where: 2½ hours from Sapporo airport on Hokkaido Island

Stats: Three resorts, Annupuri, Higashiyama and Grand Hirafu on the one mountain.

Hokkaido's sub-arctic climate means Niseko gets more snow than any other resort in Japan, up to 12m of powder a season, with dumps of a metre reported overnight. Only two hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time means no jetlag and, with direct flights to Sapporo from Australian Airlines, it's easy to get to. **Hot deals:** From \$2045 plus taxes. Japan Airlines to Sapporo return, transfers, eight nights at Australia House, seven-day lift pass, breakfasts.

www.skimax.com.au. Ph: 1300 136 997

Sahoro: www.clubmed.com.au/sahoro

Where: Hokkaido Island, two hours northeast of Sapporo.

Stats: 9 lifts, longest run 3km.

Stay at Club Med Sahoro and almost the entire mountain is yours with little if any lift queues. The all-inclusive lift passes, lessons, accommodation and three meals a day

including beer and wine make it a smart choice for those wanting to experience both Japanese culture and powder snow without the language barrier. And there's the Club Med kids club to ensure junior gets comfortable on sticks and boards.

Hot deals: Seven-night Sahoro all-inclusive package with return airfares from \$3399pp.

www.clubmed.com.au. Ph: 1300 669 837

Kashmir, India

Last week's earthquake should be considered, but the Kashmir side of the Himalayas, better known for climbing than for skiing, is an emerging area worth noting.

Gulmarg

Where: The Pir Panjals, the westernmost mountain range in the Himalayas, 56km from Srinagar, with connecting flights to Delhi. Be among the first to carve it up in Kashmir. Gulmarg is India's highest ski resort and the only place to heli ski the Himalayas. With a base altitude of 2650m, Gulmarg offers a gondola, chairlifts, poma tows and snowcats to get snowriders up the mountain. Prices are cheap, no need for your Prada jacket here. It's basic, fun and uncrowded.

For more information about tours and accommodation visit www.skihimalaya.com

