



Snow go: hop on a motorised sled for a great ride.

Take your pick of the big six

Zoe Skewes checks Victoria's ski resorts

MT BAW BAW

Drive time: 2½ hours.

Claim to fame: The family resort has seven lifts on 30ha, 10km of cross-country trails, toboggan run and snowtube park.

What's new: Rail park opens on June 30 with features including kick boxes for adventure-seekers.

Price: Vehicles \$30, adult one-day lift pass \$69, children \$39.

The deal: Stay three nights midweek in a deluxe cabin for \$686. Deal includes a three-day lift pass for two adults and two children and mountain entry.

www.mountbawbaw.com.au

MT BULLER

Drive time: 3 hours.

Claim to fame: With 300ha of spectacular, skiable terrain, Mt Buller has everything from gentle, groomed slopes to impressive off-piste tree runs.

What's new: Queues won't be a problem thanks to 25 lifts moving up to 40,000 people an hour.

Price: Vehicle \$30, adult one-day lift pass \$92, children \$49.

The deal: Stay three nights midweek for \$554 an adult and \$339 a child, with ski hire, adult Discover lift-and-lesson package; and child full-day lift-and-lesson package (including lunch).

www.mtbuller.com.au

FALLS CREEK

Drive time: 4½ hours

Claim to fame: Falls has Australia's only ski-in, ski-out village. The resort is ideal for intermediate and advanced skiers and 80 per cent of the mountain is for skiers with a sense of adventure.

What's new: non-skier activities including snowmobile tours, snowtubing, helicopter flights, day spas and yoga.

Price: Day lift ticket \$90, resort entry \$28, ski hire from \$30.

The deal: Stay five nights at the White Space family apartment for

\$756 an adult and \$691 a child and get a five-day lift pass with lessons and snowbuggy.

www.falls creek.com.au

HOTHAM

Drive time: 4½ hours

Claim to fame: It's all about snowmaking at Hotham, where \$600,000 has been spent on five new snowguns, creating permanent snowmaking on Sundowner.

What's new: affordable flights from Lilydale leave at 7am and return by 8pm. Cost \$250. Ph: 9739 1211

Price: Adult one-day lift pass \$90, children \$45.

The deal: Two-night escape for \$590 an adult six-share. Includes two-day lift pass.

www.hotham.com.au

LAKE MOUNTAIN

Drive time: 2 hours

Claim to fame: More than 37km of trails of varying grades, but take time for a tour in a motorised sled.

What's new: for snow players and tobogganers, six new tower guns are near runs one and two.

Price: Midweek entry \$27, weekends \$30.

The deal: Stay three nights in a family room for \$465 an adult, including continental breakfast.

www.lakemountainresort.com.au

MT BUFFALO

Drive time: 3½ hours

Claim to fame: Open for business despite Cresta Lodge being destroyed by bushfire.

What's new: supervised and groomed toboggan runs and 11km of cross-country ski trails still operating. Also rest rooms, first-aid, toilets and toboggan hire.

Price: Vehicles \$9.90.

The deal: No mountain accommodation available. Check Bright and Myrtleford.

www.mtbuffaloresort.com.au



Glorious nature: the view from New Zealand snowfield The Remarkables.

Slip slide away time

Australia and New Zealand's 12 big ski resorts are all famous for something, writes **Rachael Oakes-Ash**

SKI RUN

When it comes to groomed runs, size matters.

Thredbo's (www.thredbo.com.au) 5.9km Supertrail wins for length alone. Get in early, because it can feel like Punt Rd come midday.

In a good season Mt Hutt (www.nzski.com) is tops. Turn right at the top of the six-seater Summit chair and have the ungroomed South Face all to yourself.

BEGINNERS' MOUNTAIN

Perisher Blue has 22 per cent of its 1245ha dedicated to beginner terrain.

There are 13 ski carpets and a Tom Thumb platter lift ensures beginners can get up the hill.

Falls Creek beginner area has six carpets including a 124m fully enclosed magic carpet.

Coronet Peak (www.nzski.com) in New Zealand has doubled its beginner ski area for 2007. Whakapapa at Mt Ruapehu has Happy Valley, a separate beginners-only ski area.

EXPERT TERRAIN

You need to be an expert to ski the 18 Motatupu Chutes at Treble Cone,

where the pitch can be 50 degrees. It's a trek out from the bottom, if you make it. Take a transceiver and a buddy. This is the back country.

SNOWMAKING

Thredbo has spent \$4.5 million on snowmaking gear in the past three years with 212 fully automated tower snowguns and 40 manual ones.

Snowmaking covers 25 per cent of the resort's terrain.

Mt Buller (www.mtbuller.com.au) and Mt Hotham have gone green, using recycled water for snowmaking.

TERRAIN PARK

Falls Creek is consistently voted No.1 by *Australian Snowboarder* magazine for its Terrain Park facilities.

Think four terrain parks for varying abilities.

Across the Tasman, Cardrona wins with three terrain parks, four halfpipes and a Gravity Cross course.

And there's Snowpark, a dedicated freestyle terrain resort. Visit (www.snowparknz.com).

SKI IMPROVEMENT

The Alpine Ski Advancement



Highly popular: Bourke St run in Mt Buller village.

Program (ASAP) at Treble Cone (treblecone.co.nz) is an intensive program over five days with video analysis, dry-land training, off piste and race gates. The program, through August, costs \$NZ2880.

The L'Oreal Women's Week at Mt Hotham (www.hotham.com.au) is five days with female instructors. July 23-27. It costs \$799 including lift pass. Visit www.hotham.com.au

KIDS' PROGRAM

Freeriding teens can enrol in Falls Creek's Freeride Holiday Camp (www.falls creek.com.au) for 8-17-

year-olds and learn how to do rails, boxes and jumps. Running July 2-6 and July 9-13, it costs \$299.

Cardrona's kids centre has it all with a purpose-built nursery, day-care centre and kids' club. (www.cardrona.com)

The four-day Skivee and Lowriders accelerated development program starts every Monday. Supervision, lessons, lunch, rental and lift cost \$NZ520.

NON-SKI ACTIVITY

Falls Creek grooming tours run nightly through winter.

Hop into the huge Kassbohrer groomer's heated cabin for a first-hand look at how to fix the slopes. It costs \$35 for a 50-minute tour.

Hotham runs sparkling sunset tours at 5pm each day. A heated-cabin cat machine takes groups of six to the mountain summit for champagne and nibbles. Adults \$30, children \$15.

GRUB

Inspire at The Spire in Queenstown (www.thespirehotels.com) is where you will find Rex Morgan's award-winning degustation cuisine.

For lunch, try Amisfield Winery in Queenstown for cellar-door prices, the chef's platter and kids' picnic lunches.

Michael Newby's restaurant at Summit Ridge at Falls Creek has local produce, chai roasted duck and high-country beef (www.summitridge.com.au).

Grimus at Mt Buller (www.pensiongrimus.com.au) is an Austrian institution complete with Hans Grimus and his accordion.

NIGHTLIFE

Queenstown has 120 licensed establishments in one square kilometre. (www.queenstown-nz.co.nz)

Start the night in the Martini Bar at the Crowne Plaza for lakeside views.

Hit Bermuda for outdoor fireside cocktails, then go to Bar Up, the Boiler Room or Bunker bar for some turntable tunes.



Kids' stuff: (above) they love making snowmen.

Chef's platter: (left) the Amisfield winery.

High jinks: (main picture) clowning about at Falls Creek.



Finish up with a Fergburger hamburger in the wee hours.

VALUE

The club fields of New Zealand are a great way to get some terrific turns in for little financial outlay.

Six nights at Mt Olympus (www.mtolympus.co.nz) including accommodation, meals, lift passes and lessons is \$NZ700 for non-members and \$NZ350 for members. It costs \$50 to become a member with an annual subscription of \$50.

AND... SNOW

You can't rely on snow but you can go by snow-depth charts and average them out. Mt Ruapehu claims to have an average four metres each season and the Canterbury region of NZ has more than three metres, but it's irrelevant if the snow is simply ice.

Position is what counts. You want to be on east or southeast-facing slopes. They get the most snow.

North and east-facing slopes are prone to sun damage and south-facing slopes have the best snow quality.

So, if you can't heli to the good stuff in the Mt Cook region of NZ or trek to the back country of Kosciusko National Park, head to the far-west rolling lava slopes of Whakapapa on a bluebird day after a fresh snow storm.

But you can't rely on those days, either.