

More than 300,000 Australians will ski in NSW and Victoria this season, with another 50,000 heading across the Tasman to quench the thirst for downhill fun. If you want to make the most of your weekend or week on the slopes, prepare early and think ahead.

1 FIT TO SKI

Skiing and boarding use muscles that are not used as much in your normal daily routine and if you're not fit you'll feel it the next day. It's important to work on strength, balance and fitness when training for the snow. Working out three times a week for four to six weeks before your trip will reduce stress on the joints and muscles and ensure you can walk on your second day.

Concentrate on the quads and hamstrings for strength, cardio for fitness and stretch the groins, hamstring, hip flexors and quads to help avoid injury. For basic exercises, see www.ifyouski.com/health/fitness.

Many physiotherapists have a pre-season fitness program with fellow snow lovers (phone the Australian Physiotherapy Association for details of classes in your area, 8748 1555).

Fitness First gyms have Fit to Ski programs with a personal instructor: see www.fitnessfirst.com.au.

2 CAR FIT

Getting to the snow in Australia means driving. If you're behind the wheel be prepared for icy and unpredictable conditions and alter your driving accordingly. Book your vehicle in for a pre-ski service to ensure tyres and brakes are in optimum condition. Anti-freeze in the radiator coolant is a must – without it your radiator can crack.

Pack an emergency first aid kit along with an extra blanket, jump leads, shovel and de-icers for the windscreen. In the national parks, all two-wheel-drive vehicles must carry snow chains. Most can be hired at ski shops and petrol stations close to the snow fields for about \$20 a day.

If it's snowing heavily, steer between the orange poles and reflectors on the side of the road. If you can't see them, pull over and wait for the weather to clear. Never apply your handbrake when parking in the snow as it can freeze and snap, and lift your windscreen wipers so they don't stick to the glass.

Smooth out the ski trip bumps

Heading to the snow can be expensive and **Rachael Oakes-Ash** make the experience more enjoyable.



3 TUNE UP If you own your skis, invest in a tune-up to repair any underside damage for a clean, flat, waxed base - scratches on the ski or board base can affect your performance. A perfect flat ski bottom allows the skier or boarder to glide better and to control speed. A clean edge is important for a



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perfect turn and your ski and board's edges may have rusted or pitted over the summer. Ski tuners can return the edge to its former glory with a full ski equipment service. Larry Adler stores (www.larryadler.com.au) do an edge and wax job for \$50 and a full snowboard tune-up for \$70.

4 BEST BOOT FORWARD If you buy one piece of ski or snowboard equipment, make it boots. Skimp on these and you'll pay the price in pain. A good pair of boots can improve your performance, so spend some time trying them on. Generally your boot fitting will be tight and some fitters recommend wearing them around the house to break them in before taking them to the snow.

A qualified, experienced boot

fitter will measure your foot, your stance, skeletal alignment and ski level and make the appropriate adjustments to your new boot to ensure a flat boot on the snow. They may use customised footbeds and mould the liners. Call ahead and make an appointment with a boot fitter and don't be afraid to ask his qualifications. Paul Reader (www.paulreader.com.au), Larry Adler and Inski (www.inski.com.au) have fitting services.

5 FASHION Posh Spice skis in Chanel, dishing out \$1300 for a pair of Chanel quilted leather skis and even more for a matching ski suit and poles. European fashion houses Prada and Escada have both jumped on the ski fashion wagon producing

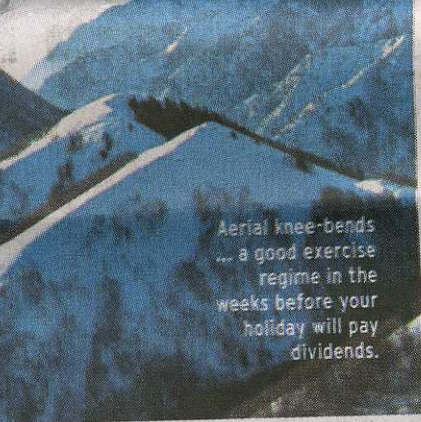
their own range of swanky label-conscious ski wear with or without fur trim. True snow addicts, however, are more likely to wear the sport specific SOS, Columbia, funky Burton and 686. Whether you buy funky and loose fitting or sleek retro, make sure the fabrics are breathable and waterproof.

Invest in some under garments such as SKINS (www.skins.com.au) or X-Undergear (www.x-undergear.com) designed to reduce fatigue on the muscles and keep the body warm and dry. You can't rent goggles so go crazy with a style from faux crocodile to bling gold. Go for power brands Electric, Oakley, Smith and Anon and ask for advice on the lens. Some come with two lenses for differing weather conditions - yellow for low-light conditions, mirror for

bright conditions. Expect to spend \$80-\$300.

6 INSURANCE This is a no-brainer. Skiing and snow boarding can hurt, injuries occur and it's best to be covered. You don't want to be left on the mountain because you can't afford the tens of thousands of dollars for a medical evacuation helicopter. If you cause an injury by running into someone else then you'd better be covered, too, as they may sue.

If you injure yourself in Australia, Medicare will cover some costs but not all; in New Zealand the government accident insurance scheme will do the same for Australian skiers. But elsewhere overseas, you won't be covered at all



Aerial knee-bends
... a good exercise
regime in the
weeks before your
holiday will pay
dividends.

Travel insurance will generally cover ski equipment, lost luggage, cancelled flights and ambulance and hospital. It's up to you whether you choose unlimited hospital cover, though this is recommended for the likes of the United States.

Among the ski-specific insurance companies are www.ski-insurance.com.au: seven-day cover for Australia is \$55 and, for Europe, \$97.

7 PRIVATE OR GROUP LESSONS, SKI IMPROVEMENT COURSES

If you're skiing for the first time this season, book some lessons. Well-meaning family members and friends may think they can teach you but it's more likely you'll just be taught their bad skiing and boarding habits instead. Good technique reduces the chance of injury and allows you to enjoy the whole mountain.

Private ski instruction is best (\$286 for a three-hour lesson in Thredbo), group lessons teach the basics (\$94 for a two-hour group lesson in Thredbo) but group numbers may be

9 KNOW THE CODE

There's an etiquette to skiing known as the Mountain Code. Stick to these rules and you'll stay safe on the mountain. Ski and board in control by knowing your ability; the person in front of you on the mountain has right of way; do not stop where you are not visible from above; obey all signs and warnings.

When encountering an accident, place your skis in a crossed formation above the injured person, alert the ski patrol and stay with them until the ski patrol arrives. If you are in an avalanche – though this is highly unlikely on a commercial ski field – “swim” to the top of the snow, keep your hands in front of your face to clear a pocket of air before the snow settles.

10 DON'T FORGET

Have fun.



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the snow unprepared
sive and embarrassing.
kes-Ashe has 10 tips to
the experience
ore enjoyable.



too large for you to move up the ski ladder quickly.

Intensive ski week programs are a great way for beginners, intermediates and advanced to improve their ski technique. Treble Cone's ASAP program in New Zealand is a five-day program, small groups of no more than five, daily instruction and video analysis for \$NZ880 (\$781) including lift pass.

Most resorts have some deals, including women's ski weeks, check websites for dates.

8 WHERE AND WHEN TO SKI

The ski season officially starts in Australia on June 9 and in New Zealand on June 16 or 23 depending on the field. The season is then split into peak and off-peak, or high season and low season for pricing. Peak times are during school holidays in July, though August is considered high season as this is when the snow is usually at its deepest.

A heavy investment in snow-making at all resorts means there will always be snow on which to ski or board as early as June if you stick to the groomed runs.

Families head to Falls Creek in Victoria and Perisher Blue in NSW, while keen skiers looking for black runs head to Thredbo, Hotham and Mt Buller. Across the Tasman, Queenstown and Wanaka have six ski fields between them including Snow Park free-style park and Snow Farm cross-country.

Christchurch is the gateway to Mt Hutt and the club fields of New Zealand. These boutique ski fields have very basic accommodation, rope tows and are more backcountry than on-piste. A great experience for those who are competent on the snow and are on a budget.

If you have the time, head to South America and ski the Andes in Chile at Portillo (www.skiportillo.com) and Argentina (www.skiargentina.com) for a Latin ski experience and serious boasting rights. August and September are the best months for these resorts.