



Ski expo

SO MUCH snow, so little time. If you want tips from the experts on finding the right overseas ski resort for you, head to the 20th International Ski Expo on this weekend.

There are representatives from resorts from the United States, Canada, France, Austria, South America and Japan explaining the advantages of the hottest and newest places to hit the slopes. Find out the best places for heliskiing adventures, night skiing or the slopes that best suit your level of skiing.

Work out whether you want to head to Colorado or Canada, or perhaps you have a hankering for a bit of apres-ski action in France.

The International Ski Expo is on today, 10am to 3pm, Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, cost free.

Visit www.travelplan.com.au for more information.

Taste the Aspen highlife

Rachael Oakes Ash soaks up the Aspen nightlife. And a bit of skiing

AS SKI towns go, Aspen is a celebrity. It's known for its multimillion-dollar properties, its world-class ski mountains and its high-profile clientele.

It hasn't always been this way. Aspen first made its name as a silver mining town in the late 1800s before launching itself as a ski resort with Aspen Mountain in 1947. Since then three more mountain resorts have been added to the Aspen fold.

Combined, Buttermilk, Aspen Highlands, Snowmass and Aspen Mountain offer more than 2100 skiable hectares of dry Colorado powder.

It's rude not to share Aspen with someone, whether lover or friend, if only to have a second pair of eyes when spotting the celebrities. Goldie and Kurt, Jack Nicholson and Kevin Costner all have property in these parts.

Jen and Vince, when they were together, chose the swanky St Regis to

lay their silky locks and Elle Macpherson was discovered on the slopes of Aspen Mountain as a teenager.

Aspen is American for Apres which means get your drinking shoes on in English. The 39 Degrees bar at the Sky Hotel (www.skyhotel.com) is de rigueur come 5pm when the instructors come down from the hill, their pockets fat with tips from rich clients.

Little Nell (www.littlenell.com) is slopeside at the bottom of Aspen Mountain and complimentary canapes are served each afternoon after the lifts close. The bar at nearby Hotel Jerome (www.hoteljerome.com) was favoured by Hunter S Thompson during his day and is still frequented by creative types.

The beauty of ski towns is everyone's on a high, they're on holidays and if the snow is on and it's been a bluebird day then they're floating on the ceiling.

It's impossible not to mingle and strike up conversations with strangers



in these conditions and Americans love to talk.

Jimmy's is a staple at Aspen (www.jimmysaspen.com), a first-floor bar with high wooden bar tables and a wall signed by every Jimmy that's ever entered. It's casual and fun and worth a visit for a drink or dinner.

Don't be fooled, it's not all schuss by day and drinking by night. Aspen is a romantic town, with all those twinkling street lights and snow-lined lane-ways. It's the kind of town marriage proposals are made, honeymooners come to and weddings are held.

Get close to your loved one high in the sky with a hot air balloon ride over the snow with Unicorn Balloons (www.unicornballoon.com), snuggle



up under a rug with a horse-drawn sleigh ride to the log cabin at Pine Creek Cookhouse (www.pinecreekcookhouse.com) for hearty mountain food or take a dog sled ride to Krabloonik (www.krabloonik.com) for the wild game menu.

Brush up on your gourmet skills with a culinary adventure. Both Aspen Cooking School (www.cookingschoolofaspen.com) and Back Door Catering (www.backdoorcatering.com) offer group cooking classes.

If you've still room on the credit card then get shopping. Check out the windows of Prada, Dior, LV and their friends. Drop in to Kemo Sabe for western-style gear and Gracy's of Aspen, a consignment store where all

the celebs sell off their cast-ons at a fraction of the original price.

Then there's the spa; sigh. Couple it with a massage for two at the Aspen Club (www.aspenclub.com) with an Alpine Rejuvenator massage or an Oxygen Treatment facial. The Remede Spa at St Regis (www.stregis.aspen.com) has its own oxygen lounge to help with altitude adjustment and a hydrotherapy pool to soothe muscles.

Have we mentioned the skiing? Hike the 45 minutes up hill at Aspen Highlands to the back bowl, ski down the open back-country bowl and finish with lunch at Cloud 9 Alpine Bistro with a breathtaking vista.

Adventurous couples take a Powder Tour by snowcat (www.aspensnowmass.com) to secret powder stashes or take a lift-accessed back-country day with Aspen Expeditions (www.aspenexpeditions.com).

We haven't even mentioned the ESPN Winter X Games, the Comedy Festival, the art galleries, the swanky Montagna restaurant, the groovy D-19 diner or the Explore Bookstore.

Aspen does that to you, always leaves you begging for more.