

The white stuff



The Remarkables, South Island, New Zealand



Snowboarding at Treble Cone, New Zealand

Ski and boarding enthusiasts are counting down the days to the official start of the ski season on the June long weekend. Whether you're a seasoned professional or starting out for the first time, there's a ski field and resort to suit you, writes **RACHAEL OAKES-ASH**. The only question is, which side of the Tasman?

AUSTRALIA

New South Wales

THREDBO

www.thredbo.com.au

Thredbo is known as the skier's mountain, with 480 hectares of all-level terrain. Home to Australia's longest ski run, the 5.9-kilometre stretch from the highest lifted point of Karel's T-Bar to Friday Flats, Thredbo has more than 670 metres of vertical terrain to burn the thigh muscles. There's a host of on-mountain eateries to rest weary legs before hitting the slopes again and great 'Prada princess' viewing from the village square.

Parents can drop off the bubs at day care and the kids at ski school at Friday Flat where beginners have their own ski area with magic carpet and chairlift. Once graduated, beginners hit the green runs of Thredbo before conquering the mountain's mammoth 67 per cent of intermediate terrain. Black diamond masters have their fair share of bowls, drops, wind lips and tree runs to play in.

PERISHER BLUE

www.perisherblue.com.au

Family-friendly Perisher Blue is favoured for its wide

open ego skiing – skiing that's good for the ego, on groomed runs designed to make you feel like a god. The vertical drop is half that of Thredbo but what it lacks on the vertical it makes up with its 1245 hectares of wide open ego terrain. Combining seven mountain peaks with more than 50 chairlifts, Perisher Blue is a hit with the snowboarding crowd with its four terrain parks and one almighty super pipe.

The beauty of Perisher Blue is its ski-in, ski-out accommodation. Most of the resort's lodgings are found on-mountain, which means stepping outside and stepping into snow. Open fire restaurants, grills and piano bars keep the après crowd entertained and September's annual Spring Carnival means two weeks of frivolity for all ages.

MT SELWYN

www.selwynsnow.com.au

Mt Selwyn is a truly intimate snow sport experience. This boutique field caters for the beginner crowd, which makes it ideal for first-timer toddlers. The ski field is 45 hectares of easy gradient with 40 per cent devoted to the beginner and almost 50 per cent to the intermediate skier. Snowmaking ensures the field is covered at all times. For the non-skiers and the

young at heart there's snow tubing and tobogganing – or try your hand at 45 kilometres of cross-country ski trails.

Victoria

MT BULLER

www.mtbuller.com.au

Melburnians looking for a white weekend head to Mt Buller for some snow action each weekend. They're in good company. You may find yourself sipping a cappuccino next to Alissa Camplin or Jacqui Cooper as Mt Buller is the aerialists' training ground.

The resort features 180 hectares of terrain accessed by high speed chairlifts and centred on the infamous 'Bourke Street' green run, known for its peak hour traffic. Sit slope-side and watch the beginners steer around each other. It's better than watching *Funniest Home Videos*.

There's plenty to do here for après: hang out at La Trobe winter campus cinema, chow down at the Black Cockatoo fine dining restaurant or shoot some pool at Kooroora pub before it turns into a late-night disco.

MT HOTHAM

www.hotham.com.au

New South Wales has Thredbo, Victoria has Mt Hotham. An elite mountain playground for those who love steeps, powder bowls, chutes and gullies. There's back country snow gum terrain accessed by Cat mobiles for fresh tracks and the renowned 'Mary's Slide' for the daring. With 37 per cent of the resort's 300-plus hectares marked out for advanced

skiers, you want to know how to jump turn before you tackle this mountain.

Don't despair just yet, there are equal amounts of intermediate to practise on and a separate ski school area with green zoned runs. Then there's Zirky's, Hotham Central and the General Store for post-ski beverages. The best news is the airport: fly into Hotham airport and be on the snow within half an hour of touchdown.

FALLS CREEK

www.falls-creek.com.au

Across the range sits Falls Creek. It's 450 hectares of wide, groomed runs all the way, with Cat-skiing at Mt McKay for those seeking off-piste pleasures. There are bump runs at Exhibition, children's fun



Perisher Blue, NSW

PERISHER BLUE



Mt Hutt, South Island, New Zealand

MILES HOLDEN, NEW ZEALAND SKI TOURISM

Sit slope-side and watch the beginners steer around each other. It's better than watching *Funniest Home Videos*.

runs through the magic trees, superpipes and terrain parks and 28 bars for an après-ski drink. Add ski-in, ski-out lodging, a funky basement cinema, live bands at The Man and an alpine spa called Endota, and you have an all-inclusive winter playground.

NEW ZEALAND

Whether its heli-skiing, powder bowls or snow ploughing the baby slopes at Cardrona, New Zealand has it all. But do note when booking a ski holiday in New Zealand that on-mountain accommodation only exists at Cardrona ski field. The rest are anything from 15 minutes to an hour's drive from your place of stay. This is easily fixed with daily transfers – or hire a 4WD for true mobility.

South Island

MT HUTT

www.nzski.com/mthutt

Mt Hutt is considered the gateway to the Southern Alps. The ski field features 365 hectares of terrain with a six-seater high-speed-chair for more time on snow. Beginners' facilities are first-rate, with a dedicated ski school area with a 1.2 kilometre run to practise on. Intermediates have half the mountain

allocated as 'blue' and the advanced can tackle the Rakaia Saddle Chutes. If conditions are good, drop off down the North Peak and be picked up by helicopter and dropped back at the car park for around NZ\$150.

Closest town: Methven

Local tip: Both Burton and Salomon offer board and ski starter packs including equipment, lessons and lift pass for bargain prices. Enquire at the ski school.

TREBLE CONE

www.treblecone.co.nz

Some would call Treble Cone New Zealand's answer to Thredbo and Hotham while others say it's the other way round. Treble Cone has 550 hectares of skiable terrain and access to New Zealand's finest back country runs if you're prepared to trek. This is the favoured spot for the Austrian ski team to train in their off season and it's well worth an early rise to watch them race.

Snow making ensures consistent snow conditions across the 660 metres of vertical drop. Views from Treble Cone are the best from any ski field and while there's only one on-mountain catering option at the base of the mountain, it has an exceptional range of fresh tasty treats and good coffee.

Closest town: Wanaka

Local tip: Treble Cone is affectionately referred to as TC.

CARDRONA

www.cardrona.co.nz

If you want to feel like a snow king or queen you come to Cardrona to play. A seriously schmick

resort, Cardrona boasts one of the best ski schools and kids' programs in New Zealand and 320 hectares of dry snow. There are catering choices galore, including a noodle bar and mountain pizza café. The terrain park is topnotch and although the runs are short, they are wide and groomed. If you need more of a challenge, ride the chutes at Captain's chairlift.

Closest town: Midway between Queenstown and Wanaka

Local tip: Finish the day with a mulled wine by the outside fire at the Cardrona Hotel at the base of the access road – it's tradition.

THE REMARKABLES

www.nzski.com/remarkables

Known as 'Remarks', this resort proves good things come in small packages. With a mere 220 hectares of developed ski terrain, Remarks' three bowls provide fun, groomed skiing at the top of the chairlifts – or take a 10-minute hike and hit the wide, ungroomed home run or the more challenging narrow finger chutes. There's a magic carpet beginners area, a cute kids' terrain park and some fantastic super pipes for boarders and freestylers to play on. The terrain is evenly spaced beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Closest town: Queenstown

Local tip: Factor 30 protection under the sun.

CORONET PEAK

www.nzski.com/coronet

This is the local's mountain. A mere 30-minute drive from Queenstown,

early birds hit the snow before the start of business. Snow making is big here, keeping coverage on the hill throughout the season. There are 280 hectares of terrain split 20 per cent beginners, 45 per cent intermediate and 35 per cent advanced, with easy transition between each. Freestyle expression sessions for those over 10 years of age are held throughout the season so you can try your hand at the new style of skiing and boarding in a safe environment.

Closest town: Queenstown

Local tip: Night skiing on a Saturday.

North Island

MT RUAPEHU

www.mtruapehu.co.nz

Whakapapa (the 'wh' is pronounced as 'f'), and its sister ski field, Turoa, sit on either side of the active volcano, Mt Ruapehu, on New Zealand's North Island. Both are good-sized fields with more than 1000 hectares between them. Natural lava flows have created beautiful half pipes and wide, open rolling territory for boarders and skiers alike at Whakapapa where the beginners' area is separated from the main mountain to prevent any panic in those finding their ski feet. Turoa features the country's longest ski run at four kilometres and some awesome purpose-built super and half pipes. Green, blue or black, it's all here.

Closest towns: Whakapapa and Ohakune

Local tip: The Powder Keg for post-piste beers.

Call your local Travellers Choice consultant on 1300 78 78 58 for more information.

SKI LIKE A GIRL

Check out resort websites for women's ski programs that offer a week of female ski instructors teaching women in a supportive environment, complete with spa treatments and social program. Thredbo, Perisher, Falls Creek and Hotham in Australia run them, as does Mt Ruapehu and Treble Cone in New Zealand.



CHARLIE BROWN, FALLS CREEK

BEST OF THE BEST

Largest skiable terrain: Perisher, 1245 hectares

Most vertical rise: Treble Cone (705 metres)

Longest run: Thredbo, 5.9 kilometres

Best après-ski: Queenstown, 120 licensed establishments in one square kilometer

Boasting rights: Mary's Slide at Mt Hotham

Best alpine spa: Endota, Falls Creek