

Love trysts with a twist



Marriage on the slide: a bride at Loveland. Inset: a heartfelt "I do".

Ski bunnies get hitched in Loveland, writes

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united states

LOVE makes people do funny things: hire billboards to propose marriage, move countries, elope to Las Vegas...

But travel and love do make a compatible couple. Some destinations, such as Bora Bora and Hayman Island, are strictly single-free zones where the animals come only in twos.

And then there's Loveland. This appropriately titled settlement is 40 minutes west along the I-70 interstate highway from Denver, Colorado.

At first glance it seems not much more than a snow-lined hill for daytrippers with skis.

It lacks the romantic glamour of the resort at nearby Vail. Couples in Loveland would be hard-pressed to find a lodge to snuggle in, because the ski field has no overnight accommodation.

You would hardly pick it as the first choice for a lovers' day out on the slopes, but come February 14 it's a different story.

Welcome to the annual "marry me and ski free" Valentine's Day — one hell of a commitment just to get a free ski pass.

At first glance, it looks more like a venue for a fancy-dress party than a wedding ceremony as the ski fields fill with grooms in tuxedos, faux leopard-skin fur and top hats.

traveller's checks

Getting there: Loveland is an easy day trip from Denver, Colorado. United Airlines flies from Melbourne to LA via Sydney daily. Connecting flights to Denver. www.united.com

Skiing: Adult lift passes are \$US60 (\$68) and give access to good intermediate and advanced terrain with glades, bump runs and wide-groomed corduroy. www.skiloveland.com



Then the brides arrive, and I start to look for the hidden cameras.

Snowboarding women appear with veils pinned to their helmets, snow white all-in-one ski suits

adorned with snowflake print, full-length hooped bridal frocks with red velvet capes, ski goggles with tulle, ski poles entwined with flowers, love hearts and glitter.

Sixty-four couples have registered to marry or renew their vows atop Loveland mountain at noon.

It's the 15th year of the event and some are back to celebrate their mountain wedding anniversary. Others are celebrating 55 years of wedded bliss. One bride arrives on a chauffeur-driven skidoo, her leg in plaster and her crutches tricked out in bridal blue.

But don't get me wrong — the mountain backdrop is perfect for the white-wedding photo album.

Tom and Nic chose a mountain wedding, as did Billy Joel and Christie Brinkley. But these two celebrity couples chose the millionaire's box canyon of Telluride, with high security.

It feels odd attending the weddings of strangers, especially when even they don't all know one another.

Most are mountain mad, but that's obvious. Some met while skiing at Loveland; others met through their love of snow sports. Some have brought family; others have families who will find they're hitched when they watch the evening news.

The minister says a few words from atop an old picnic table, so all can see him. A big group kiss and it's all over.

Each pronounced husband and wife, the couples ski down the mountain to the mass reception at the chairlift restaurant, where those with tickets line up for the buffet and share the communal wedding cake.

Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park – A Living Cultural Landscape

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