

It's snow time!

When the temperatures drop it's time to head to NSW's winter playgrounds. Rachael Oakes-Ash reports.

Perisher Blue (including Smiggins Holes)

Families and first timers love the skiing at Perisher Blue. Over one fifth of the resort is dedicated to beginners and a further 60% to intermediate level, with an easy transition between the two. And there's plenty of black out the back for those who know what they're doing.

Perisher is Australia's biggest ski field, with over 1240 hectares spread over seven mountains linked by chairlifts, skitube and shuttle bus. The resort is known for its terrain parks and superpipes for freestyle skiers and boarders.



The adventurous trek back country with a guide and stay in an igloo ...

Got kids? All day, half-day and hourly childcare is available, with a daily program from 8.30am–4.00pm for those under three. Five consecutive days, including morning tea, lunch and afternoon

tea, costs \$428 per child.

The ski school offers all day or half-day programs for one to five days for kids six–14 years so they can learn to ski with others their age and ski ability. Parents are then free to spend the time hitting the slopes at their own pace.

Non skiers, or those wanting a day off from the action, can have fun on the inflatable tubes at Tube Town, snowshoe the back country on a guided tour or

check out the mountain from the cabin of a Snow Groomer.

There's the usual assortment of cafes and bistros both on the mountain and in the village. Be warned, prices are more expensive at the snow than in your home town. For those on a budget, stock up at your supermarket on the way down and fill your ski jacket with muesli bars for mountain sustenance.

Pub lovers head to the Man for pool tables, open fire and live entertainment; Tuesday night is comedy night at the Sundeck Hotel; and for those seeking intimate cosy cocktails try Ruffles.

around a sophisticated village square. The resort is divided into Woodridge and the Thredbo Leisure Centre.

It's walking distance to the beginner slopes at Friday Flat and the ski school, and a complimentary shuttle bus to the Valley Terminal and Village Square.

Bela's Corner is where most of the lodge-style accommodation can be found, and is high on the hill behind the village facing the mountain.

Crackenback Ridge is at the exclusive end of accommodation in town, with Thredbo's only 'ski in, ski out' accommodation.

The ski school at Thredbo offers a variety of programs for children and adults, including specially designed women's and improvement programs. Kids are well catered for both on and off the snow at Thredboland, which has its own fibre optic flare run operating on a Thursday night.

Lift and lesson deals are offered to first timers and there's free night riding on Saturday nights for the more advanced.

Twelve lifts access the 480 hectares of ski terrain, with off-piste opportunities for the advanced skier and groomed runs for the intermediate. Seven hundred thousand visitors pass through Thredbo each winter and there can be lift queues at peak times, so get in early.

The adventurous trek back country with a guide and stay in an igloo, but the Thredbo Leisure Centre offers a tamer adventure with indoor pool and climbing wall.

BEST TIME TO GO

Mid-week throughout the season is obviously quieter but, with more terrain, weekend lift queues are kept to a minimum even during peak months. The 2006 Planet X Winter Games Half Pipe and Garnier Fructis Open Snowboard Championships is scheduled for August and worth a look.

For details about other special events on in the area during the season, visit www.perisherblue.com.au.

Thredbo

Thredbo has a reputation as the skier's mountain since the first lifts were installed in 1956. Home to the country's longest ski run, 5.9km from Karel's T Bar to Friday Flat, Thredbo village sits

weather can exaggerate any existing minor faults; and

- Ensure your vehicle cooling system has the right amount of anti-freeze in it.

Ice and hills are a lethal mix, so when in snow country never:

- Accelerate hard;
- Brake hard;
- Turn the steering hard;
- Drive over 40km/h; or
- Overtake another vehicle.

Most cars that lose control are doing one or all of the above. Always be patient and don't hurry. Also, drive in a lower gear and use only enough brake pedal pressure

to stay in control and avoid wheel lock. If your wheels lock, don't panic and resist the urge to brake harder. Lift your foot off the pedal, get the wheels rolling again in the right direction, then gently reapply the brakes – this time a little more softly.

Neil Thew, from Perisher Blue, says watch out for 'black ice', give plenty of distance to the car in front and always carry chains (see right). "We have had plenty of occasions where motorists have been caught out not carrying chains and it snowed heavily. They [then] ... have to wait for NRMA to bring them chains to fit," says Neil.

CHAINS

Fitting snow chains to your wheels can help prevent slips and slides. You're not required to carry chains when you're travelling up the Alpine Way to Thredbo, but they are mandatory when you're heading into the Perisher Ski Resort due to the altitude. Generally, police and/or the National Parks & Wildlife Service will instruct you when chains are required.

Wheel chains can be purchased, or in some cases hired, from the Thredbo Service Station. Chains can also be fitted for you at an extra cost – often in car parks or lodges.

The BIG freeze

Col Battersby and his team look after Thredbo for NRMA. Calls from stranded drivers keep their phones running hot during winter. Here, Col provides some advice to make sure you spend more time skiing on the slopes than stuck on the roads.

Icy roads are common in the Snowy Mountains in winter and can be a real hazard. Before you leave home:

- Pay attention to weather reports so you know what to expect;
- Make sure your engine and the battery are in good condition as icy



If you're not skiing Thredbo, you're sipping lattes at Gourmet 42, shopping for street ski wear at Chill Factor or checking out the European designers at Snowsport Mountain Clothing.

At the end of the Thredbo day, it's all about the après. The ski elite warm up with a cocktail at the Thredbo Alpine Hotel piano bar, then delight the palate at riverside Credo for award-winning cuisine or Santes for dining by candlelight.

Eagles Nest sits atop the ski hill and is open Saturday nights for dinner; Sunday is yum cha at the Denman; and every night is party night at Keller nightclub.

And how do you know when to take them off? Simple. "Chains should be removed as soon as there is no snow on the road, ie. when the bitumen looks black. Driving with chains on your car when there is no snow will destroy the chain and very likely damage your vehicle," says Col.

Susie Diver from Thredbo Alpine Resorts suggests packing a ground sheet and a spare pair of gloves in case you have to fit chains.

Call the Thredbo Service Station on 6457 6234 for advice on road conditions and chain information.

Note: Digging out snow from

around cars in parking areas (as opposed to genuine salvage situations) is not a provision of NRMA roadside assistance. Patrols in the area can help you to extricate your car, but charges will apply. Col's team at Thredbo even sells shovels to motorists who want to dig their own cars out. For full terms and conditions visit www.mynrma.com.au/membership_facts.asp.

WHERE TO GO

Located half way between Sydney and Melbourne, in the Mount Kosciusko National Park, both resorts (Perisher Blue and Thredbo) are a six-hour drive from Sydney.

BEST TIME TO GO:

August is peak time at Thredbo, which means book early. For more details visit www.thredbo.com.au.

OTHER SKI PLAYGROUNDS

Jindabyne

Set on the manmade Jindabyne Lake, the town of Jindabyne provides a budget alternative to staying snow side. With coach access to all the ski fields daily, it is the hub of the snowfields for rental equipment, mountain stores and supermarkets. And it's only a half-hour drive to Thredbo and Perisher Blue.

When making the half-hour drive, Susie

Diver from Thredbo Alpine Resorts recommends "leaving by 7am to miss the traffic".

For more details visit www.snowymountains.com.au.

Selwyn

For a truly intimate ski experience choose Selwyn's 45 hectares of groomed snow. Ideal for beginners, with over a third of the ski field classified as terrain for first timers. Also, a toboggan park, snowtubing and cross-country trails.

For more details visit www.selwynsnow.com.au.

1 Photolibary | 2 Courtesy of Tourism Thredbo

FEES AND PARKING

Entrance to Mount Kosciusko National Park is \$22 per day, per car, and \$145 for an annual pass. Long term and day parking is available at both resorts, and the Skitube car park has day and overnight parking, with direct access to Perisher Blue.

WHERE TO STAY

For budget accommodation at Thredbo, kids can 'stay and ski for free' at a number of places in June and September, including Black Bear Inn. Cost is \$842 per adult for five nights, with daily breakfast, three dinners and a five-and-a-half-day lift pass. Conditions apply.

Call 1300 020 589.

For budget accommodation at Perisher, book and pay for two adults by June 1 at Alpine Gables for a five-day mid-week or seven-night package and up to four kids stay free. Call 1300 655 811.

For luxury accommodation at Thredbo, stay at its only five-star accommodation, Ski In Ski Out on Crackenback Ridge. Call 6457 7030 or visit www.skiinskiout.com.au.

For luxury accommodation at Perisher, stay at the Stables Resort at Front Valley for private fireplaces and spa tubs. Bliss. Call 9979 7955 or visit www.deanes.com.au.