

# Ultimate ski destinations

Mention some of these resorts to your skiing friends and they'll be green with envy, writes **Rachael Oakes Ash**

**T**HE world of skiing provides serious bragging rights for the boastful traveller. There's nothing like dropping Aspen, St Anton, Whistler and Courchevel into the Friday-night dinner party conversation to watch your friends go green.

If you really want to impress with your ski destinations, it's time to start dropping names further afield. It's all about being the first one there so you can say, "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt" before your friends have even booked their flight.

Add these to your ski wish list and start writing the postcards.

## Gulmarg, India

The Himalayan town of Gulmarg in Kashmir is *the* hot destination. The rebel-infested border of Pakistan only 5km away certainly gives Gulmarg an element of danger but the slopes cater to both intermediate and advanced skiers.

The 36-seat gondola is the highest in the world, peaking at 3980m above sea level.

Expect luxury in Gulmarg and you'll be disappointed; look for adventure and you'll be well rewarded. Take a guide off-piste, as it's serious terrain with matching vertical.



**HOT** ski action in Chile ... Portillo, the oldest ski resort in South America.

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Getting there is no easy feat but worth it. Fly to New Delhi, then to Srinagar, and it's a 50km drive from there. Three key agencies service Gulmarg. Two British boarders have set up Himalayan Powder Dreams ([www.himalayanpowderdreams.com](http://www.himalayanpowderdreams.com)); two local Kashmiris and an Israeli set up Kashmir Alpine ([www.kashmiralpine.com](http://www.kashmiralpine.com)) and an Australian has established Ski Himalaya ([www.skihimalaya.com](http://www.skihimalaya.com)).

## Craigieburn, NZ

They say if you can ski Craigieburn you can ski anywhere in the world. It has some of New Zealand's most challenging patrolled terrain. There are steeps, deeps and chutes, grooming doesn't exist and you'd best know how to parallel turn before attempting the Burn.

If the pitch doesn't get you, the nutcracker tow rope will. Here's how it works: A barbecue tool-style contraption is attached to a belt on your waist, thrown over a moving metal chain and you're hauled up the mountain by the power of a tractor in a shed.

Add a chores board with roster for guests to "pitch in" for kitchen and housekeeping duties, a generator that runs from 7am to 9am and only a few hours each night, bunk-style accommodation and a truly majestic view from the mountain-top day lodge, and you'll experience the best of Kiwi club fields.

Craigieburn has 400ha of back country terrain with access to a lot more if you carry an avalanche beacon. Ski over the top to the neighbouring Broken River club field and double your terrain with one lift ticket.

## Need to know

Just a 90-minute drive from Christchurch, Craigieburn won't do too much damage to your wallet. Lift tickets are \$NZ28 for a member, \$55 for a non-member. Dinner, bed and breakfast is \$75 per night for non-members or \$38 for a member.

Visit [www.craigieburn.co.nz](http://www.craigieburn.co.nz)

## Bansko, Bulgaria

It's the St Moritz, the Aspen, the Whistler of Bulgaria — or it will be 20 years from now.

Millions of euros are being pumped into the development of this ski resort in the Pirin Mountains of Bulgaria, designated a World Heritage site.

A quaint Bulgarian town with historic churches, chalets and the like, Bansko offers retro skiing at its best. Most of the town's taverns and pubs are historic buildings with that authentic Bulgarian alpine feel.

## Need to know

The skiing peaks at 2600m with a base level of 990m, and the town of Bansko is below that. There's a 16km ski run, new fast-speed chairlifts, an eight-person gondola and 65km of allocated runs.

Visit [www.banskoski.com](http://www.banskoski.com)

## Sinaia, Romania

This is picture postcard-style skiing. Sinaia is a ski town built around palaces, monasteries and castles. Nearby is Peles Castle, King Carol of Romania's summer home, built in the late 19th century and considered the most romantic in Europe.

Other attractions include the 17th century Sinaia Monastery, a thriving apres ski scene, swanky restaurants and the largest ski terrain in Romania.

## Need to know

There are 60km of on-piste terrain, more than 1km of vertical and a 6km run.

Visit [www.skiromania.com](http://www.skiromania.com)

## Portillo, Chile

The oldest ski area in South America, Portillo was the pioneer of ski resorts in Chile. The resort is self-contained with three lodges. Guests arrive on and leave on Saturdays for a week of Andean ski spirit. There's skiing for all types here — beginners, intermediates, advanced and expert are all well catered for.

About 80 per cent of the terrain is groomed but for the more daring, heli-skiing is available.

## Need to know

Portillo ([www.skiportillo.com](http://www.skiportillo.com)) is a two-hour drive from Santiago. The ski season lasts from July to October. Travelplan Ski Holidays offer all-inclusive packages to Portillo. Visit [www.travelplan.com.au](http://www.travelplan.com.au)

## Heli-ski Alaska

The Chugach is a 6400sq km mountain area of supreme Alaskan heli-skiing. Runs are long and offer glacial, super steeps and powder bowls, all for the advanced to expert skier. Experienced and safe heli-ski guides lead clients daily. Lodging is private ensuite-style.

## Need to know

Valdez Heli-Ski Guides (visit their website at [www.valdezheliskiguides.com](http://www.valdezheliskiguides.com)) are some of the best available in the region but it's certainly not cheap. Seven-night heli-ski trips average more than \$US7000.