

Destination

The lyrics of Christmas songs make infinitely more sense when played in a ski town. They are indeed winter wonderlands and baby, it is cold outside. Our first family international ski trip was to Canada in mid-December. We were in Whistler and had an absolute ball. We loved walking around the drop-dead pretty village, ice skating, ziplining through snow-clad trees, and of course the skiing. It was the start of a love affair that shows no signs of waning.

Choosing to ski in the Northern Hemisphere does give you that option of a white Christmas. Santa is on hand at most resorts to meet the children, and even the jolly red man can't resist a ski or snowboard down the slopes. You will usually find a horse-drawn sleigh to jingle through the snow on and, if you are in Europe, you can tie in a visit to Christmas markets that have been running for centuries. Innsbruck is an example, or Bolzano in the Dolomites.

Skiing in Europe, Canada or the USA in January is a great option as it might be school holidays for us, but not for them. This means the resorts are not overcrowded during the week. Then there is the opportunity to infuse some culture into your ski trip, by opting for a resort in Japan, France, Italy, Switzerland or Austria.

Talk to a respected ski wholesaler, like Skimax, Travelplan, or SkiJapan, who can bundle up everything you need in one package, from lift tickets to accommodation, gear hire and lessons. And if you can't decide where to go, here are some suggestions...

If you want to take a break from riding the wind and waves of the Australian summer, **Helen Hayes** suggests perhaps it's time to ride the snow-covered slopes of a Northern Hemisphere ski resort instead.

HOLIDAYS ON HIGH

PHOTOGRAPHY: SWITZERLAND TOURISM



Zermatt

Zermatt | Switzerland

Skiing in the shadow of the Matterhorn is one of the highlights of Zermatt, which boasts three main ski areas covering 360 kilometres. The highest ski resort in Switzerland, Zermatt's Matterhorn Glacier area sits at a dizzying 3,883 metres and is open for skiing all year round. Then there's the Zermatt ski area and Cervinia/Valtournenche. For something different, ski over to Italy for lunch. It will take you all day, but hey, how often can you say you did that?

Zermatt's car-free old town, with its jumble of chalets, creates a lovely ambience and is wonderful to stroll through after a day on the slopes. Take your pick of many



wonderful restaurants and lively apres-ski bars. For some other fun activities try sledding on the Gornergrat in the shadow of the mighty Matterhorn, curling, or take to the air in a paraglider.

zermatt.ch
myswitzerland.com

Top: Zermatt's mighty Matterhorn mountain is said to have inspired the shape of the Toblerone chocolate bar.

Above: With 360km of ski areas and a glacier that tops out at 3,883m, Zermatt offers plenty of scope for escape.



St Anton am Arlberg

Arlberg | Austria

Located in the Arlberg, St Anton is known as the cradle of alpine skiing. It is also famous for its steep runs, charming Tyrolean village and the legendary apres-ski scene with schnapps the order of the day.

A network of 88 high-tech cable cars and lifts transport skiers to a Disneyland of terrain, and other Arlberg villages and ski resorts. Explore Lech, Oberlech, Zürs, St Christoph, Stuben and Warth-Schröken on one lift ticket, stopping at gorgeous mountain huts and bars along the way for gourmet Tyrolean fare and a bevvoy or two. Each of the towns has its own distinct character, with St Christoph welcoming alpine travellers since the 14th century and catering to just 700 guests.
stantonamarlberg.com



You can ski from and to the door, exploring between the villages, and then venture further afield into Les Trois Vallées, the largest ski area in the world.



Courchevel

Courchevel | France

With its private air strip, designer shops and swarm of five-star hotels, Courchevel drips with wealth, but it walks the walk of one of Europe's best ski resorts. Courchevel has six villages, named for their altitude, including Courchevel 1850, Courchevel Moriond, Courchevel Village, Courchevel Le Praz, Courchevel La Tania, and Saint-Bon. Courchevel 1850 is the glamourpuss of them all with a swag of five-star properties including Le Chabichou, which is anything but shabby with a Michelin-starred

Top: Courchevel offers a variety of ski-in, ski-out accommodations, as well as access to the world's largest ski area.

restaurant and spectacular spa. You can ski from and to the door, exploring between the villages, and then venture further afield into Les Trois Vallées, the largest ski area in the world. You can play on 600 kilometres of terrain, skiing to Meribel, Val Thorens, Les Menuires or St Martin de Belleville. In St Martin you'll find a wonderful restaurant called La Bouitt that will knock your ski socks off.
courchevel.com

TIP Depending on where you want to go, it might be worth investing in an Epic Pass or an Ikon Pass, both of which offer multi-resort lift access, although predominantly in the US and Canada (the Ikon pass does include Zermatt and a handful of resorts in South America, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere), or even a season pass at the resort you have chosen.



ALL MAPS COURTESY GOOGLE MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID ANDRE



Niseko

Hokkaido | Japan

Niseko is usually the place to go for first-timers to Japan. It has English-speaking lessons, English menus, and the famous Hokkaido powder snow. There are four resorts around the sides of Mount Annupuri – Grand Hirafu, Hanazono, Niseko Village, and Annupuri – all linked so you can ski from one to the

Don't go backcountry skiing without a guide and make sure you have the right gear, and do go to Bar Gyu – the best ski bar anywhere. You enter through a fridge door.



PHOTOGRAPHY: WILLIE NELSON

other. The main place to stay is in Hirafu, which has a great selection of luxury condos and hotels, such as Skye Niseko, Ki or Aya Niseko, and great traditional Japanese restaurants and onsens. There is accommodation in Niseko, and Hanazono will welcome its first hotel – the Park Hyatt Hotel and Residences – on 20 January 2020. The night skiing at Hirafu is the best I have seen anywhere in the world, with a great array of runs lit up. Some tips: don't go backcountry skiing without a guide and make sure you have the right gear; and do go to Bar Gyu, the best ski bar anywhere. Entry is through a fridge door. niseko.ne.jp/en/



Above: Niseko is Japan's number one snow resort and comprises four interlinked resorts in Hokkaido.



Whistler

British Columbia | Canada

Whistler is open-judged the best ski resort in the world, and there's a reason why – it is just 90 minutes from Vancouver and has two mountains to explore. Whistler and Blackcomb both have more than 100 runs, with a combined 3,306 hectares of snowy goodness to ski or board on. The two are linked by the incredible Peak 2 Peak gondola, which has several cars with clear-glass floors just so you can see how high up you really are. Whistler village is home base for access to both mountains, or you can stay at Creekside, which has shuttle access to Whistler village and lift access to the mountain. While you're there, try the Peak to Creek run - a knee-trembling 11-kilometre run from the top of Whistler to Creekside. There are activities aplenty, with the Fire and Ice show a must. whistlerblackcomb.com whistler.com



Top: Whistler itself presents a true winter wonderland for visitors and skiers alike, yet is only 90 minutes from the vibrant and cosmopolitan city of Vancouver.



Left and below: A series of runs span the two mountains of Whistler and Blackcomb, which are connected by the Peak 2 Peak gondola. Activities extend far beyond skiing and include a thrilling zipline ride.



Kicking Horse

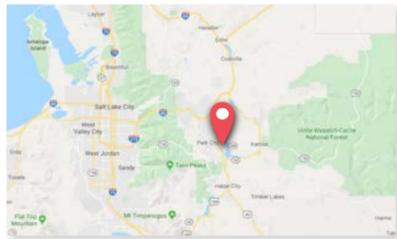
British Columbia | Canada

Located near the town of Golden, Kicking Horse Mountain Resort is one for those who like it steep and deep. It is not the biggest or the most glamorous, but it has one of the best vibes

of any ski resort I have been to. Diehards who love double blacks will be stoked with 85 chutes and a host of runs to curl your toes. If you are like me and prefer cruisy blues, then Crystal Bowl and Bowl Over are fabulous too. Kicking Horse also has a resident grizzly bear by the name of Boo, who was given his own sanctuary when he was an orphaned cub. Ski right up to his den and read all about him (follow *Boo Grizzly* on facebook). There's accommodation at the base or stay up in the clouds in a Summit Suite atop Eagles Eye Restaurant, at a lofty 2,346 metres. The view is astonishing. kickinghorseresort.com tourismgolden.com

Left: Double blacks and 85 chutes make Kicking Horse one for those who like it steep and with great vibes.





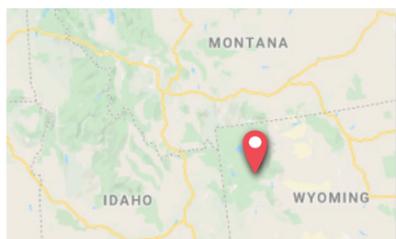
Deer Valley

Utah | USA

Deer Valley is different for several reasons. One, it is a ski-only resort with no snowboarding allowed. Two, it was designed to be five star and to deliver five-star service to skiers, and it certainly does that. There are valets to take your skis at the end of the day, ambassadors to give you advice, and people to help out all around the mountain. There is skiing to suit everyone, a fantastic ski school, and as for where to stay in style – Stein Eriksen Lodge or the Montage are both ski-in, ski-out and are stunning. Deer Valley is also known for its award-winning seafood buffet, and for fireside dining at Empire Lodge with its fondue goodness. Nearby Park City with its beautiful historic Main Street has a swag of restaurants to choose from, ranging from No Names Bar & Grill to the highly rated Handle. deervalley.com



PHOTOGRAPHY: ERIC SCHRAMM



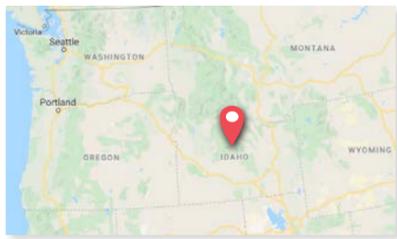
Jackson Hole

Wyoming | USA

Jackson Hole is almost a pilgrimage for skiers and snowboarders the world over. The experts come to tackle the infamous Corbet's Couloir, where you drop over the edge into a

Above: The fearsome drop into Corbet's Couloir at Jackson Hole presents the classic dilemma – will you, or won't you?

squeezy space between two canyon walls. You can see it when you ride Jackson's big red tram – which can carry 100 people – up to the top of Rendezvous Mountain. While it does have a lot for experts, it also has plenty for beginners and intermediates. Stay in one of the many condos in Teton Village at the base of the mountains, or for added luxury, stay at the Four Seasons or Amangani. The wildlife around here is incredible, too – do a wildlife tour to see moose, elk and bison, or you can even head into nearby Yellowstone National Park for some geyser action. The town of Jackson is also worth a visit, or stay over for a few nights. jacksonhole.com



Sun Valley

Idaho | USA

You might be surprised to read that Sun Valley was the first destination ski resort in North America. It was founded in 1936 after the location was selected by an Austrian count. Once

built, the resort was promoted to the Hollywood elite by Ernest Hemingway, who loved it so much he lived there, and died there. Sun Valley was designed to have European glamour and when you stay at the magnificent Sun Valley Lodge you see it. Even the on-mountain lodges are elegant and sophisticated. As for the skiing, there is Dollar Mountain for beginners, and Baldy for intermediates and advanced. The town of Ketchum is an old mining town and has some excellent places to eat and drink, with the Pioneer Hotel (the Pio) a wonderful experience. Also, don't miss a horse-drawn sleigh ride to dinner at Trail Creek cabin. sunvalley.com
visitsunvalley.com

Right: The sleigh ride to dinner at Trail Creek cabin is not to be missed.



RUSSIAN FAR EAST and the ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

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RUSSIAN FAR EAST & THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

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