

COOL WINTER HOTSPOTS

The weather might be colder and the days shorter, but winter is a great time to get out and about and explore these cool gems, writes **Stephanie Williams**.

TAKE YOUR PARTNER

Some people chase the sun in winter, but if you love winter you'll enjoy a getaway to the wild and woolly southern state. Hobart is the perfect combination of cosy nooks and fresh breezes and has so much to offer, even for a weekend.

Check into the Islington boutique hotel and then check out MONA, Hobart's world-class contemporary art gallery. Catch the MONA ROTA, a bright-purple helicopter offering scenic flights from the gallery; or splash out on a flight in a seaplane, from the city, over the Derwent River and Mount Wellington.

A Gourmania walking tour with a local expert will reveal the talented artisan producers, cafés and food stores of Hobart. And, of course, a trip to Hobart isn't complete without

a visit to Salamanca Market and the surrounding boutique stores.

After dark, Hobart remains an epicurean's paradise. Start the evening with a drink at local favourite Preachers – it's like entering the grand old home of a friend who just happens to have 16 boutique beers on tap. Try Westend Pumphouse for a casual dinner in a large, warehouse-style space where you can watch the chefs at work in the open kitchen; or Ethos Eat Drink for its menu featuring superb local ingredients. From Wednesday to Sunday drop into Sidecar for a nightcap on the way home.

Beechworth, an easy three hours' drive from Melbourne, is another winter hotspot. Apart from being on the way to the ski fields in the Victorian Alps, this is the perfect

Hobart at night as seen from the summit of Mt Wellington.

Snake by Sidney Nolan, 1972, was the original centrepiece of Hobart's MONA museum.

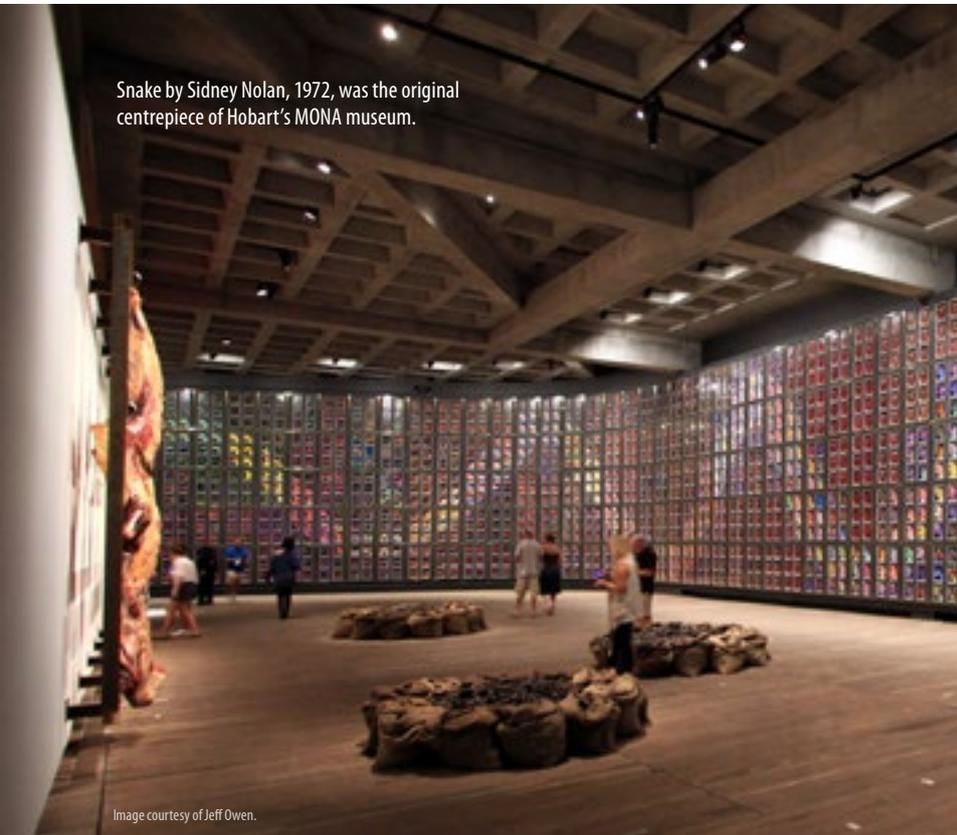


Image courtesy of Jeff Owen.

place to cosy up to the one you love. StoneTryst Spa Villas makes for a picturesque base camp; it's a short walk from town and each villa has a gas log fire and a spa bath.

Ned Kelly left his stamp on Beechworth, so history buffs will love to while away a few hours in the old Beechworth Courthouse (where Ned was tried for murder) and Beechworth Gaol (where Ned and his mother were held). If history isn't your thing, the boutiques and quaint cafés should keep you occupied.

Cyclists will love the Rail Trail (hire a bike for some two-wheeled action on the historical disused railway tracks; while mountain bike enthusiasts should head for the Beechworth Mountain Bike Park.

Book a table at renowned two-hatted restaurant Provenance and enjoy chef Michael Ryan's outstanding degustation menu; or dine at The Ox and Hound Bistro on local produce such as foraged yabbies, mushrooms and berries. Locals love the coffee, the wines by the glass and the charcuterie at Cellar Door Wine Store.

TAKE YOUR FAMILY

In winter, thoughts turn to football, and in Australia we're spoilt for choice. For AFL lovers there's no better place to be in winter than Melbourne (pictured left), barracking for your family's favourite team. But there's more to Melbourne than just AFL.

Familiarise yourself and the kids with this sports-minded city with Real Melbourne Bike Tours. Take off from Federation Square and, along the way, see rowers on the Yarra River. Swing by the home of the Australian Open, and ride past the world-famous Melbourne Cricket Ground and the newest stadium, AAMI Park, where NRL games are played. If you're lucky you might even see an AFL or NRL team training on the nearby ovals.

Lygon Street, which runs through Carlton and Brunswick, is home to the best Italian restaurants in town and is a Mecca for Ferrari-lovers after the Grand Prix. Go to Tiamo (Carlton) for authentic pastas; or 400 Gradi



Image courtesy of Tourism Vic / Roberto Seba

(Brunswick) for wood-fired pizzas. The kids will love the quirky flavours on offer at Gelato Messina in Smith Street, Fitzroy – their only problem will be choosing which ones to have.

Winter means snow, and if the kids are keen to learn to ski, Falls Creek is the perfect destination. The slopes are gentle and most accommodation is ski-in, ski-out, so getting the kids to the runs is easy.

It's great to learn to ski (and snowboard) at a young age. At Falls Creek kids as young as three years old can get started at the Snowclub 4 Kids, which teaches them basic skiing skills while taking them off your hands for the day so you can also enjoy the slopes. Children aged from 12 weeks to five years can be cared for at the resort's childcare centre. Make sure you end the day with a warm donut or two at the base of the Falls

Express lift to get them home.

Check into one of the many apartment hotels and self-cater – the FoodWorks supermarket should have everything you need. Skiing definitely exhausts the kids, so eating in will save you some tired tantrums. But if you need a night away from the pans, try The Man hotel or The Gully Bar & Restaurant (by the Three Blue Ducks team from Sydney) for family-friendly fare. 🍩



The slopes at Falls Creek are gentle and most accommodation is ski-in, ski-out, so it's easy with kids.

TAKE YOUR MATES

Get away from it all and off the beaten track to South Australia's Flinders Ranges. Full of awesome 4WD tracks ranging from easy to advanced, it's a 540-million-year-old landscape crammed with history and natural beauty, making this an unforgettable and classic Australian journey.

Skytrek, a spectacular track in the heart of the ranges, is known as a 4WD rite of passage in these parts. You and your mates will enjoy the rugged rocky ranges, starting out at Willow Springs Station, a 28,000-hectare sheep property just north of Wilpena Pound (five hours north of Adelaide), and continuing for six thrilling hours.

In the north of the state there are plenty of 4WD tracks to explore in and around the Simpson Desert, including the Strzelecki, Birdsville and Oodnadatta tracks.

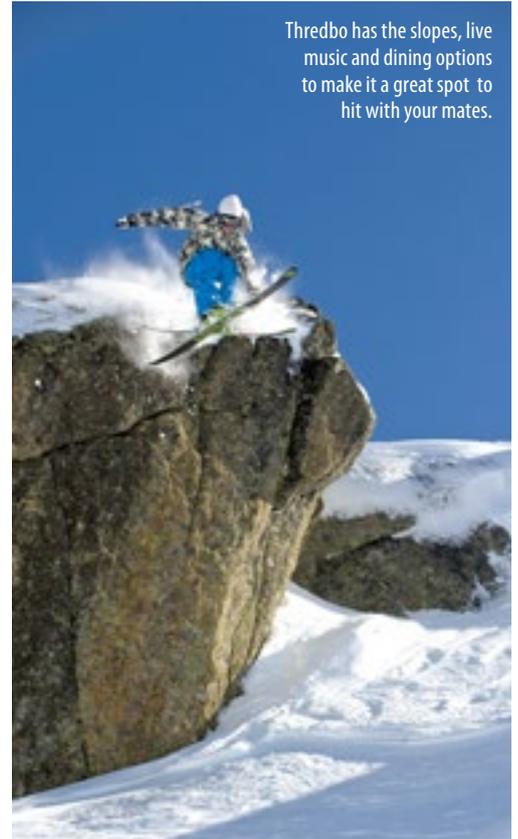
Or for something cooler, what better place to be with your mates in

winter than in Thredbo, carving it up on the slopes. A six-hour drive from Sydney or Melbourne, Thredbo has everything you need for an awesome skiing or snowboarding weekend. Book an apartment in the village or stay in nearby Jindabyne for a little less coin.

Thredbo has terrain to suit everyone. Beginners can learn on the gentle slope of Friday Flat, stepping it up a gear at the Cruiser intermediate area, while the advanced can have a crack at some of the most advanced terrain in the country.

After hours, Thredbo kicks off. Grab a drink at The Pub Bar and Bistro to get your night started or maybe catch a game while you enjoy bar snacks at Bernti's Tapas Bar & Grill. After a day on the slopes you'll be starving – at House of Ullr Bar & Grill you can cook your own steak; or try Al Fresco Pizzeria for casual Italian dining with BYO. All roads lead to the Keller Bar after hours, where you can enjoy live music while you swap 'big powder' stories. 

Thredbo has the slopes, live music and dining options to make it a great spot to hit with your mates.



ABC Range, part of the majestic Flinders Ranges.

FAST FACT

The Flinders Ranges stretch for more than 430 kilometres from Port Pirie to Lake Callabonna and form the largest mountain range in South Australia. St Mary Peak is its highest point at 1170 metres.