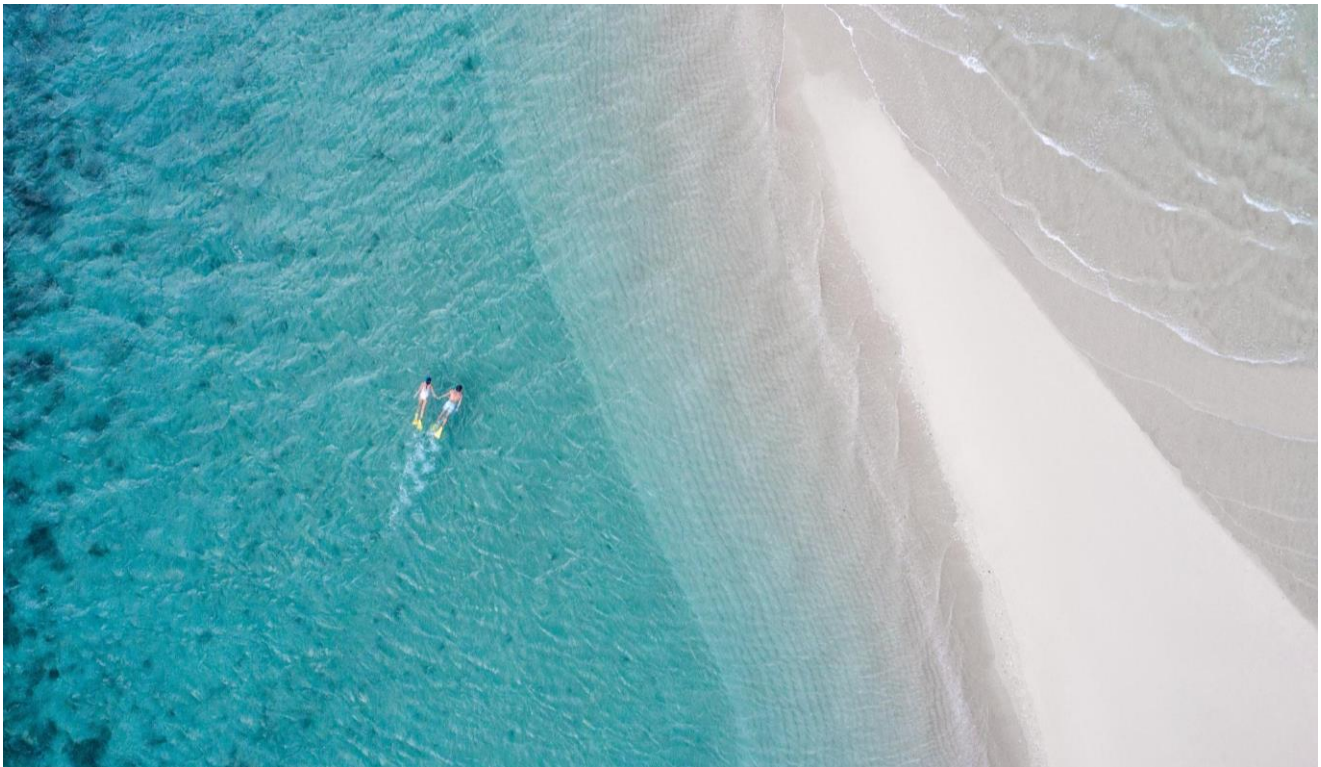




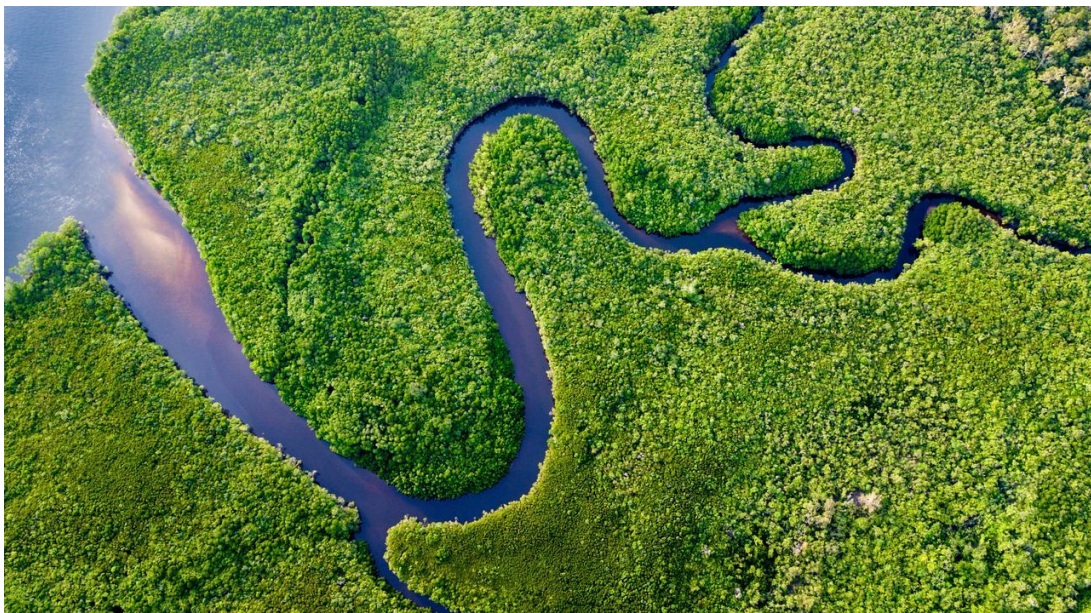
The nine best places in Australia to escape winter

We have rounded up the ultimate sun-soaked destinations —including a few unexpected ones — that will have you defrosting in no time.

By TRAVEL + LUXURY TEAM
From Travel June 6, 2024



Snorkelling at Langford Island near Hayman Island.

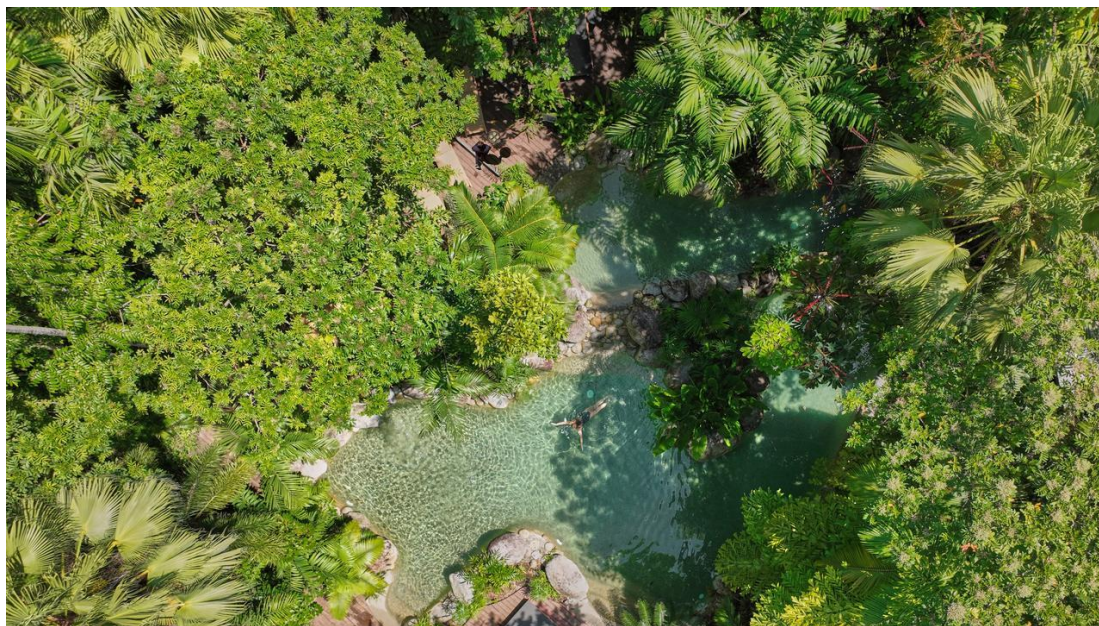


The Daintree Rainforest. Pic: Getty Images

Daintree Region, Tropical North Queensland

A World Heritage-listed national park, the oldest living rainforest and the largest tract of tropical vegetation in Australia. There's much to love about the Daintree, north of Cairns, and who doesn't long for sultry heat during the southern winter. From June to August, expect average daytime temps to hover around 26C, sliding to 19C at night. But the Kuku Yalanji calendar of five seasons throws up more detail.

Juan Walker of Walkabout Cultural Adventures tells me the Dularuiji mid-year months can be cool as well as dry. A tour with this immensely knowledgeable Kuku Yalanji man yields fascinating info on how the region's bush and marine landscapes function as both pharmacy and pantry. Examples of natural medicine and bush tucker are revealed at Mossman Gorge and along coastal scrubland.



The pool at Silky Oaks Lodge.

Boyd's forest dragons hang about, the air is sharp with herby scents, Ulysses butterflies flutter, tall trees shimmer in chlorophyll-infused light and the filtered sunlight feels like a benediction. Mid-year is the ideal time for boat trips from Port Douglas to the Great Barrier Reef. There's low humidity and little rain, and while sea temps are nippy, visibility generally is clear, stingers are rare and sightings of whales common.

Stay: [Silky Oaks Lodge](#), overlooking Mossman River; from \$1300 a night for two (minimum two nights) in a Rainforest Retreat, with breakfast, dinner and other inclusions.

SUSAN KUROSAWA



Sunset, Yellow Water Billabong, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory.

Kakadu, Northern Territory

Two of Kakadu's traditional six seasons – Wurrkeng and Kurrung – span the south's cooler months to October and are delineated by weather and observations of plants and wildlife. Dry days reach 30+C but humidity takes a back seat. Creeks stop flowing and spectacular landscape features such as Jim Jim Falls are accessible.

Magpie geese flock to billabongs and plants such as white and red apple are fragrant. Nothing matches the orange-red majesty at sunset of Nourlangie outcrop (with its Indigenous rock art), as seen from the Nawurlandja lookout. Did someone say crocodiles? Just a snap away from the luxury of Yellow Water Villas at Coinda Lodge, take a cruise for sightings of these prehistoric reptiles.

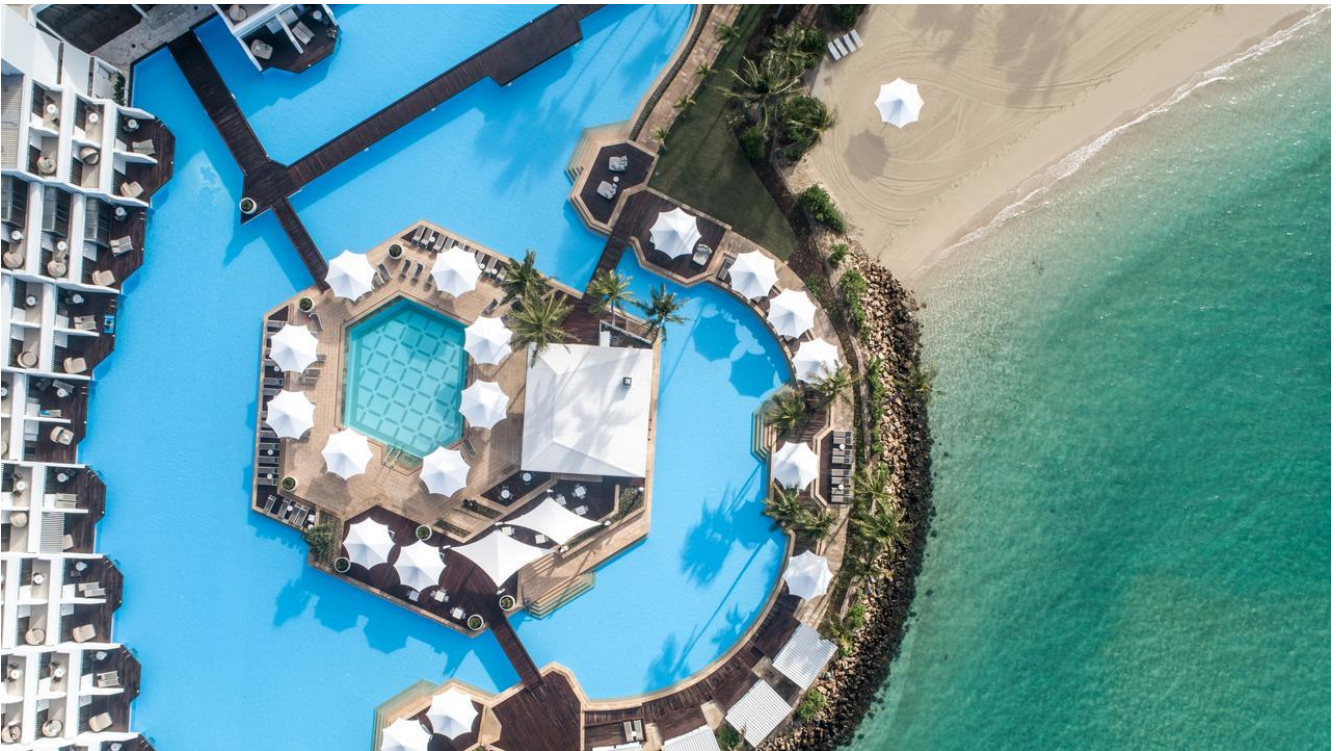


Yellow Water Villas at Coinda Lodge, NT.

At the very top of the Top End, on the edge of the Mary River wetlands, indulge in the comfort of a safari bungalow at Bamurru Plains Wild Bush Luxury lodge. Expeditions by 4WD vehicles or airboats through the wetlands and savannah woodlands reveal crocs, buffaloes, wallabies and 230 species of birds. Then laze by the pool and dine from a menu that combines classical and bush inspirations.

Stay: [Yellow Water Villas](#), from about \$990 a night twin-share (early-bird deals available). [Bamurru Plains](#), open to October, from about \$3195 a night twin-share; two-night minimum; all inclusive.

GRAHAM ERBACHER



The famous pool at Hayman Island.

Hayman Island, Whitsundays

Winter in the Whitsundays signals mild temperatures, whales on the horizon, and no pesky stingers. The most storied resort in the region, located at the northernmost point of the archipelago, retains an almost old-world charm.

There's been a hotel on the 295ha Hayman Island since the 1950s; [today's 182-key InterContinental](#) embraces the scale of the '80s resort, with whitewashed guestrooms cupping Australia's most recognisable pool. Elsewhere, private villas are sunk into lovely gardens lining a 2km white sand arc. The Great Barrier Reef is nearby, although there's great snorkelling off the beach on the island's Blue Pearl Bay.



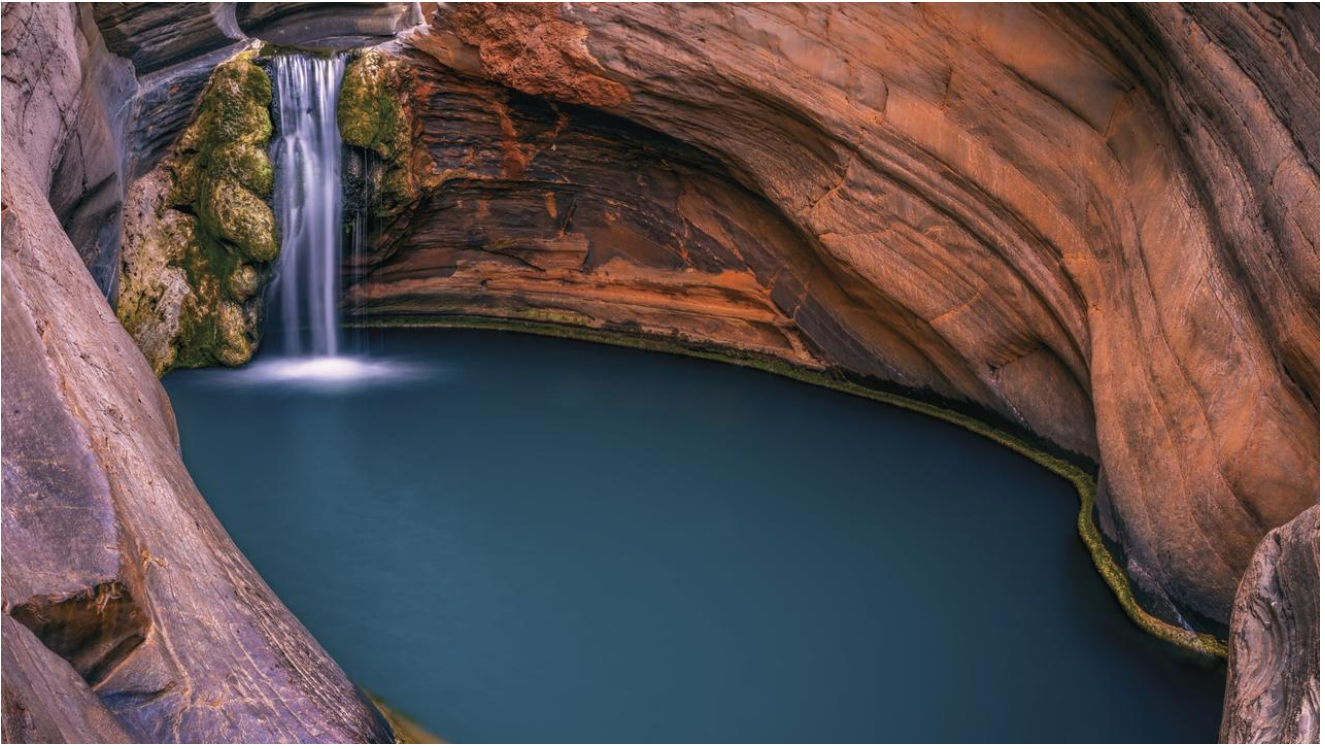
Hayman Island, Queensland.

A helicopter flyover of the reef is a highlight of any stay, like seeing the Earth from space. Island life is equally diverting. Proserpine rock wallabies are everywhere, little faces peering from the bush, and cockatoos, naughty as monkeys. Keep those doors closed when you're out, these birds are dab hands at a spot of ransacking.

Dinner in the garden takes on a surreal note as a stone-curlew stalks our table, standing perfectly motionless each time we look his way. Resort trimmings are White Lotus indulgent; two enormous pools, day spa, dinner on the sand, transfers by luxury launch with bubbles.

Stay: Pick of the digs are the 12 Beachfront Pavilions opened in late 2022 and located away from the main resort, or the four enormous hilltop residences (where Elton John stays); from \$1397 a night, twin-share, in a pavilion, including breakfast.

CHRISTINE MCCABE



Natural spa pool located at Hamersley Gorge, Karijini National Park.

Karijini National Park, WA

Hidden in the two-billion-year old Hamersley Range amid WA's iron-ore landscape, is one of our most spectacular and underrated reserves, [Karijini National Park](#). It's remote in anyone's language, being 1400km north of Perth, but the park is easily accessed via two-hour flights to Tom Price followed by a 45-minute drive.

From clifftop lookouts, a network of rusty gorges unfolds, layered banded-iron formation dropping 100m down. In the late afternoon, the gorge walls glow a striking red, contrasting with straw-coloured spinifex and the trunks of white-barked snappy gums.

Karijini is best explored on foot, with trails ranging from the easy 2km Gorge Rim Track to the challenging scramble of Hancock Gorge and Kermit's Pool. After a hot day of adventures, cool off with a float at Fern Pool above Fortescue Falls.



Couple relaxing in a rock pool in Hamersley Gorge, located in the Karijini National Park.

Stay: Book ahead for [Karijini Eco Retreat](#), the only accommodation inside the park and within walking distance of Joffre Gorge. The Indigenous-owned property offers a range of accommodation from basic eco-cabins to new luxury tents with airconditioning and ensuites. Karijini Outback Restaurant offers al fresco dining under the brightest starry sky; from \$160 for an eco-cabin with shared amenities.



Uluru is a much more cooler experience during winter.

Uluru, Northern Territory

The [Red Centre](#) bakes in summer, with temperatures pushing north of 40C, and the flies can be unbearable. Winter brings an entirely different experience, with overnight lows of 4C climbing to the early 20s during the day, meaning there's no need to retreat from the heat in the afternoon.

The six-hour, 12km guided Seit trek around the base of Uluru is a far more attractive proposition in these conditions, as are excursions to Walpa Gorge and Valley of the Winds. Even pedal power is a viable option during the cooler months; bike hire is available through Outback Cycling (adults \$119, with resort transfers and three hours to ride around the rock).



Longitude 131 has unforgettable views.

New to Ayers Rock Resort from August 1 is the Australian Native High Tea featuring sweet and savoury treats that showcase Indigenous ingredients (adults \$95, Sails in the Desert). Another fresh offering starting on the same date is the Sunrise Journeys experience, the result of a collaboration between three female artists on an original artwork depicting Anangu culture and connection to country.

Guests will need to rug up as they take their seats before dawn on a platform overlooking Uluru. Hi-tech lasers and projectors will then bring the painting to life (adults \$125), followed by nature's own brilliant daily exhibition – sunrise.

Stay: Splurge on a luxury tent at all-inclusive [Longitude 131](#), from \$4400 night, twin-share, or take a room at Sails in the Desert, from \$475 a night, minimum three nights.

PENNY HUNTER



Reef House Resort & Spa Palm Cove, QLD.

Palm Cove, Tropical North Queensland

“Winter” isn’t a word used around the region known as Tropical North Queensland, which loosely comprises Cairns, Palm Cove, Port Douglas and a dewy rainforest hinterland. “Dry” is the way the locals describe the months between May and October, thanks to their low humidity, mild daytime temperatures, and average three or four days of rain each month. That makes it the ideal time of year to pack your bags – leaving coats and jumpers behind – for a Queensland escape.



Palm Cove, Queensland. Picture: Vince Sofia

You may not get wet on land, but it's the best time for divers and swimmers to get into the sea. The water is still warm and the infamous box jellyfish are blobbing around somewhere else. [Divers Den](#) offers regular one-day or overnight snorkelling and scuba trips around the Great Barrier Reef, including their new night-time dive, while citizen scientists can join daily coral monitoring expeditions with [Passions of Paradise](#). Alfresco dining is a year-round thing here, so ask for a beachfront, patio table when you book at beloved tropical hotspot, [Nu Nu](#), which is celebrating its 20th year in business.

Stay: A mid-year slump calls for restorative rest, so the adults-only [Reef House](#), Palm Cove, has a “sleep concierge” to help guests sink into slumber. Its three-night Rest & Refresh package starts at \$1265 a person.

ALEXANDRA CARLTON



Aerial view of Osprey Campground, Cape Range National Park. Picture: Tourism Western Australia

Coral Coast, WA

While Ningaloo and its whale sharks' beckon in the west, you don't have to go underwater to escape winter on the Coral Coast. This is a land of sun-soaked 25C days, turquoise water, alabaster sand, and bucket-list megafauna but Cape Range National Park is another reason to add it to your winter wishlist.

A serene boat ride along Yardie Creek provides the chance to spy the rare black-footed rock wallaby perched on the russet cliffs that tower either side on the lands of the Baiyungu, Thalanyji and Yinigurdira people. Prefer to hike? Head south from Exmouth along a winding road to reach the lookout at Charles Knife Canyon and the Badjirrajirra Walk that traverses the range rim.



Bullara Station, Exmouth Gulf, Western Australia.

At the base of the peninsula, 90km from Exmouth, a sprawling working cattle farm is serving surprisingly sophisticated experiences, too. The Woolshed at Bullara Station forms the social hub where camping families and other winter defectors converge to tuck into house-made pies and freshly baked scones, or for intimate dinners at The Table, five nights a week – bookings, released a month out, are quickly snapped up.

Stay: [Bullara Station](#) with its new safari huts and outdoor showers under lava trees. Open April to October; from \$450 a night. Camping from \$36 a night.

CELESTE MITCHELL



Ardo in Townsville.

Townsville, Queensland

[North Queensland's largest city](#) has made an \$88m play for the pleasure tourist with the opening of Coral Sea resort [Ardo](#). Townsville's elegant new eight-storey hotel, curved to capture views of Great Barrier Reef islands and the coastal city, is a destination in itself, with 137 rooms and suites and a rooftop with infinity pool, tapas bar and swank steak and seafood restaurant Marmor.



At sea level, there's polished Japanese dining at Terasu and a bijou spa where Brazilian therapists deliver world-class wellness treatments. The Ville, next door, is a modest casino, home to several good restaurants and a Hollywood-worthy pool with a swim-up cocktail bar. If/when resort life pales, there are renowned dive sites nearby, including SS Yongala and John Brewer Reef, home to the [Museum of Underwater Art](#).

Or escape to islands such as Orpheus and the laidback, time-warp of Magnetic, a 20-minute ferry ride away. Winter's the best time to visit this island with daytime temps in the mid-20s, perfect for hiking the national park or swimming its 23 beaches and bays, and the thrill of breaching humpbacks July to August.

Stay: At the Ardo, of course; double rooms from

\$225 a night.

Some of the delicious food at Ardo.

KENDALL HILL



Astra Lodge, Falls Creek.

The Wild Card: Falls Creek, Victoria

Instead of hiding from winter, taunt the beast and run towards it. There's irresistible romance in lying low in a mountain lodge, snuggling by a roaring fire, cradling a glass of mulled wine as a storm rages and snow piles up outside. Winter is knocking, but it can't get in.

You don't have to be a skier to be seduced by [Falls Creek](#), a Victorian alpine village that does a decent impression of a picture-book hamlet in the European Alps.



Falls Creek. Picture: Visit Victoria

The village is carless, so you can stroll between the many restaurants, bars and stone ski lodges dotted among the snow gums. Projections light up the snow at night, fireworks explode above the ski runs, and smoke rises from chimneys into starry skies. This winter welcomes Sorella at Elk, a modern Mediterranean-style restaurant and cocktail lounge, and The Little Chop Italian Shop, serving fine Victorian High-Country produce.

Stay: Comfort is a given at [Astra Falls Creek](#), a boutique, Austrian-accented ski hotel with an open fire in the cosy lounge (all cowhide and rough-sawn cedar), a heated magnesium pool and dreamy day spa; from \$474 a night in June and September, \$1090 in peak season, July and August.

RICKY FRENCH