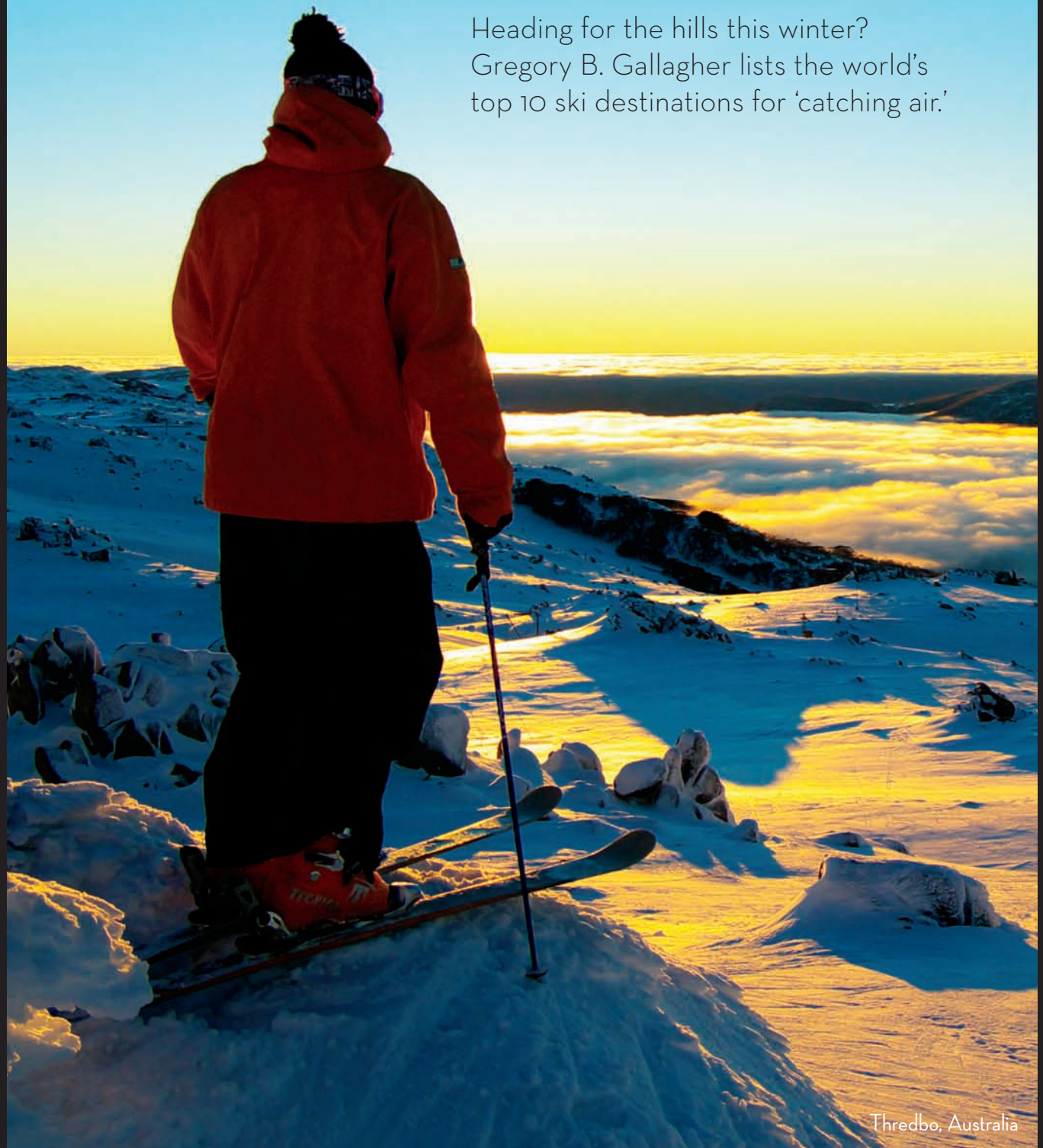


# Powder Hounds

Heading for the hills this winter?  
Gregory B. Gallagher lists the world's  
top 10 ski destinations for 'catching air.'

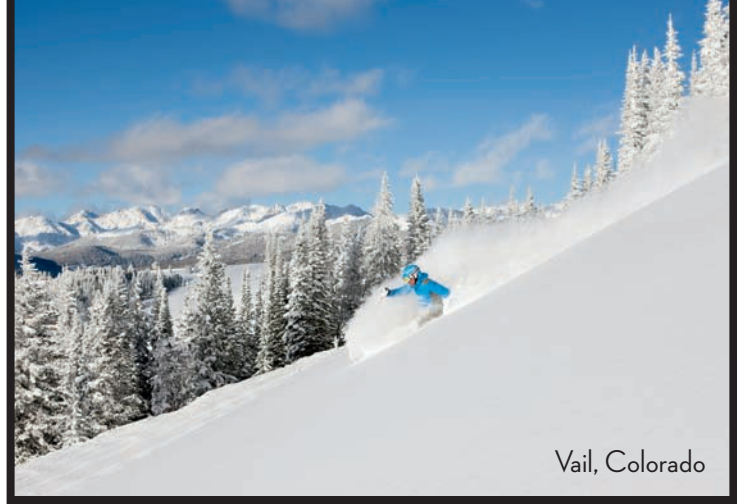


Thredbo, Australia



## VAIL, COLORADO

Home to the largest single ski mountain in **North America**, **Vail** also has other excellent hills like **Beaver Creek**, **Steamboat** and **Breckenridge**. The sheer volume of snow here is legendary and with the greatest number of high-speed lifts anywhere on the continent, it's easy to see why Vail owns the title of '**King of the Mountains**.' Just ask backwoods bowlers, or even the cruisers and carvers; they'll report getting stoked across 5,000 acres, with **Gore Valley** runs of more than seven miles, and the ungroomed **Back Bowl** providing the freedom to huck cliffs and slow-dog noodle. Combined with village ambiance to suit skiers and non-skiers alike, few will go home from Vail disappointed.



Vail, Colorado

## KITZBÜHEL, AUSTRIA

For that distinctly European feel of cobblestone streets, cozy eateries and bustling nightlife, head to **Kitzbühel**, home of the **Hahnenkammrennen**, the annual World Cup alpine ski races. Only 80 kilometres from historic **Salzburg**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kitzbühel guarantees snow. The **Hahnenkamm Mountain** downhill course, held on the infamous **Streif** slope, is regarded by top skiers as the most difficult run in Europe to master and the toughest course on the World Cup circuit, and has been attracting the world's best since 1931. Expert downhill skiers will thrive on riding a different run each outing, with more than 158 kilometres of trails. Cross-country and ski mountaineers have more than 500 kilometres of their own to discover, while **Lake Schwarzsee** offers an outdoor arena for curling and ice-skating fans.



Kitzbühel, Austria

## WHISTLER BLACKCOMB, BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Olympic Selection Committee got it right when they selected **Vancouver** for the 2010 Winter Olympics, in large part because of the twin peaks at **Whistler Blackcomb**. Reliable snowfall, along with the two highest vertical rises in North America spreads over 7,000 acres of chutes, bowls, steeps and the signature **Couloir Extreme** double black diamond run. Whistler Blackcomb is served by the dreamy new **Peak 2 Peak Gondola**, a high-speed system that connects skiers to more than 200 trails and additional acreage in **Garibaldi Provincial Park**. Luxurious off-hill attractions mix with sensational skiing to create a winning ambiance felt throughout the bustling village. The season runs from late November until early June, and those in the know travel from Vancouver aboard the **Rocky Mountaineer** train via the breathtaking three-hour **Whistler Sea to Sky Climb**.



Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia

## STOWE, VERMONT

The largest ski resort town in the northeastern U.S. leads the field in winter village mystique. The excitement of tree skiing and the sheer physicality of the steeps, plus the heavy winter backcountry snowfall in excess of 300 inches, were the original draw in the '60s. Today, the blueblood crowd still packs both mountains each year for the combination of idyllic terrain and the romance of **New England**. More than 116 trails and 13 lifts cover 39 ski miles, encompassing **Mount Mansfield** for experts, **Spruce Peak** for beginners and intermediates, plus countless wild miles for cross-country skiers. The challenges of the **Front Four** extreme downhill runs – **Goat**, **Lifeline**, **National** and **Starr** – continue to create storytelling sessions par excellence for skiers and audiences alike during après-ski unwinding.



Chalet at the Stowe Mountain Resort





Los Tres Valles, Chile

## LOS TRES VALLES, CHILE

East of **Santiago**, at the Andean foot of **El Plomo** (17,800 feet), skiers flock to **Los Tres Valles**, with access to the largest ski area in **South America**. **Valle Nevado** leads with 23,000 acres, featuring steep peaks like **Tres Puntos**, **El Colorado's** cone-shaped crown beckons beginners with more than 70 starter hills, 16 lifts and 25 trails, while **La Parva** owns the most dramatic 24 miles of powdered fun with the biggest vertical drop at 3,150 feet. The French-built **Valle Nevado** resort exudes European über-luxe, and delivers an array of services to satisfy even the most demanding clientele: **Andes Express** chair lifts, heli-skiing and heli-snowboarding, **South America's** only super half-pipe, hang gliding, ski school, ski shop, three hotels and six restaurants.

©KARL SANDERSON



Whiteface Lodge, Lake Placid, New York

## THREDBO, AUSTRALIA

Halfway between **Sydney** and **Melbourne** in the **Snowy Mountains** of **Australia's** **New South Wales**, **Thredbo** is a thriller ski resort celebrating more than 50 years as the country's best. The largest snowmaking machines in the southern hemisphere guarantee snow levels, and its location inside **Kosciuszko National Park**, a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**, assures a range of amenities to suit many budgets. Boarders and skiers of every stripe will love the impressive **Monster Bagjump** training tool, while advanced skiers can choose from **Michael's Mistake**, **Funnel Web** and **Cannonball** runs. The **Crackenback Supertrail** is a must-do, and first-timers are awed by the idyllic view from the **Express Chairlift**, rising 560 vertical metres to the veritable top of **Australia**.

## LAKE PLACID, NEW YORK

The **Winter Olympics** have been awarded twice to just three locations: **St. Moritz**, **Innsbruck** and **Lake Placid**. Local skiers brag about **The Slides** on **Whiteface Mountain**, an expert-only 35-acre zone of steep wilderness with double black diamond chutes that are open only when the ski patrol approves. Located in the six-million-acre **Adirondack Park**, **Lake Placid** is an official U.S. Olympic Training Site, featuring the highest vertical drop east of the **Rockies**. Expert skiers ride long runs filled with plenty of steepes, 87 trails fed by nine chairlifts, one gondola and a conveyor lift, while novices enjoy great beginner runs, snow sports school, an **Olympics Museum** and the **Annual Winter Carnival** in February.

COURTESY OF THE WHITEFACE LODGE



Trois Vallées, France

## TROIS VALLÉES, FRANCE

**Trois Vallées** in the French Alps is arguably the best ski destination on the planet and comprises the three valleys of **Courchevel**, **Val Thorens** and **Méribel**. Collectively, they encompass the largest linked-up ski area in the world. More than 600 kilometres of trails with 200 lifts (including three funitels) create a dream environment without equal. Purchase a three-valley pass, pick your style of vacation and you will find it here: from boisterous nightlife to tranquil retreat, with luxe trappings to serve the kings and queens of the ski world. Stay at the **Courchevel 1850** – reputed to be the world's best ski resort – catering to the jet-setting crowd, ski the **Combe du Vallon** run at **Méribel** and don't miss the amazing six-kilometre toboggan run at **Val Thorens**, the highest ski resort in Europe.

©SIME/ASTOCK PHOTO



## Après-Ski Plus

Reserve a room at **Vail Mountain Lodge and Spa** and visit its new **Vitality Center**, focused on comprehensive, medically-based wellness programs.

On your way to **Kitzbühel**, spend a night at the luxurious **Hotel Sacher** in **Salzburg** and treat yourself to its storied **Sacher-Torte**.

The happy hour it-spot in **Chile's Los Tres Valles** is the lounge at the **Valle Nevado Hotel**. Come midnight, everyone shifts to **Tres Puntas Hotel** to dance until dawn.

At the **Fairmont Whistler Resort**, sit by the firepits on the **Mallard Terrace** or snag the comfy fireside couches inside the lounge while sipping a **Polar Bear**, the signature hot chocolate drink.

**Méribel** in France's **Trois Vallées** now boasts its own version of **Dick's Tea Bar**, made famous at **Val d'Isère**, while **Jack's Bar** cranks live music most afternoons, with live comedy until the wee hours.

Stay for a couple of nights at **Australia's Westin Sydney** on your way to the **Snowy Mountains**; it's within walking distance of the **Sydney Opera House**, **Botanical Gardens** and **Harbour Bridge**.

**Lake Placid's** waterside **High Peaks Resort** boasts an **Aveda Signature Spa** and offers a three-day **Winter Adventure Package** for \$348 per person that includes breakfast and dinner and selected activities each day.

Switzerland's **Davos Resort** is notorious for its hip nightlife, including the **Hotel Europe** piano bar and **Cabanna Club**.

## LE MASSIF DE CHARLEVOIX, QUÉBEC

Operated by Daniel Gauthier, one of the founders of **Cirque du Soleil**, **Le Massif** has a signature view over the mighty **St. Lawrence River**. With a vertical drop of 2,526 feet, **Le Massif** has the highest Canadian annual snowfall east of the Canadian Rockies of 21 feet and attracts legions of downhill skiers, snowboarders and cross-country fans, not to mention the **National Alpine Skiing Downhill Training Centre**. Of course, no conversation is complete in **Québec** without talk of cuisine, and **Le Massif's Mer & Monts** restaurant provides fine dining atop the mountain, featuring robust local flavours. Conviviality, both on and off the slopes, attracts families, groups and singles.

## DAVOS, SWITZERLAND

Not as glitzy as **St. Moritz** or **Gstaad**, **Davos** delivers an extraordinary level of skiing and *couloir* fun considered the best in Europe. At an elevation of 5,000 feet, it is the highest town on the continent, and widely recognized as a snow mecca for downhill and cross-country skiers and snowboarders too. Half-pipes at **Jakobshorn**, and **Monster Pipes** at **Nidecker** and **Bolgen** combine with rails and kickers at the **Jatz Junior Snowpark** to supply the hip-hop crowd with the requisite challenges. Offering 54 lifts, nine chairs, 27 drags, 12 cable cars and 106 runs, **Davos** keeps all levels of skiers moving with a bus system that operates every five minutes, linking all five major mountain regions. ▣

