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# The perfect winter remedy

*There's something exhilarating and poetic about being the first to walk across fresh snow. Here, we take a journey to Victoria's Falls Creek to make fresh tracks and admire the rugged snow-capped mountains glistening in the morning sun.*

Words MEG LAW



**Opposite page** On route to Falls Creek via The Great Alpine Road with views over Mt Hotham.  
**Top** The setting sun casting long shadows over Falls Creek. **Left** An extensive lift network operates across Falls Creek.

*"Immerse yourself in nature's symphony and let your senses burst with joy."  
- Tom Brown Jr*

A feeling of escapism comes with flying solo down a black run on skis, zigzagging between trees, competing against yourself and clocking your own velocity and speed — the stillness and peacefulness that comes with standing on your own at the top of a mountain after a morning hike, surrounded by a blanket of thick white snow with nothing but the crisp, icy cold air to keep you company. Compare this with the stark contrast of the chaos in the main village with children squealing as they fly past on their toboggans, families happily building snowmen, snowball fights, learners

colliding with their limbs and ski poles in an awkward tangled web of defeat. Just as no two snowflakes are ever the same, humans have differing ideas on what "floats our boat" and what makes us truly happy. For me, it is the snow. There is something about a trip to the snow that feeds my soul. The whole notion of a winter escape gives me energy, ignites my sense of adventure and activates my passion for being immersed in nature. For some, winter is synonymous with staying indoors and rugging up. Heaters cranked up, fires burning, ugg boots on — these cosy images are enough to keep us from heading outside all winter. But in my mind, nothing compares with rugging up in my red woollen beanie, a scarf and matching mittens and feeling

fresh snowflakes land gently on my pink mottled cheeks. I feel young and playful. I want to run, skip and make snow angels. Then later, when I hit the slopes and ski down a freshly groomed track I get the same sense of liberation and youthful exhilaration. I giggle with glee as my feet dangle over the chairlift, the cold, harsh wind slaps me awake and my eyes feast upon the spectacular unmatched panoramas of the Victorian Alps. At the end of a long day of physical exertion, I find myself in a tranquil state of bliss. Whether it be nursing a warm cup of chocolate by a log fire or sipping on a tepid glass of mulled wine recounting tales of the day with friends, I succumb to a newfound peacefulness, an inner happiness; a feeling that is hard to replicate elsewhere.

## Falls Creek

Falls Creek is Victoria's largest ski resort. In winter, this alpine resort is home to the largest ski and snowboarding terrain in Victoria before it effortlessly transforms itself into a natural haven and outdoor mecca for mountain biking, hiking, trail running, kayaking and fishing. Falls Creek Resort offers 14 lifts, 92 runs and the perfect mix of beginner, intermediate and advanced terrain. But it's not just the epic skiing and boarding on offer. The mountain also packs a punch with its rugged snow-covered peaks, towering snow gums and spectacular scenic views that will have nature lovers picking up their jaw from the floor. There's also plenty of après-ski mischief to be had on the mountain, whether you're tempted by one of the

many bustling bars for a cheeky ale or butterscotch schnapps or prefer to dine on some gooey baked camembert with apple and honey or a buttery clam chowder. Located in North East Victoria, this popular resort evokes a storybook ambience synonymous with a fairy tale with its alpine-style chalets, lodges, luxe hotels, fairy lights and old-world charm. It has an altitude reaching up to 1850 metres above sea level and is home to Australia's highest body of water, Rocky Valley Lake. At night you can see thousands of twinkling stars against some of the darkest skies in the world, far from light pollution. **Flow-on effects** The positive flow-on effects and benefits to the mind, body and soul from being in

a cold alpine environment make a trip to the snow a perfect winter remedy. In recent years, numerous experimental psychology studies have linked exposure to nature with increased energy and a heightened sense of happiness and wellbeing. It goes without saying that when we spend more time in nature we feel greater vitality, more energised and positive, and have improved resilience and physical health. More and more studies worldwide have found that humans' health and wellbeing benefit from spending time in nature. From reducing inflammation and restoring immunity to lowering stress levels and boosting energy, there's no doubt nature heals. But most of us don't need research to support the idea that being at one with





The adrenaline kicks in with the chairlift ride up the mountain as the wind slaps your cheeks awake and the immensity of the freshly packed snow beneath awaits.



## Escape routes

- **Go**  
Falls Creek is a 4.5 hour drive from Melbourne CBD in North East Victoria.
- **Visit**  
Falls Creek is Victoria's largest ski resort, with a good mix of beginner and advanced terrain. In summer it transforms itself into an outdoor mecca for mountain biking, hiking, trail running, kayaking and fishing.
- **Stay**  
Astra Lodge, a classic European alpine lodge, was awarded Australia's best boutique ski hotel for seven consecutive years by the World Ski Awards. Centrally located on mountain, luxe living (but with a cosy, relaxed vibe) and unparalleled views of Falls Creek. Elegant studio apartments and deluxe rooms. Comes complete with its own day spa, magnesium pool, on-site bar and restaurant, exclusive snow transfer service and even your very own sommelier. Book for peak winter season in advance at [astrafalls.creek.com.au](http://astrafalls.creek.com.au).
- **Don't miss**  
Weekly fireworks during winter, night skiing and boarding and resting your aching muscles with a mulled wine paired with baked cheese and apple by an open fire.
- **Plan**  
Plan your Falls Creek snow trip at [skifalls.com.au](http://skifalls.com.au) and [falls.creek.com.au](http://falls.creek.com.au).



*A brisk stroll in the snow can often turn into a vigorous heart starter and is incredibly effective in improving blood sugar and insulin intolerance.*

nature simply feels good. A gentle breeze, the warmth of the sun or the sound of rain, nature evokes a peace and tranquillity that can't be found elsewhere.

Within minutes of arriving at Falls Creek, I notice my shoulders visibly drop and relax and my smile widen. There is nothing more liberating than clicking on my skis and zipping up my snow jacket to hit the fresh powder, explore the unknown and push myself out of my comfort zone on new trails.

Moving my body in the crisp Victorian air is the perfect antidote to winter stagnation, and can help lower blood pressure, improve cardiovascular health, increase flexibility and boost mood.

It's the ultimate calorie burner, too. A brisk stroll in the snow can often turn into a vigorous heart starter and is incredibly effective in improving blood sugar and insulin intolerance.

Physical activity in the mountains certainly improves your fitness, as even with gradual walks and hill climbs, more

METs [the ratio of your working to resting metabolism] are required. With this in mind, you don't have to rely solely on skiing or snowboarding to improve your health; you can also try some fun alternatives in the alpine setting, including snowshoeing, deep-snow hiking or cross-country skiing.

According to research, cold weather appears to trigger calorie burn. Cold temperatures signal your "brown fat" (the fat that allegedly helps burn "white fat") to get to work, meaning that winter weather can be the catalyst for weight loss. That is, providing you lay low on the artisan cheese and those heavy craft brews.

Like all forays into the natural world, just be sure you activate all of your senses, soaking up the sounds, colours, tactile sensations, tastes and aromas, and appreciate nature in its purest form.

### Rejuvenate complexion

Another added perk of chilly temperatures and an alpine environment is that it can keep you looking younger.

Cold weather enhances the complexion and rejuvenates skin — which is quite ironic as when we think about winter weather we conjure up images of dry hands, cracked noses, red cheeks and a slew of unsavoury skin conditions that colder temperatures inflict upon us.

But in the spirit of testing this theory out, I checked myself into the Astra Lodge Day Spa to see if this was true. Like a big brown grizzly bear, I wanted to take full advantage of this cosy, luxe winter retreat, and if I had my way I would have settled into a long slumber until spring.

A trip to the snow is not just about testing the limits or reaching new heights, so it was time for this adventure junky to swap her thrills and spills for rest and relaxation.

With my face lathered in a soothing concoction of Australian organic clay and native botanical extracts, my skin therapist explained the basis of the theory that cold weather can indeed act as a tonic or astringent, keeping pores less visible and refined, slowing down

and preventing the secretion of sebum, keeping shine at bay and reducing acne.

According to the beauty world, cold weather promotes blood circulation in both the face and body, having a magical effect on reducing inflammation, puffiness and swelling to the eyes and face which, in turn, can keep you looking younger.

### Immune system benefits

Next up, I retreated to the Astra Lodge library and climbed into a plush sofa lounge with a soft cashmere blanket and a cup of steaming herbal tea and delved into some textbook theories surrounding the wellbeing benefits of colder climates.

When your immune system adapts to cold environments, its ability to fight off infection gets stronger. I had heard this before about people experiencing reduced allergies and inflammation in colder temperatures but wanted to find out if this indeed had merit.

In summary, mountain life takes advantage of specific climatic conditions

to treat chronic allergic diseases including eczema, asthma, nasal allergies and other ailments.

Add to all this the health benefits of increased vitamin D, adapting your oxygen levels to suit the colder climate, the physical exertion that comes from a day on the slopes, the mental health perks of simply building a snowman or tobogganing down the hill, catching fresh snowflakes as they fall ... the list is endless.

We all find wellness in different ways. Some may find it from tackling a black run with determination and speed. Others may find it by creating daily rituals like reading by the log fire, strolling through the snow gums or bobbing up and down in a magnesium pool. Some, like me, may like a combination of all of the above.

After a week experiencing all that mountain life had to offer, I can concur that the cold climate and alpine environment had a profound effect on me — a wellness experience which provided me with a powerfully transformative flow.

*Top left* The quiet breath of the mountain is all that is heard on a bluebird morning at Falls Creek. *Top* From its gentle slopes to its steep pitches, the mountain shares its majestic gift with village companions. *Above* Astra Lodge at Falls Creek: the perfect apres ski haven to relax and unwind after a full day of skiing.

I reaped the health benefits and left feeling energised and uplifted.

As I drove back down along the winding roads of the Bogong High Plains, all I wanted to do was breathe in the crisp mountain air and stay in this winter retreat forever.

You see, even winter has its role in nature's grand plan, and if we're brave enough to step outside and experience it during the polar months, its magic will touch you in more ways than one.

*Meg Law is a travel writer who lives on Victoria's famous coastline, The Great Ocean Road. She is happiest when she has her pen in hand documenting her latest adventures, or with her husband and two mini explorers in tow.*