

## let it SNOW

If après is your priority, we don't judge. Here, we offer a handful of must-ski destinations with a vibe that's as potent as their powder.

BY MARY HOLLAND

Whether you're a snow bunny or black diamond veteran, everybody knows that a ski vacation isn't only about the sport. Good slopes do count, but so does the ambience. Isn't après-ski half the reason to book a trip (or maybe even more)? And, of course, don't forget climate change. "In a world where snow at Christmas isn't a guarantee anymore, you're looking for as high an elevation as you can go," says Cari Gray, the Malibu-based founder of Gray & Co. who's known for her expertise in high-end sports trips. Here, she offers some itineraries for the best skiing worldwide.



**FROM TOP**  
In Telluride, your best bet is to stay slopeside at Auberge Resorts Element 52; if a village stay is more your style, book a suite at Dunton Town House.

### TELLURIDE, COLORADO

The biggest gripe about Telluride is logistical, but the fact that the town is so hard to reach is also its biggest asset. It's located in a box canyon in the San Juan Mountains, about two hours from Montrose Regional Airport, so there's only one road in and out; this weeds out the more casual traveler. "People who love skiing know the best places are near-impossible to get to," says Gray. Though there are daily flights from cities such as Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and Denver (in Montrose), the best option is Telluride's own FBO.

At a high elevation, snow is pretty much guaranteed: The town is at 8,750 feet and the slopes are almost 4,000 feet higher. It's also ski-in-ski-out, thanks to the chairlift located in the middle of town. Beyond the slopes, think of Telluride as a high-end party town, with many breweries, saloons, and wine bars; best of the former include Telluride Distilling Company and Telluride Brewing Company. In town, Rustico Ristorante offers classic Italian, while the New Sheridan Hotel serves up excellent steak. Once a mining town, the Main Street is lined with historic, colorful buildings and clapboard storefronts. "It's such a cute town, with Victorian houses and a real 'cowboy' feel," Gray says.

She recommends visitors stay at Auberge Resorts Element 52, a collection of sharp residences, located slopeside. Though it's on the hill, for a night out you simply "take the gondola right into town." Alternatively, Dunton Town House, an intimate hotel set in a picturesque building filled with Tyrolean antiques, is located in the middle of the village, within walking distance of shops and restaurants.

### DOLOMITES, ITALY

The upcoming 2026 winter Olympics—which will bring the Games back to Cortina d'Ampezzo 70 years after they last took place at the glamorous ski town—are certainly raising the profile of the Dolomites. Gray argues, though, that the reason true skiers are flooding into the northern Italian mountain ▶



# dream itineraries



**FROM TOP**  
The Marmolada glacier provides a majestic backdrop when skiing the Dolomites; a private deck at Dolomiti Lodge Alverà; an en-suite onsen-style soaking tub at Higashiyama Niseko Village, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve



## **NISEKO, JAPAN**

According to Gray, Japan—more specifically Hokkaido, the island north of mainland Japan—is the “darling of skiing right now.” Niseko is the biggest resort on Hokkaido, and by far the most reliable when it comes to snow, even though it’s not at a high altitude. “They get epic amounts,” says Gray, adding that the flakes have a unique soft quality: “It’s puffy, which I think appeals to people enormously.” Another one of Niseko’s biggest draws: it’s linked to the IKON Pass, which gives skiers access to more than 50 resorts (predominantly in the US). Hokkaido’s trails are spread across a volcano consisting of four different bases; they are not connected at the bottom, but it’s easy to cross between when you’re up on the hill. “Hokkaido is known for backcountry skiing,” says Gray. “If you go as a regular skier, it’s an intermediate mountain. Tree skiing is super fun since there are no tree ‘wells’ like in North America.”

The hotel scene is a little more underdeveloped than other ski towns, but Gray has a handful of trusty stays to recommend, including the Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono, appealing in particular because of its seclusion. The same goes for the high-design Higashiyama Niseko Village, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. “It would be great for someone who doesn’t want to be on the hill as much.” Those looking to soak up the village vibe might be better ▶

range is much simpler. “A lot of people are increasingly motivated by their stomachs,” says Gray, “Who doesn’t love northern Italian food? Having a nice big bowl of risotto is a dreamy thing.” The restaurant at the Dolomiti Lodge Alverà is a failsafe for local staples—think speck, mushrooms, polenta, and risotto—as well as the Michelin-starred Atelier Moessmer Norbert Niederkofler.

The other major lure here is the sheer scale of skiable terrain. The Dolomites range has more than 745 miles of skiing and 450 lifts, which means ample runs to explore and less likelihood of running into other skiers. The best international gateway is Venice, just over two hours’ drive from the main range (and a much better visiting experience in midwinter than in overtouristed midsummer).

For accommodation, Cortina’s Dolomiti Lodge Alverà, (Gray’s personal favorite) is set in a building that’s got a modern-meets-classic chalet style. Otherwise, try the Rosapetra, with its excellent spa. Keep an eye out, too, for the soon-to-reopen Rosa Alpina, which is about to re-emerge under Aman’s auspices (notably, it will now open nearly year-round, to capture visits outside the ski season).

If après-ski is more your focus, Marmolada hotel in Corvara is the best option, right in the main town of the Alta Badia ski resort area. “People love being in town, walking around and seeing what’s going on.” Still, Gray suggests that a trip to the Dolomites is best planned with stays at a variety of locations. “You can get a pass and go from village to village, so you can even go over to another country [Austria] for lunch.”



Skiing Niseko, the largest resort on Hokkaido, which is at the center of Japan's ski boom.



suiting to stay in Grand Hirafu, which is among the buzziest towns in the area. "It has more of that traditional ski-village feel." Gray also suggests checking into the Skye Niseko hotel, a contemporary property with an *onsen* and door-to-door ski access. "It's among the best, and up a bit closer to the hill," she says. Otherwise, consider AYA Niseko, a ski-in/ski-out property with incredible penthouses, and centrally located in the village, with quick access to a wealth of restaurants. "People love the food, and it's really fun to have ramen on the slopes," says Gray. Boyoso, located in a log cabin under a gondola, is the best place for slopeside ramen, but Gray also recommends two top-flight, reservations-required sushi spots: Sushi Kato and Sushi Shin by Miyakawa, from three Michelin-starred chef-founder Masaaki Miyakawa.

## what to pack

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