

SE Escape
HD **Ski resorts may face a snowless future**
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AUSTRALIA's ski resorts will not be viable beyond mid-century because of the effects of global warming, tourism experts have warned.

As the Winter Olympics enters its second week in unseasonably warm temperatures that have snow machines working overtime to ensure a reliable supply of white powder, tourism experts say our own ski resorts are exhibiting such steep declines in snowfall their future is bleak.

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"They will not be viable if this trend continues, as we expect it to," Professor Susanne Becken from Griffith University's Griffith Institute for Tourism said.

Becken's comments are part of a broader call to tourism operators and authorities to consider how to deal with climate change.

The Griffith University academic was part of an international research team that assessed the potential impact of climate change on the ski industry in New Zealand and Australia in 2012.

After conducting research at two Snowy Mountains ski sites, it was estimated snow depth at Australian resorts would be between 57 per cent and 78 per cent of 2012 levels by the 2040s, and between 21 per cent and 29 per cent of current depths by the 2090s.

"When we considered the number of days with snow depth at each of the sites in the current climate, the lowest sites were only just achieving the generally accepted 100-day threshold for a viable industry," she said. "Our research forecasts Australian snow days will fall to between 81 and 114 per annum by the 2040s, and down to between zero and 75 days by the 2090s." At the Australian sites, the number of snow days – days when snow depths are at or greater than the industry's 30cm standard – are now between 94 and 155.

"These changes will have an impact on future potential Australia-New Zealand tourism flows," Becken said.

However, Becken said it was not just the country's ski fields where the impact of a changing climate posed questions for tourism operators.

She said Queensland's World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef – one of the country's most popular tourist attractions – was also at risk from coral bleaching and the impact of rising sea levels.

Globally, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) lists 44 World Heritage sites as in danger, many because of the effects of environmental degradation or climate change.

These include attractions such as Florida's Everglades National **Park**. "Because tourism is so important to this country, Australia needs to be at the forefront of dealing with changes in climate," she said.

While short-term measures, such as the use of snow machines on ski slopes, could delay the impact of climate change on tourism, Becken said operators needed to begin planning for the future, with diversification likely to be a key adaptation measure.

In areas such as the Snowy Mountains, she said tourism authorities were already making the most of summertime activities such as mountain biking and hiking to balance inconsistent snowfall.

"It is very important that the tourist industry understands how vulnerable destinations are to changes that mean destinations are no longer attractive in the way they were previously," she said. "This is crucial not only for the international tourist business involved but also for national economies with development goals that often depend on a healthy and growing tourism industry."

2 Volunteer in africa AFRICAN safari specialists Bench International have launched a range of new volunteer projects as part of the Sydney-based **company**'s 45th birthday celebrations.

The **company** said the programs will be available from late this year and will be run in conjunction with volunteer tourism operator Camps International.

Bench general manager Martin Edwards said the programs in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda will offer customers the opportunity to be involved in wildlife research and support programs, as well as assist with community development projects.

The programs will be aimed at school expeditions, gap year participants, older singles and family groups, and participants will be able to undertake trips ranging in length from two weeks to three months.

Visit benchinternational.com.au or phone 1300 AFRICA for more information.

3 European specials LUXURY tours operator Scenic Tours has marked the release of its 2015 European River Cruising program with a string of earlybird specials.

The luxury tours operator, which specialises in European river cruising, has unveiled a range of new experiences and destinations for next year, including a route through France that takes in the 18th-century architecture, gardens and vineyards of Bordeaux.

Guests who book now will be able to secure the new itineraries at 2014 prices. The new trips have been created as all-inclusive European experiences, including sightseeing activities, entertainment, accommodation, airport transfers, meals and tips included.

"We are thrilled to start this year off with a sneak peek of what will feature in the 2015 program for European River Cruising," general manager of product Aleisha Fittler said. "We have included a variety of new experiences and destinations for next year, which are on **sale** now at a special pre-release rate." Contact your travel agent or Scenic Tours on 1300 SCENIC for more information.

4 **Hong Kong** stopover BRITISH Airways has added **Hong Kong** to its growing list of stopover destinations in Asia, allowing Australians to take a break on the way to or from the airline's London home. Travellers flying with the British carrier or one of its codeshare partners are now eligible to stop over in the **Chinese** territory for a holiday or business. It adds to existing British Airways stopover destinations such as Tokyo, Singapore, Shanghai, Chengdu and Bangkok and follows the announcement the airline will become the sole European carrier to fly to Australia, following Virgin Atlantic's decision to cancel its Sydney service. British Airways South West Pacific regional **commercial** manager Nicole Backo said the airline's stopover destinations provide more flexibility for travellers to explore or do business without the hassle of having to find connecting flights at additional cost. Australians travelling on British Airways services from **Hong Kong** will also be able to travel on the airline's new A380 aircraft, which operate on selected flights to London.

Visit britishairways.com for more information.

5 take in a Taste of peru THE lawns of Canberra's National Gallery of Australia will come alive next month with the art, culture, music and film of Peru.

Fiesta is a free evening event held on March 7 and 8 in conjunction with the Gallery's exhibition Gold and the Incas: Lost Worlds of Peru, which will showcase the splendour of the Incan empire and its South American predecessors.

Festival guests will be treated to Peruvian food and music from South American six-piece band Tigramuna and Australia's best known Peruvian folk dance **group**, Te Amo Peru.

There will also be late-night screenings of *The Motorcycle Diaries* – a 2004 film about the young life of revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara – and food documentary *Peru Sabe: Cuisine as an agent of social change*.

The National Gallery will also offer ticketed, late-night entry to the *Gold and the Incas* exhibition over the two nights. See nga.gov.au/Enlighten2014 for further information.

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