

Whether you embrace the cold or seek to escape it, Australia is blessed with abundant places to go this season. Here are 50 enticing options

WINTER WANDERS

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NSW

Sydney

The NSW capital might be considered the ultimate Aussie summer destination but its allure remains strong across the cooler months. Bondi Beach swaps bikinis for beanies during a two-week festival (July 5-21) replete with theatre, comedy and live music, ice-skating rink and ferris wheel. You can get your skates on, too, at the Darling Harbour Winter Festival (July 6-21), which features a program of adventure films plus DJ beats. Choose a hotel with a top-notch spa for the perfect defrost – The Langham, Crown Sydney, Capella and QT Sydney hit the spot.

visitnsw.com

Northern Beaches

It's a dream fit: whale-watching from a balcony of the historic Jonah's hotel at a Sydney beach named for the cetacean (with a headland that resembles one). June-July-early August is the peak time for the northern migration of the humpbacks from cold southern

waters to the warmer Pacific, with mums and their calves returning south in October-November. Jonah's, a hospitality mainstay at Whale Beach since the 1920s, offers stylish "Hamptons meets French Riviera" accommodation and top-notch dining.

jonahs.com.au

Riverina

The window seat of a guestroom at Gundagai's Flash Jacks, boutique lodgings in a converted 1888 convent, is perfect to nestle in the winter sun. But there's much to explore in this town, roughly halfway between Sydney and Melbourne on the Hume Highway and a place at the heart of Aussie folklore. Think: dog on a tucker box, tracks to the Murrumbidgee River and a visit to the restored Niagara Cafe, an Art Deco gem. Pencil in Sunday roast lunch at Three Blue Ducks, Nimbo Fork Lodge.

kimoestate.com

South Coast

Berry, a heritage village two hours' drive from Sydney, is the perfect spot between the green



Wilga Station near Bathurst, main; The Donut Van in Berry, South Coast, above

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NORTHERN TERRITORY

Uluru

Running anywhere in the red centre in summer is unthinkable. In July, however, when average daily temperatures hover around 18C, dipping close to zero overnight, jogging becomes a much more palatable proposition. The Australian Outback Marathon attracts runners to the nation's spiritual heart on July 26 for an event that features full and half marathons plus 11km and 6km fun runs. Routes traverse red dirt tracks, unsealed roads and sand dunes, and whether you're a spectator or a participant, the scenery promises to be spectacular. Ayers Rock Resort has a range of accommodation to suit all budgets. Our pick? Sails in the Desert with its grove of silvery gums and Ilkari restaurant. ayersrockresort.com.au

QUEENSLAND

Brisbane

It's manta ray season all year long in the waters surrounding Lady Elliot Island but it reaches fever pitch in winter. For those pressed for time, Emporium South Bank in Brisbane offers the chance to snorkel with squadrons of

the graceful giants, wrapped up in a two-night Reef & Retreat getaway. Pairing a pampered stay at the hotel, guests are then flown to the eco island resort for an action-packed day, with glass-bottom boat tour, guided snorkelling, fish feeding and a tropical buffet lunch. emporiumhotels.com.au

When the British & Irish Lions descend on Brisbane for two matches (July 2 and 19), guests at the new Queens Wharf Residences will have their home away from home sorted. There are more than 200 well-appointed apartments in the tallest tower of the Queen's Wharf Precinct, delivering river and botanic garden views, plus in-room amenities by Elysia Wellness Retreat. Footy fever or not, it makes for a chic city stay, with a new public art trail to wander, a wine lounge, sauna and steam room. minorhotels.com

Tropical North QLD

Swap the southern chill for the swaying palms and lagoon pools of the Sheraton Grand Mirage in Port Douglas, home base for Australia's premier tropical food festival. At Taste Port Douglas (August 7-10), guests can mingle with master chefs, join cooking classes and walk off indulgent meals along golden sands. Highlights include the Long Lunch series beneath

the sprawling canopies of poinciana trees in Market Park, and the theatrical Flames of the Forest fire show set deep in the Daintree Rainforest. Festival packages are available. marriott.com

After three seasons in the Med, the 41m Benetti superyacht MY Northern Escape has been relocated to Cairns. During the winter months, migrating dwarf minke and humpback whales add an extra layer of excitement to tailored itineraries. Most requested is a five-to seven-night journey from Cairns to Lizard Island, with stops to dive or snorkel the Ribbon Reefs. Or kick things up a notch with the new Outback to Ocean package, connecting Luxury Lodges of Australia member Mt Mulligan Lodge with a bespoke Morris Nautical Charter and a stay at Orpheus Island resort or the ultra-private and chic house on Pelorus Island. morrisnautical.au

Gold Coast Hinterland

It's hard to think of an Australian hot tub with a more surprising view than that of the one cleverly perched at the edge of Verandah House Country Estate, Mount Tamborine. The cedar tub offers not only a magnesium soak but a glimpse of distant Gold Coast skyscrapers. Life here is a world away from the Glitter Strip. Think cheeky king parrots eyeing your breakfast, crackling in-room fireplaces and an onsite barrel sauna. It's enough to attract celebrity guests such as actor Jude Law. vhcountrystate.com.au

Scenic Rim

Just over an hour's drive from Brisbane, Spicers Hidden Vale is well known among foodies. They flock to the rural retreat's Homage restaurant for languid lunches starring local ingredients such as Marburg emu and Too-woomba beef (request a table on the deck with its striking views overlooking the infinity pool and mango tree). Fully relax by overnighting in a heritage cottage or contemporary cabin with a soaring stone fireplace and outdoor bath on a secluded deck. Say hi to the kangaroos that pop by to graze the lawns. spicersretreats.com

Sunshine Coast Hinterland

On a working farm in Kin Kin, Mayan Farm pairs pastoral charm with quiet luxury just 40 minutes from Noosa. Four new rammed-earth villas sit gently on the land, two with outdoor spas, two welcoming pets, all with views that overlook Kin Kin Creek and tucked away from the bite of westerly winds. Days unfold slowly here: a pottery class, horse riding, perhaps a long lunch prepared by a private chef. As evening falls, smoke drifts from the outdoor kitchen with six grills and a pizza oven. mayanfarm.com.au

K'gari/Fraser Island

Winter on the Fraser Coast brings a rare kind of magic. Migrating humpback whales don't simply cruise by; they stay and play in the warm waters of Hervey Bay. From mid-July to late October, Fraser Island Boat Charters of-



Verandah House Country Estate, top left; Sheraton Grand Mirage, Port Douglas, top right; Spicers Hidden Vale, right; Australian Outback Marathon at Uluru, left

