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Aussie Christmas holiday ideas

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More about Christmas:

The cicadas are buzzing, cherries are ripening, the rellies are coming and the temperature is climbing. Christmas in Australia is all about spending long days in the sun, catching up with friends and family and taking it easy. If you're looking for a Christmas getaway check out these top 10 Chrissie holiday ideas.

White Christmas

If you're dreaming of a white Christmas think sand, not snow. Whitehaven Beach on Whitsunday Island is world-renowned for its pure, white, silica sands and crystal-clear waters and the Whitsunday reefs have outstanding coral cover and variety. Charter a luxury yacht from Sunsail Whitsundays and spend the festive season on the white silica beach of Whitehaven. You won't be slaving over a hot oven to serve up Christmas lunch or dinner, because Sunsail can provision your yacht with an array of gourmet treats. In the Christmas spirit, all Whitsunday charters booked for December receive a 20 percent discount off the regular price.

Website: www.sunsail.com.au

Camp it up

Kwiambal National Park is one of the more stunning national parks in north-west NSW, and one of the least visited. On the junction of the Macintyre and Severn rivers, this park has some of the best swimming holes and river gorge scenery east of the Kimberleys. The camping area is at Lemon Tree Flat, a shady sprawling grassed area beside the Severn. Here, you camp under wind-twisted gums in the shadow of the high granite walls of the river gorge, with campsite views of huge boulders balancing precariously above the eddying water. It's a great place to swim (although the current in middle of the river moves quite fast the sandy river beaches are calm enough), fish, rock-hop or just sit and watch the early morning sun warm the pale river rocks.

Website: www.npws.nsw.gov.au

Beside a waterfall

Escape the coastal crowds and take a holiday drive along the Waterfall Way. This classic touring drive starts on the mid-north NSW coast at the banana-clad beach resort town of Coffs Harbour and coils its way up through lush rainforest of the Great Divide to the New England Tablelands to finish in Armidale. Highlights include Bellingen with its strip of cafes, galleries and alternative lifestyle markets; mountain-top Dorrigo, smothered in rainforest with its spectacular skywalk that leads out over the rainforest canopy; and the high plateau gorge country. Of waterfalls there are plenty, with the pick of the bunch being Dorrigo's Dangar, Ebor, Wollomombi (the highest in Australia) and Apsley.

Website: www.waterfallway.info

Culture vultures

Australia's capital city may be the home of power and politics, but it's also home to the best collection of museums and galleries in the country. Top of the list is the new National Museum of Australia. Other must sees are the National Art Gallery, The War Memorial, Questacon, Old Parliament House and the new National Portrait Gallery, or take the kids to the National Dinosaur Museum.

Website: www.canberratourism.com.au

Wild at heart

If you're looking for a wilderness escape then you can't go past Cradle Mountain Lodge in Tasmania. At the northern end of Cradle Mountain — Lake St Clair National Park there is a range of range of walks for all levels of fitness and keen-ness. Even if you don't want to walk, drive up to Lake Dove for spectacular (depending on the weather) views of Cradle Mountain. If you're staying at Cradle Mountain Lodge, you can go horse riding to the aptly-named Fury Plains, four-wheel driving, join guided walks, night-time animal spotting tours or informative slide shows.

Website: www.cradlemountainlodge.com.au

On the Murray Forget the pounding surf and sandy cossies, spend this Christmas floating down the country's longest river. Despite much drought-related doom and gloom in recent media reports the Murray River, while experiencing record low levels, has more than enough water for house boating. There's plenty of houseboats available to suit all budgets, but if you want to splurge out for Christmas try the super luxe Dream Boatel, moored at Mannum in South Australia. This floating palace, all smoky glass, chrome and stylish design, is more like a five-star city hotel than a houseboat with five large bedrooms, each with ensuites and floor-to-ceiling windows.

Website: www.dreamboatel.com.au

At the dive in

Watching a movie under the stars is an Australian summer event not to be missed. There are moonlight cinemas showing in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, but brand new is the Dive In Theatre at Macquarie Waters Hotel and Apartments in Port Macquarie on the NSW mid-north coast. It operates Friday and Saturday nights and also on Wednesday nights during school holidays, screening the latest new release movies and is free of charge to all hotel guests, who can swim while they watch the movie or relax in a chair beside the pool.

Website: www.mwaters.com.au

Island paradise

Kangaroo Island's gentle rolling hills, covered in rich pasture and studded with grazing sheep and cattle, belie a wilder heart. Close to half of the island is either natural bushland or national park, and it is home to some of the most diverse wildlife you'll find concentrated in one area anywhere in Australia. Four thousand penguins, 6000 fur seals, 600 rare Australian sea lions, 5000 koalas, 15,000 kangaroos, 254 species of birdlife and somewhere in between 500,000 and one million tamar wallabies. If you can't spot wildlife here then you simply aren't trying.

Website: www.tourkangarooisland.com.au

Slumber safari

If you can't get to Africa this is the next best thing. Werribee Open Range Zoo's Slumber Safaris include up-close animal encounters, a delicious African barbecue feast, an African drumming lesson and an evening of fun around the campfire. Get close to the action of Africa sleeping in four-star canvas safari tents and wake to watch the savannah come to life while enjoying a delicious cooked breakfast. All Slumber Safari guests receive special discounts on all special tours of the zoo, including the canoe safari along the Werribee River and the open vehicle adventure where you can come face-to-face with the animals.

Website: www.zoo.org.au

Underground

If you really want to escape the heat and Christmas crowds, head out to the opal mining town of White Cliffs in outback NSW. Searing summer temperatures of 40°C plus, and a wealth of opal buried beneath the surface has driven most of the population of this tiny outback town underground. And you'd be mad not to join them. Dug-out homes have a steady year-round temperature of 22°C. Spend a night or two in the underground motel or B&B, tour the galleries and fossick at the opal fields.

Website: www.undergroundmotel.com.au