

GEOGRAPHY

Perisher Blue Report

The Perisher Blue Resort is a local example of the global economic activity of tourism. It is an alpine-based, leisure and hospitality enterprise located within the boundaries of Kosciuszko National Park, in south-east New South Wales – approximately 350km south-west of Sydney (36°S, 148°E). It covers 1245 ha of skiable terrain and incorporates seven major peaks and 50 ski lifts. As a business, Perisher Blue is a multifaceted enterprise focusing on snow sports area operations, railway operations, lodgings and the supply of food and beverages.

Locational Factors

Perisher Blue (36°40'S, 148°41'E) is located within the borders of the Kosciuszko National Park in the Snowy Mountains of south-east of NSW. The most significant markets for Perisher Blue are Sydney (a 5.5 hour drive away) and Canberra (a 2.5 hour drive away). It is principally a domestic-based tourist attraction, which can be both positive (not influenced heavily by global changes) and negative (limited pool of tourists).

The location of ski resorts is determined by five main locational factors.

Elevation

Perisher's base elevation is approximately 1720m and the summit elevation at the highest lifted point 2034 m. Perisher's base elevation is a lot higher than many other notable ski resorts. Therefore, elevation is not the principal locational determinant, but it is an important one. At 1603 to 2034 m, Perisher's elevation is well within the range of altitude occupied by other resorts.

Latitude

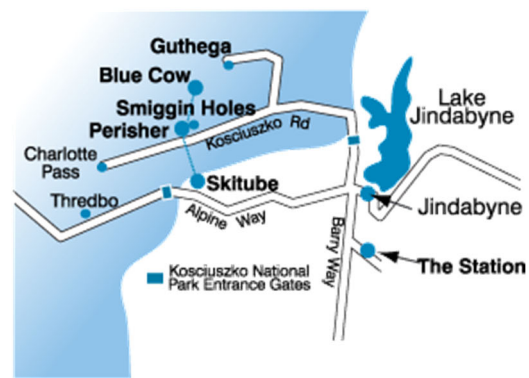
The key locational factor in Perisher's case is latitude, not altitude. Australia's geographical location means that it misses out on the colder temperatures experienced at higher latitudes. Because of its latitude (36°40'S) Perisher receives the maximum amount of snowfall in winter.

Climate

Perisher Blue receives 2000mm of precipitation every year, which comes mainly in the form of snow during the winter months. This snow is 'dumped' by the passage of cold fronts, creating large snowdrifts during the winter. This is the best location for a ski resort such as Perisher to be located.

Accessibility

The location of winter sports destinations is greatly influenced by the potential market and availability of a labour force. Ski resorts by their nature, tend to be found in remote mountain locations and will only develop if the specific site is accessible to tourists and staff. Improvements in the transport infrastructure, as well as the opening of the Skitube, have significantly reduced this barrier to consumption for Perisher Blue. The resort is accessible by road and by the Skitube, Australia's only underground rack-railway.



History

The main reason that Perisher Blue Ski Resort is located where it is purely historical. Had it not been for the development of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme (1949-1974), Perisher would most likely never have been developed. European immigrants that came to work on the project, for example Tony Sponar, introduced and embraced recreational skiing, making it more popular among Australians. The Snowy Mountains Scheme also opened up the area through the construction of access roads, and the consequent growth of regional settlements, such as Jindabyne, ensured that there was a pool of labour for the resort to use.

Ecological Dimension

The term 'ecological dimensions' refers to the relationship between people and the environment, and the effect that they have on each other. Perisher Blue is located within an extremely fragile alpine environment, and has a number of both topographical and climatic constraints placed upon it, such as: altitude; the surrounding landform; the river system; the spread and depth of snow; changes in wind patterns; and finally, global warming. All of these factors have a major influence on the vulnerability and resilience of this ecosystem. As such, it has now become protected as part of Kosciuszko National Park (KNP).

Climate constraints

The sustainability of Perisher Blue depends on climate. Global warming could result in the retreat of the snowline to higher elevations. It is expected that climate change may result in reduced snowfall and a shorter snow season.

Humans also have a major impact on the functional form and character of Perisher Blue, in a number of areas. These include the following:

Threatened animal species

The mountain pygmy possum, broad toothed rat, and alpine water skink are all native to the Perisher Blue resort area, and as such are threatened by the large number of tourists that use the area.

Perisher is committed to minimising the impacts that human interactions, just as developments and snow sports, have on these species by:

- Prohibiting access to the species prime habitats by skiers, boarders and slope grooming machines.

- Constructing 'love tunnels' or small mammal crossings under ski runs so that animals such as the burramys can move about more freely in some area.

Vegetation

The area's most distinctive plant species are the highly specialised alpine and sub-alpine plant communities. Overall, 178 plant species are found in the area. Alpine communities only have short windows for growth and they take from 300 to 700 years to reach full maturity. As a result the ecosystem is extremely fragile. Consequently, 11 of these plant species are considered threatened due to human activities, for example trampling, which is killing the climax communities currently present in the area.

To monitor the problem vegetation plots and transects have been established to monitor a variety of factors, which include the rate of natural regeneration of previously disturbed areas and the impacts of the new development activities.

Water Supply

The Perisher Blue resort area requires a considerable amount of water for its operations; however, with the 2000mm of annual precipitation that Perisher receives falling mainly in the form of snow, there is a limited amount of clean water available for use and there can be a critical shortage of water at times. This is because Perisher is located on the headwaters of Perisher Creek so it has a relatively small catchment area. Although with this, most of the moisture is unavailable when it is needed in water, as it is frozen as ice in the snowpack. What little water is available is becoming increasingly adversely affected by human activities, for example the sewage spill in Charlotte's Pass.

Pollution

The influx of large numbers of tourists in the winter threatens environmental quality from both sewage and vehicle emissions.

The operation of the sewage system is vital to the commercial success of the enterprise. Any disruption to the treatment process would result in the temporary closure of the resort and the loss of millions of dollars of income.

Cars are another problem to the enterprise, but however, they disrupt the ecosystem and cause problems in the fragile alpine zone. Apart from the exhaust fumes, the most problematic issue is the spillage of polyromatic hydrocarbons onto car park surfaces. The polluted car park runoff can impact on the water quality in the nearby streams.

Perisher Blue is taking a number of steps to ensure the future of its enterprise, by implementing a number of policies to ensure the **ecological sustainability** of the area in the future. These strategies include:

- Prohibiting access and restricting development within endangered species' habitats.
- Utilizing water from the Hydro-Electric scheme to cater for the large demand for water, as well as promoting greater water efficiency.
- Using 'harmonic filters' on chairlifts to reduce energy consumption, as well as promoting increased energy efficiency.
- Constructing safe animal crossings underneath the ski slopes, and building raised walkways to minimise vegetation trampling.

- Replacing disturbed areas with native species (native regeneration program).
- Use of better equipment for lifting and snowmaking, as well as utilizing 'cloud seeding', which will increase snowfall during the winter; increase the length of the snow season; and maintain the viability of the local economic enterprises reliant on it for survival.
- Educating tourists on how to minimise the impact they have on the environment.

Perisher Blue is committed to achieving a sustainable balance between the protection and maintenance of the environment, exercising social responsibility and economic development and providing high quality alpine recreation and tourism experiences.

Internal and external linkages and flows of people, goods, services and ideas.

People

Perisher Blue is a market leader at both local and national scales. Perisher Blue is a significant local employer and major player in terms of the regional economy. Perisher Blue recruits staff from the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide to work in its hotels, food and beverage outlets, in its railway operations, as ski and board instructors, in equipment rentals, and as lift operators. The more specialised ski instructors fly in from the Northern Hemisphere to continue their perpetual winter. Young locals who have grown up in the mountains often seek this as a career as they have the needed skills. Tourists from both Australia and overseas travel to Perisher Blue either for single day visits, or for several day visits.

Economy

Perisher Blue has an enormous impact on the local economy. Fifty percent of its entire operating cost is spent on labour, while a significant amount of money is fed into the local economy in return for food, alcohol and clothing that are purchased from local retailers. Large sums of money also flow into the adjacent urban centres, such as Jindabyne and Cooma, which service the massive influx of tourists in the winter. The multiplier effect of the money spent by tourists on the local economy is huge.

Goods and Services

The main flows of goods and services relating to Perisher Blue and its operations include:

- Retail activities
- Services/utilities from nearby urban centres
- Medical facilities
- Entertainment
- Administration
- Transport

Government

The NSW state government sets the parameters in which the resort operates, through the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS). The government actually owns the land on which the resort operates, and they lease it to Perisher Blue Pty. Ltd. for use. The NPWS is responsible for managing the resort leases, the natural and cultural values of the lease areas, public health, and issues related to the impacts of the resorts on the rest of the National Park. It is also their role to provide the municipal utilities and infrastructure that is normally the job of the local council, for example, water supply, sewage treatment, garbage collection, etc.

The whole perception of Perisher Blue is based on linkages. It is a single integrated resort incorporating interlinked resort nodes. This integrated nature of the resort has proved to be very popular. This has allowed Perisher to expand its market.

Globalisation and the emergence of international alliances

The process of globalisation is helping to transform the industry of winter sports. For example there is a trend towards the development of strategic marketing alliances that link ski resorts all over the world. This will, in time, result in the emergence of a truly global holiday club where tourists can move freely between allied resorts in Australian, North American and European resorts and be rewarded for their loyalty.

Effects of Global Changes

There are many global changes that would have an impact on the operations of Perisher Blue, such as:

- Global warming
- Terrorism
- Changes in wind patterns
- Natural disasters
- Higher national or global real incomes
- Increasing number of visitors leading to increased pollution
- Changes in ownership
- Changes in the value of the Australian dollar
- Tourism promotion by the government
- Better / more effective technology

Global Climate Change

The future of Perisher Blue depends on climate more than any other constraint. Global Climate change could result in the disappearance of natural snow from all the highest peaks of mainland Australia. As this is a global problem there is little that can be done by Perisher Blue to avert this impact on the enterprise.

The alpine ecosystem is the most sensitive to climate change in Australia because of its limited areal and altitudinal extent. The reduction in snowpack would disrupt the ecological processes and impact on the distribution of species, populations and communities.

Increasing Global Competition

The market in cold-destination tourism is extremely volatile. Perisher Blue has to compete with other NSW and Victorian resorts, overseas cold-destination resorts and also warm-destination resorts both here and internationally. With the increasing technological innovation the enterprise will be affected, as it makes snow-based tourism much more competitive, as many tourists will now be able to easily travel to different destinations at similar costs.

Another major problem is the lack of the destination loyalty that once characterized the industry. Tourists are now able to easily change their preferences from one particular location to another. Meeting the guests' expectations is how one resort differs themselves from their competitors.

'The Future Plan' for Perisher Blue Resort

Perisher is committed to working to achieve its vision...

"To be Australia's pre-eminent four-season destination mountain resort, providing international class facilities, based on ecologically sustainable development principles."

To achieve this Perisher Blue is aiming to improve the Mountain and Village in a way that has been planned so that they complement each other. The new mountain facilities being implemented will take advantage of the geographic and topographic location of Perisher that will basically guarantee that it will receive more snow over a larger area. There is also the plan to ensure the efficient integration of the original four separate resorts through the modernisation of lifting.

For the vision to also be achieved, the village will provide an improved range of entertainment and active and passive activities. This will result in the creation of a range of pleasurable activities that balance recreational, educational, retail and entertainment opportunities.