

White Fluffy Stuff

It's so cold that your bones hurt. A light breeze makes your teeth ache as it dries your mouth and gives you an instant ice-cream headache. Everything is muffled and the sky has an odd glow. A few minutes later, large fluffy snow flakes start drifting down to earth. A sense of wonder overwhelms and the cold is forgotten. This is the magic of snow.

In another lifetime I lived in Hokkaido in northern Japan. It is the first and only time I have lived somewhere that spends a significant portion of the year coated in a white blanket. In my first winter, the thermometer dropped to zero on my birthday. Celebrations being held at the worryingly named "Bogey Club" karaoke bar moved into the street when we heard the snow had begun. I still have a perfect image in my mind of massive soft snowflakes floating through a pitch black sky.

It started snowing and it didn't stop. Once the ground had its first layer we ran outside to play. We made snowmen, threw snowballs at each other, buried ourselves and caught snowflakes on our tongues letting their existence gently melt.

Four months later we were sick of the sight of the stuff.

Many years later I moved to Tokyo and a small group of us would head off for snowboarding weekends in Nagano. We would leave on Friday after work and bicker in the crowded car until we arrived at the Backcountry Lodge near Naeba, where we would reconnect with chilled beer as we sat huddled around the gas heater.

At some point over the weekend my inner child would throw off the restraints of adult behaviour and I would run outside and throw myself giggling into the snowdrifts. Several

snow angels later I would re-enter the lodge, soggy and chilled, ruddy-faced from the cold, my eyelashes coated with snow crystals. My friends would shake their heads at my wontedness over the tops of their iced beers but I never tired of that feeling of nostalgia for a winter childhood that I never had.

I've even seen this wonder manufactured. At Ski Dubai we held a press conference once we had the snow park play area covered in snow. It is real snow. It just has a helping hand from an engineering firm. Even the most hardened, sceptical journalists who entered the park melted at the feel of the crunchy snow squeaking underfoot.

Tired at work, jaded from a demanding role and long hours, I would gaze into that same snow park to see the wide eyes of wonder in children's faces as they first felt the magic. It never failed to make me smile. In fact it still does.

I don't know what it is about snow that is so special but I do know that even though I don't want to live in it, I appreciate it's magic. I appreciate it even more when I am watching the flakes drift down from the night skies as I sit warm and cosy by a crackling fire.



The Snow Cave at Ski Dubai