

Before You Buy the Powder Dream

Five winter questions every Australian buyer should ask

The house may be cheap.

Winter may have other plans.



Snow country in one minute

Start here before opening the detailed checklist.

How much winter work comes with this house?

EASY

You can arrive and park.

- Municipal road clearing
- Flat access
- Good snow-dumping space
- Local contractor already available

MANAGEABLE

You need a winter plan.

- Driveway clearing required
- Some roof monitoring
- Local help needed while away
- Costs are known and budgeted

HIGH-MAINTENANCE

The house may own you.

- Private or steep access
- No clear snow storage
- Roof snow work likely
- No local support secured

The quick rule

A good snow-country home is not just close to skiing. It has reliable access, a safe roof and parking layout, local support, protected utilities, and a realistic winter budget.

The five questions

The first three are about access, snow storage and the roof.

1

Can you reach the house?

The council may clear the road. It may not clear your driveway.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Public road or private road? | ☐ How soon after overnight snow? |
| ☐ Can emergency vehicles reach it? | ☐ Who clears the final approach? |

2

Where will all the snow go?

Snow does not disappear. It changes address.

Check where road snow, driveway snow and roof snow will sit by late winter - not just after the first snowfall.

No snow-storage plan = no winter plan.

3

What is the roof trying to do?

DROP IT

Snow-shedding

HOLD IT

Snow-retaining

MELT IT

Snow-melting

MIX IT

Mixed system

No roof strategy is automatically best. The question is whether it suits the site - and who maintains it.

The five questions

The last two are about support and the true winter cost.

4

Who helps when you are in Australia?

Snow problems rarely wait for your next flight to Japan.

- **Driveway contractor** Clears access before you arrive
- **Local checker** Looks after storms and sends photos
- **Plumber / heating tech** Handles frozen pipes or boiler trouble
- **Trusted key holder** Provides access when you are overseas

5

What does winter actually cost?

Cheap house. Expensive winter?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Site snow clearing | per visit or seasonal contract |
| Roof checks / snow removal | only when required - but must be available |
| Heating and fuel | especially January and February |
| Water shut-down / restart | for long absences |
| Absence management | storm checks, photos and emergency access |

Ask for last winter's actual bills, not a best guess.

Three winter surprises

The moments no sunny inspection can show you.

1. The snowplough gift

You wake up and the road is beautifully cleared. Unfortunately, the plough has left a wall of snow across your driveway.

ROAD CLEARED
DRIVEWAY BLOCKED

2. The buried shovel

Your snow shovel is inside the locked house. The front door is behind one metre of snow.

SHOVEL
INSIDE

3. The frozen welcome

After a long flight, you turn on the tap - and discover winter arrived before you did.

TAP ON
NO WATER

The practical lesson

Plan the first ten minutes after arrival - before planning the first ski run.

Roof types without the engineering lecture

Identify what the roof does, then ask one good question.



DROP IT Snow-shedding roof

Snow slides off.

Ask: Where does it land?



HOLD IT Snow-retaining / no-snowfall roof

Snow stays on the structure.

Ask: What load is it designed for?



MELT IT Snow-melting roof

Heat or water melts snow.

Ask: What does it cost and what happens if it fails?



MIX IT Mixed or complex roof

Different sections behave differently.

Ask: Can the snow and meltwater paths be drawn?

Safety rule

Roof snow work is professional, high-risk work - not a weekend DIY project. For a second-home owner, the key question is who can inspect and act while you are away.

Red flags and green flags

A quick screen before you fall in love with the listing.

RED FLAGS

Walk away - or investigate carefully.

- No clear place to put removed snow.
- Roof snow falls onto the entrance, car or neighbour.
- The last road section is private, steep or unreliable.
- No drain, waterproofing or roof maintenance record.
- Frozen-pipe history is unknown.
- No contractor or local checker while you are overseas.
- The only explanation is: "It has always been fine."

"It has always been fine" is not a maintenance record.

GREEN FLAGS

Good signs of a manageable winter.

- Municipal snow clearing reaches the property reliably.
- Flat access and good visibility.
- Enough on-site snow-dumping space.
- Roof snow does not threaten the entrance or parking.
- The current owner's contractor can be introduced.
- Winterized plumbing and a clear shut-down process.
- Year-round neighbours or a local contact nearby.
- January / February photos and real winter bills exist.

The best winter feature may be the neighbour with a snowblower.

Send this page to the agent

Ask for answers, photos and evidence - not reassurance.

1

How many times per winter is the driveway normally cleared?

2

Who currently clears it, and can they continue after the sale?

3

What did snow clearing cost last winter?

4

Where is cleared snow stored through the whole season?

5

What roof strategy does the house use: shedding, retaining, melting or mixed?

6

Where do roof snow and meltwater go? Please mark this on a site plan.

7

Has roof snow removal ever been needed? How often, by whom and at what cost?

8

Has snow or ice ever damaged the roof, gutters, carport, ceiling or exterior?

9

For M-type / flat roofs: when were drains, ducts, waterproofing and overflow routes last checked?

10

Have water pipes ever frozen or burst?

11

Is the access road public / municipal or private?

12

Can a snowblower be used safely on this property?

13

Please provide January or February photos of the roof, driveway, entrance, parking and neighbouring area.

Before leaving - and before arriving

Two short routines prevent most unpleasant surprises.

BEFORE LEAVING JAPAN

- ☐ Drain the water system or shut it down correctly.
- ☐ Set minimum heating if required.
- ☐ Check fuel level and delivery access.
- ☐ Clear vulnerable areas before departure.
- ☐ Confirm contractor access and payment.
- ☐ Ask for inspection after heavy snow.
- ☐ Remove food and secure windows / shutters.
- ☐ Photograph the property before leaving.

Do not leave the emergency key, contact list and payment method until the first storm.

BEFORE ARRIVING IN WINTER

- ☐ Confirm the public road is passable.
- ☐ Confirm the driveway and parking are cleared.
- ☐ Confirm the front path and door are accessible.
- ☐ Confirm heating can be started safely.
- ☐ Confirm water can be turned on safely.
- ☐ Check for roof snow over the entrance or car space.
- ☐ Check vents, meters and outdoor units are clear.
- ☐ Ask for fresh photos after a major storm.

Plan the first ten minutes after arrival before planning the first ski run.

Mini glossary and buyer notes

Useful Japanese roof words - plus space for your decision.

Words you may hear

murakusetsu yane	Snow-retaining / no-snowfall roof
M M-gata yane	M-type inward-draining roof
kobai yane	Sloped roof
rakusetsu-shiki	Snow-shedding type
taisetsu-shiki	Snow-resisting type
yusetsu-shiki	Snow-melting type
seppi	Overhanging snow cornice
suga-more	Ice-dam related leakage

Buyer notes

Core buying principle

A good snow-country second home is not simply close to ski fields. It has reliable winter access, a safe roof and parking layout, local snow-removal support, protected utilities, and a realistic management plan.

Decision-aid only. Verify local conditions with the seller, agent, municipality and appropriate local professionals. Regional roof terminology and snow-management concepts are adapted from the source framework used in the original JapanoMa checklist.