

Quebec's Hôtel de Glace

The BIG Chill



Sleeping at the Ice Hotel and Frolicking at the Quebec Winter Carnival

story by LAURIE WALLACE-LYNCH

I have to say—sleeping at Quebec's Hôtel de Glace (Ice Hotel) is a really *cool* experience!

Actually, bundled up in the mummy-like sleeping bag, you are surprisingly warm, despite the fact that the entire room, including the bed and the furniture, is made of ice. Blocks of ice form the base of the bed, which are topped with a solid wood base and a comfortable camp-style mattress. Your sleeping bag and liner, isolating bed sheet and a pillow are delivered to your room, ready to unroll at bedtime. The temperature is a chilly -3°C to -5°C, no matter what the temperature is outside. The specially designed outdoor sleeping bags are made to resist temperatures between -15°C and -30°C (5°F to 22°F). Just a hint—wear your hat to bed and bring a scarf—only your face gets a bit cold, but frankly, before dozing off, I was too busy gazing at the ice carvings of a giant sea turtle and fish on the wall and ceiling to notice the cold.

There's no potty, no plugs, no electricity here, other than some

night lights, which you can turn on or off as needed. There are, however heated outhouses located just outside of the Ice Hotel and at 5 in the morning, nature was calling.

First, I had to figure out how to get out of my mummy casing as the sleeping bag was fastened under my chin with Velcro. I found the zipper, put my hand out into the chilly air, and freed my head from the hood. Next I wiggled out of the liner and the sleeping bag, pulled my coat out of the supplied wet bag and then reached down to find my boots. They were shoved inside of one another so as not to freeze overnight. Now what have I done with my cell phone? Oh, it's still in the sleeping bag. Coat on, boots on, phone in hand, I quietly slip into the tunnel-like hallway to make my way to the front door of this ice palace. It's eerily and yet beautifully quiet as I walk by the Ice Bar where Michael Jackson's *Beat It* is playing to four silent ice walls and some empty ice stools. »



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« Once outside, I head to the outhouse, throw open the door, and a blast of warm air hits my face from the heater. Out of the corner of my eye I spot another door—it's the well-lit back entrance to the main hotel. It's about 100 steps away and like a beacon, it is calling my name. You see, your stay at the Ice Hotel includes a hotel room at the beautiful on-site Hôtel Valcartier resort. The hotel room is where you store your luggage, get changed, and in my case, go to the bathroom at five in the morning. Back to my room at the Ice Hotel, I am awakened a few hours later by my wakeup call—it is a "call" in the most literal sense as one of the desk agents calls through the curtain on the door of your ice room.

The Ice Hotel is located at the Valcartier Vacation Village, about 20 minutes from Quebec City. The complex is like a winter carnival itself with snow tubing, slides, and a skating path. Indoors, the fun continues with games rooms, an indoor waterpark, along with various restaurants. The 42,000 square foot Ice Hotel complex has 42 rooms and suites, an Ice Bar, the Grand Hall with elaborate ice sculptures, an ice slide, along with a chapel and the outdoor Arctic Spas and Saunas - Ice Hotel guests take a dip in

the outdoor hot tub or sauna and then dry off and get into their PJ's in the main hotel prior to heading for bed in their ice room.

The world-famous Ice Hotel, there is only one other located in Finland, attracts more than 100,000 visitors a year including 4,000 overnight guests who are eager to try this one-of-a-kind experience.

Each year more than 50 artists and sculptors carve artistic shapes into the walls of certain suites based on a theme. It takes more than a month to create this magical winter wonderland, which opens around New Year and the whole thing is bulldozed come April, only to be rebuilt the following year.

Some of the stand-out suites include the Garden Gnome Room, the Exotic Flower room, the Mushroom Room and the Honeymoon Suite, which is one of only two rooms where the artist added colour to the ice. This romantic suite comes with its own outdoor hot tub and sauna room.

QUEBEC WINTER CARNIVAL

Quebecers are known for their sense of celebration and their contagious joie de vivre, which is evident everywhere you look at the Quebec Winter Carnival, a 10 day

party happening every February (February 7 to 16, 2020).

Music, local gastronomy, artistic flare, culture and outdoor adventure come together in this grand celebration of winter festivities. The Quebec Winter Carnival is the largest outdoor winter celebration in the world. Approximately 532,000 people, locals and visitors combined, attended the carnival sites in 2018 according to Marie-Eve Jacob of Carnaval de Quebec.

The tradition of celebrating winter with a carnival dates back to 1894 when the first major winter carnival was held in Quebec. Interrupted by two World Wars, the carnival re-emerged sporadically until 1955 when the economic development team revived the party and chose Bonhomme, a big white snowman, as the ambassador of the Quebec Winter Carnival.

"We embrace winter!" said Nancy Dacres, account executive of Quebec City Tourism.

Start the day with an exhilarating ride on the historical toboggan slide called Au 1884, located on the Dufferin Terrace in front of the historic Chateau Frontenac. The iconic hotel was carved in ice at the site of the Quebec Carnival Ice Palace site where you can also line up to have your photo taken with Bonhomme; try your skill at axe throwing, sample a delicious Beaver Tail (a yummy donut-like treat) or relax with a hot drink in front of the outdoor fire. »





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Scenes from Quebec Winter Carnival.



« The streets of Quebec City are buzzing with life as revelers pack into charming cafes and restaurants. Everywhere you look, people are smiling and laughing and a majority of carnival visitors are wearing the traditional woven red arrow sash jauntily tied around their waist or wrapped around their neck like a scarf to ward of the chill. The signature drink called Moose Blood also warms you up—it's a delicious concoction that looks and tastes similar to mulled wine.

While at the carnival a must-try is the French Onion Soup at Chez Boulay Bistro, Poutine at The Poutinery, just steps from the Chateau Frontenac, and featuring dozens of types of Poutine, the exquisite Sugar Pie at L'Échaudé and the Grilled Flank Steak at Cafe Sirocco.

Then take the funicular down the hill to visit Old Quebec with its abundance of quaint, winding cobblestone streets and gorgeous shops. Nearby we could hear cheering and laughter so we head up a cobblestone alley to discover a European-style city square filled with people who have formed a giant conga line, dancing to the music.

There is an abundance of outdoor activities to choose from during Carnival. You can go ice fishing on a lake standing over a hole bored into the ice or in the comfort of a big plastic igloo-shaped tent with benches. You can go ice skating at Place d'Youville, watch the ice canoe races on the St. Lawrence River or you can even partake in a polar bear plunge.

Where to Stay... in Quebec City and Area

Hilton Quebec

The beautiful Hilton hotel is located on Parliament Hill in Quebec City and is the headquarters for the Quebec Winter Carnival. From your room, as well as from the restaurant on the top floor, you can enjoy a panoramic view of the Quebec Legislature, the city and the St. Lawrence River. Carnival sites are within walking distance. hilton.com/en/hotels/quebec/hilton-quebec

Fairmont Chateau Frontenac

Royalty, Heads of State and movie stars like Grace Kelly (the late Princess Grace of Monaco) have stayed at the legendary Chateau Frontenac. This majestic castle on the hill overlooks Old Quebec and the St. Lawrence River. fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec/

Hôtel de Glace (The Ice Hotel) and Hôtel Valcartier in Valcartier, just outside of Quebec City.

A must-do bucket list destination at the renowned Ice Hotel and Hotel Valcartier. valcartier.com.

For more information on Quebec City, the Quebec Winter Carnival visit www.carnaval.qc.ca, quebeccite.com, quebecoriginal.com, quebecregion.com, tourisme-charlevoix.com