



by Sarah Wesley Lemire

# ICE, ICE, BABY

*Cold is nothing short of cool in Quebec City*

Hôtel de Glace  
Quebec City, Canada

■ **'Cuz, I'm. Having. A good. Time. With you. I'm telling you...**

The music thumps in the background, playing The Black Eyed Peas song, *The Time*, as people bundled from head to toe in their warmest winter gear sip florescent concoctions from square drink glasses crafted entirely of ice. Many stand around a fully glassed-in fireplace that throws no heat, but still invites the chilly to gather, if only for the imagined warmth and visual interest it provides.

A lucky few are able to score a private alcove complete with their own ice table and bench, which fortunately is covered in fur to keep frosty bottoms from going completely numb. Bartenders wearing wool caps and multiple layers of coats and scarves serve mixed drinks from bottles stored in ice wells and then hand them across a bar made from, yep, ice.

Some of the patrons have just attended a

wedding in the nearby ethereal, crystalline-cold chapel and others are checked in to spend the night in one of the 36 intricately carved rooms equipped with ice pedestal beds and luminescent walls etched with honeycombs, frogs and other hand-carved images. And still others are just visiting to lay claim to the bragging rights for having a drink in the bar at one of the only ice hotels in the entire world.

Made from 500 tons of ice and 15,000 tons of snow, the 32,000-square-foot Hôtel de Glace accommodates 88 guests per night. In addition to its ice bar, it boasts an outdoor hot-tub area, an ice café and even an ice slide for guests of all ages.

Though the accommodations are more than a bit chilly at Quebec's famous ice hotel, cold has never been cooler in a city that celebrates

winter with an exuberance that is second to none. And to make it official, Quebec City hosts the world's largest annual winter carnival, *Carnaval de Québec*, each year from the end of January through the second week of February.

It's a jubilant soiree where guests are invited from far and wide to come celebrate, in what amounts to the exhilaration of Mardi Gras combined with the family-

friendly feel of a hometown fair.

The carnival first began in the late 1800s as part of the French tradition of getting together to eat, drink and be merry before the official start of Lent. It had a few stops and starts before finally taking root in 1955, and has been going strong ever since.

Each year, the event attracts thousands of visitors who come from all over the world to

enjoy the abundance of activities and carnival offerings, along with the seemingly endless array of winter-related things to do in and around Quebec City.

It officially kicks off on the last Friday night in January with an opening show that includes a spectacular fireworks display followed up by live bands performing on an outdoor stage to thousands of eager audience members — all bundled

## HÔTEL DE GLACE FAQS

### WHEN IS THE HÔTEL DE GLACE OPEN?

The Hôtel de Glace is open from the first week of January until the last week of March.

### WHAT TEMPERATURE IS IT INSIDE?

In addition to being a great windshield, the thick snow walls keep the Hôtel de Glace well insulated. The ambient temperature varies only by a few degrees between 23°F and 27°F, no matter what the outside temperature is.

### WHERE DO PEOPLE SLEEP?

All the ice hotel's beds have a solid ice base, with a wooden bedspring and a mattress on top. Mattresses are covered with blankets, and people sleep inside arctic sleeping bags designed to keep people warm in temperatures as low as minus 22°F. Children are welcome, and the hotel provides modified sleeping bags for kids so that they warm up more quickly.

### WHAT ABOUT THE BATHROOM?

You have direct access to heated bathrooms near the Hôtel de Glace in the Celsius Pavillion.



**ABOVE FROM LEFT** Visitors at the Hôtel de Glace gather around a glassed-in fireplace that throws no heat. Construction on the ice hotel begins in early December and takes approximately six weeks to complete. A cozy ice bedroom and ice drinking glasses.

up for temperatures that are usually well below freezing. It's a time for visitors and locals to come together to celebrate winter in all its glory.

People attending the carnival have an array of attractions to choose from, including a thrilling ride on a 400-foot ice slide, which is about as close to lugging as most will ever get. There are also sleigh rides, snow slides, ice skating and stunning snow sculptures created by master artisans.

Events offered throughout the 17-day carnival run the gamut and include dogsled races, an outdoor dance party, snow rafting and even an extreme canoe race on Quebec's half-frozen St. Lawrence River – a tradition each year since the carnival began.

Additionally, three separate parades are held, including two at night. They draw some of the biggest crowds with their giant inflatable floats, marching bands and dance troupes. An ice palace (separate from the

Hôtel de Glace) is erected and visitors are invited to wander through. Illuminated with special effects lights that change their hue from pink to purple to blue to green to yellow throughout the evening hours, it serves as a beacon to many carnival goers.

The city itself truly seems to come alive, and many shops and restaurants along its European-like streets are resplendent with bright, holiday-style decorations, inside and out. Horse-drawn carriages trot on cobblestone streets alongside evening traffic and musicians wearing coats decorated with electric lights play their instruments as visitors walk by.

An abundance of quaint restaurants and coffee shops help tourists take the chill off, and at Casse-Crêpe Breton in the "Old Quebec" section of the city, you can find homemade crepes that rival those found on the streets of Paris. However, be prepared to wait; the café is small and more often than not, the line winds out the door and onto the sidewalk.

For thrill-seekers and just about anyone else, there is North America's largest winter playground, le Village Vacances Valcartier (Valcartier Vacation Village), located about 20 minutes outside the city. The park offers an

ice skating trail more than a half-mile long, with music and lights at night to keep skaters both entertained and enchanted. There's also snow rafting and "ice-karting," which is essentially go-karting, except riders drive their karts on a snow-covered track.

But perhaps it's the 35 different snow slides, with inclines that accommodate just about every type of sledder, that draw the most visitors to the park. Some hills are fairly modest while others are only for the fearless. At 109 feet high, Valcartier's "Everest" is the highest accelerating slide in North America, sending daring sledders plunging straight down a vertical descent at more than 80 mph.

For those who prefer viewing vertical descents rather than sledding them, a cable-car ride provides a scenic trip up the Parc de la Chute-Montmorency, located just outside the city. The "Montmorency Falls," as they are referred to in English, rise an impressive 272 feet and are one-and-a-half times higher than Niagara Falls – but not as wide.

During the cold winter months, the spray from the plunging falls freezes into a mountain at the base, creating what is known as the "pain de sucre" or "sugarloaf," which can grow as high as 98 feet.

The best view of the sugarloaf comes from standing high up on the suspended bridge that overlooks the falls.

Without a doubt, it isn't for those who are afraid of heights or who mind narrow, wooden-slat bridges that creak when you walk on the snow-covered boards. But if you can brave the bridge, the view pays dividends with its sky-high views of the St. Lawrence River and Île d'Orléans, an historic island and popular summer destination.

Also perched at the top of the cliffs is the Manoir Montmorency restaurant. The elegant eatery, with its wrap-around terrace, offers gourmet dining with a view. Guests can dine there year round and enjoy the gracious estate's charm and Sunday-morning brunch.

At several locations in and around Quebec City, Iditarod-dreamers can get their fill of yelling, "Mush! Mush!" by taking a dogsled ride through wooded trails. Interested parties can choose from short excursions or daylong trips.

Some local companies offer additional packages that include meals, snowshoe hikes, sleigh rides and even overnights in rustic cabins for those seeking a true outdoor adventure. Families, groups or individual riders can

all be accommodated and are typically led through the trails by a trained guide who helps sledders with their dogs or anything else they may need.

Sleds typically hold two riders who take turns driving the team or sitting comfortably as a passenger. Bundled up in warm clothes (an indisputable must), riders navigate the Siberian huskies through quiet, snowy forests, with only the barking of the dogs to break up the silence. The experience is unforgettable and no one should cross the Canadian border back to the U.S. before giving it a try.

Rising majestically above Quebec City is the hotel that has come to both represent and symbolize the 400-year-old French province town. Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, a virtual castle, has sat high atop the city for more than 118 years and housed the likes of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth along with Princess Grace of Monaco and Prince Rainier, among other dignitaries. It is named for the flamboyant French governor Louis de Buade, Count of Frontenac, who served as governor general of New France (the North American area colonized by the French in the late 1500s) from 1672 to 1698.

The Château Frontenac is said to be the most photographed hotel in the world and it's not hard to see why. With its specially designed bricks imported from Scotland during the 19th century and oxidized green copper roof, it is a landmark visible from most anywhere in the city, day or night.

However, it's not only the outside that impresses visitors, but the lavish interior as well. With 618 rooms and 18 floors all decorated luxuriously, the hotel lives and breathes its history and glamour. From sweeping staircases to magnificent chandeliers hanging from the ceiling of elegant ballrooms, it's quintessential Quebec and a must-see if you are in the city. If you aren't able to stay in one of the well-appointed guest rooms, you should at least stop by for meal in one of its restaurants (Le Champlain or Le Café de la Terrasse) or a drink in its bar: Bar Saint-Laurent.

No matter where you go in Quebec City, one thing is universal in the winter: It's cold; really cold. And snowy, too. But it's that icy chill and falling snow that makes it so much fun to visit a city that celebrates it so thoroughly. Smart guests pack their warmest winter and ski gear to be able to fully revel

in all that the city has to offer. From days spent ice-skating, sledding and enjoying the activities of Carnaval de Québec to nights lit up by fireworks and parades, Quebec City is the place to be when temperatures drop below freezing. **HM**

**BELOW, CLOCKWISE** Visitors looking for a thrill go to Village Vacances Valcartier for the slide of their lives. Quebec's grand Fairmont Le Château Frontenac. Carnaval de Québec's night parade lights up a chilly winter night. Those looking to experience an Iditarod-style sledding at several different locations.



Hôtel de Glace photos: Fireplace photo ©Luc Rousseau | Exterior and bedroom photos ©XDachez | Drinks by Sarah Wesley Lemire

Photos at right, clockwise from slide: Courtesy of Valcartier | Courtesy of Vacation Village | Courtesy of Fairmont Le Château Frontenac | Sarah Wesley Lemire | Courtesy of Carnaval de Québec



**Hôtel de Glace**  
[hoteldeglance-canada.com](http://hoteldeglance-canada.com)  
(418) 623-2888 or (877) 505-0423

**Carnaval de Québec**  
[carnaval.qc.ca](http://carnaval.qc.ca)  
(866) 422-7628

**Casse-Crêpe Breton**  
[Cassecrepebreton.com](http://Cassecrepebreton.com)  
(418) 692-0438

**Village Vacances Valcartier**  
[valcartier.com](http://valcartier.com)  
(418) 844-2200

**Montmorency Falls**  
[sepaq.com/chutemontmorency](http://sepaq.com/chutemontmorency)  
(418) 663-3330

**Dog sledding**  
[Chenillapoursuite](http://Chenillapoursuite)  
(418) 573-7777

**Fairmont Le Château Frontenac**  
[fairmont.com/frontenac](http://fairmont.com/frontenac)  
(866) 540-4460