

Have a grownup snow day

Québec's famed ice hotel and Carnival make winter fun.



Québec's Winter Carnival is a major spectacle, with a sparkling ice palace and snow-themed attractions.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CARNAVAL DE QUÉBEC

by Ingrid Sapona

Being a February baby and growing up in Buffalo, I always hoped for a snow day on my birthday—I wanted to build an igloo as a present to myself. Last winter, I decided to do the next best thing.

I spent a night in Quebec’s famed Hôtel de Glace: the Ice Hotel. My oldest sister was game to join me; my other sister preferred to meet us afterward in Québec City for Winter Carnival. Both seemed like perfect trips to embrace winter rather than flee from it.

My childhood dreams came to life the moment I saw the hotel’s two-story, igloo-like main building. At the hotel’s fireplace-adorned reception area, we got a coat-tag ticket to get into the hotel (non-overnight guests can pay admission to see the place or have a drink at the bar), a key to our luggage locker and a fluffy robe—no doubt a necessity in a frozen hotel.

Neither of us imagined how big or beautiful a structure made of snow and ice could be. The architectural detail was amazing. A spectacular ice chandelier hung from the cathedral ceilings in the great hall. Arched stained glass-like windows adorned the chapel. Murals and designs were carved into the walls. Ice furniture sat in each suite. (See sidebar for more details.)

Before settling into the room, we had another unique experience to try: dog-sledding. The hotel actually offers a package, which includes a four-course



dinner and other goodies after mushing for an afternoon. The five-dog teams were already harnessed when we arrived. After a quick tutorial on the basic commands, my sister and I were off with five other two-person sleds.

The ride through woods and clearings was exhilarating, though probably less so for the dogs because I couldn’t help riding the brake on the curves. We capped our ride with hot chocolate and a visit with the puppies.

Back at the hotel, staff members demonstrated how to arrange the zippers, pulls and flaps of the room’s mummy-shaped sleeping bags. Having a comfortable night here is all about preparing for bed. They key is to raise your core body temperature in a hot tub or sauna first.

So after a few drinks at the frozen bar, we grabbed our bathing suits, sandals, robes and night clothes and headed out back to warm up in the “Nordic recreation



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARNAVAL DE QUEBEC AND QUEBEC CITY TOURISM



A NEW HOTEL EVERY YEAR

It takes 15,000 tons of snow and 500 tons of ice to build the 36-room Hôtel de Glace. Every year it’s re-designed and built from scratch. Last year it celebrated its 10th anniversary.

This year, the hotel is being built just 10 minutes north of downtown Quebec City. (The hotel used to be about 30 minutes away.) At its original location, more than 65,000 people toured the hotel every winter, with 4,000 guests staying overnight annually.

Besides guest rooms, the hotel last year included a disco, gallery and exhibition area, indoor ice slide, a bar big enough for 400 and a chapel that hosts dozens of weddings. You can visit just for a tour or drink, as well. Shuttles run from downtown Quebec to the hotel.

Weather permitting, the Ice Hotel is scheduled to run from Jan. 7 to March 27. For more information, go to www.icehotel-canada.com.

(Top) Intricate snow sculptures lined a walkway at last year’s Winter Carnival. (Opposite page, middle) The Ice Hotel sports an ultra-cool bar and a Nordic Recreation Area to warm up. (This page, middle) Dog sledding is one of the many activities the locals use to make winter fun. (Bottom) The carnival offers visitors a try at the winter version of whitewater rafting. Quebec itself exudes old-world charm (but with a sense of humor, as witnessed by ice canoeing at Winter Carnival).

Taste of New York Restaurant



Lunch

Dinner

Beer & Wine Tastings

Reservations available online or call 585-394-7070
www.NYWCC.com



NEAR TO HERE

area.” After relaxing in the sauna, we popped into the adjacent heated bathroom trailer to change into our sleeping clothes, then made the short walk (in boots, of course) back to our room.

Tucking into the sleeping bag was pretty simple. Once we were settled, we were struck by the peacefulness. There’s nothing mechanical in the hotel and the snow walls are thick, so there was complete silence. Before we knew it, we were fast asleep.

The next morning we were pleasantly surprised at how warm the arctic-rated bags kept us. Our travel alarm showed the room’s temperature was 31 degrees, but inside the sleeping bag it registered a comfortable 90. At 7:30 a.m., someone from the hotel came to check on us and leave us hot chocolate and coffee.

After breakfast, we were off to Québec City to meet our other sister for the second leg of our adventure: Winter Carnival.

We stayed in the heart of old Québec City, at the Auberge Saint-Antoine hotel, with views overlooking the port and the St. Lawrence River. The place was luxurious, the service exceptional. The next morning our first stop was the observation deck near the convention center. We toured the sparkling ice palace, which overlooks the carnival’s entrance and one of the passageways through the fortress-like wall that rings the historic city.

At the carnival, we watched teams of people transform huge blocks of pure white snow into detailed sculptures. We tried out the winter equivalent of a whitewater raft, sliding down a huge hill. I also crossed the grounds suspended 30 feet up on a zip line. Large, heated tents provided both warmth and a bite—or a brew—when we needed it.

That evening, with hand warmers tucked into mitts, we took in the colorful, family-focused carnival night parade.

It all led up to the ice canoe race.

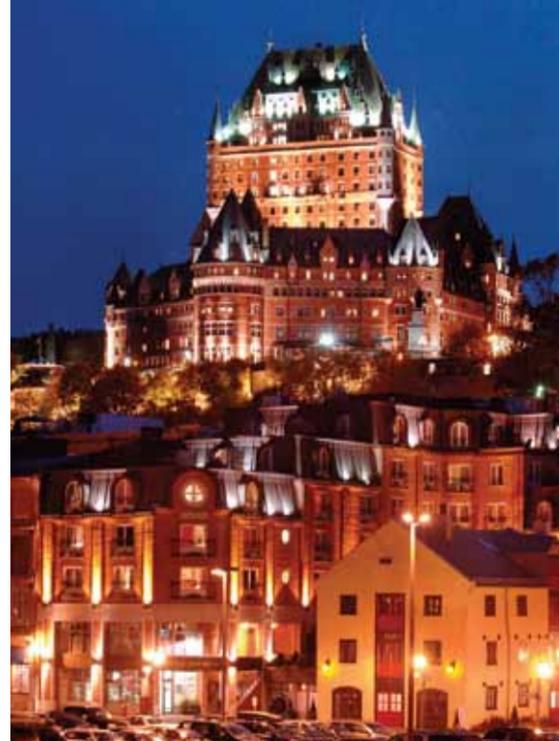


PHOTO COURTESY OF AUBERGE SAINT-ANTOINE HOTEL

The Auberge Saint-Antoine hotel offers luxury in the heart of old Québec City.

Given the huge chunks of ice flowing down the St. Lawrence, a canoe race seemed crazy. But there we were, Sunday afternoon, amid a huge crowd at the harbor to watch 49 canoe teams brave the current, tide, ice and cold. Ice canoeing is wacky but exciting to watch. The five-person teams paddle when they can, but at any given moment they hop out and basically jog through the slush and ice while pushing the canoe forward. A minute later, they’re paddling in sync again. The race was the highlight of the carnival, and well worth braving the cold (we couldn’t have been as cold as those canoeists in the slush).

In the end, the thrill of spending the night in the Ice Hotel and the fun of Winter Carnival was all about feeling like a kid again. Best of all: As adults, we get to choose our own snow days.

Ingrid Sapon is a Toronto-based writer.

QUÉBEC WINTER CARNIVAL

This year’s carnival runs from Jan. 28 to Feb. 13. For information, visit www.carnaval.qc.ca. (Scroll to the very bottom to click on the English-language option.) The canoe race is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 6.

For information about the Auberge Saint-Antoine hotel, go to www.saint-antoine.com.

YOU’RE A REAL EYE OPENER

Not the same old Rochester selection



eye Openers

appointments suggested

OPTICAL FASHIONS

2929 Monroe Avenue • 585.442.0123



Bonfish Grill

Francesca’s Collections

Have an Eastview Day

HAVE A GOOD DAY.

Destination Eastview.

Shop winter sales at J. Jill, Francesca’s Collections, LOFT, Eddie Bauer, Macy’s.

Experience Anthropologie, L.L. Bean, Build-A-Bear Workshop®, Sephora, Pandora.

Enjoy dining at P.F. Chang’s, Bonfish Grill, Biaggi’s, Champps.

Treat yourself at Euphoria Salon/Spa, Teavana, Abbott’s, Starbucks.

Shop, Relax, Renew.

Have an Eastview Day!


EASTVIEW
A HIGHER FORM OF SHOPPING

Route 96 in Victor
(585) 223-4420
www.eastviewmall.com

