

Chill out with an extreme overnight at the Ice Hotel

Written by Deborah Stone



Deborah Stone sips vodka in the Absolut Ice Bar at the hotel. Photo courtesy of Deborah Stone. Accomplishments come in many sizes and shapes. For some, it might be scaling Mt. Rainier or completing a marathon. For others, it could be learning to knit, losing weight or graduating from college. For me, it was surviving a night in the Ice Hotel, or the Hotel de Glace de Quebec-Canada.

You may not consider this one of life's great feats, but for me, it was an achievement of note. One of only three ice hotels in the world (the other two being in Sweden and Alaska), the Ice Hotel Quebec-Canada is located approximately 30 minutes west of Quebec City in the village of Sainte-Catherine-de-la-Jacques-Cartier at Station touristique Duchesnay, a recreational resort on Lake Saint-Joseph.

In its fifth year, the Ice Hotel continues to be considered one of the world's most popular tourism attractions, holding its own exotic appeal to visitors from all over the globe who desire the epitome of a pure winter experience. Since its first year, over 220,000 people have toured the facility and 10,500 have braved an overnight sleeping experience within its walls.

The month-long construction of the hotel begins in December, when several dozen artisans and craftspeople gather to perform their magic, using 12,000 tons of snow and 400 tons of ice. The fruits of their labor results in a 30,000 square-foot hotel with 32 rooms and decorated suites (everything from frozen rose petals for honeymooners to bunk beds for the kids) to accommodate more than 84 people per night. There's also a beautiful chapel, where dozens of weddings are held each season, an art gallery and exhibition rooms, the Absolut Ice Bar, N'ice

Chill out with an extreme overnight at the Ice Hotel

Written by Deborah Stone

Club, Grand Hall, two outdoor hot tubs and a sauna, as well as the all-important heated and lighted washrooms, located outside the hotel in a modular building.



A typical ice bed with deer pelts. Photo by Deborah Stone. The temperature inside the hotel hovers at a constant 20-25 degrees, though the weather outdoors may dip well below zero. Four-foot thick walls protect visitors from the wind and serve as efficient insulation.

When I told friends and family of my intentions to spend a night at the Ice Hotel, they all asked the same question: “Why?” I responded by telling them, “Because I think it would be cool, no pun intended!”

I’ve never been one to close a door to opportunity and when it knocked, I responded with gusto.

A trip to experience Carnaval de Quebec in Quebec City, a renowned and colorful event that takes place over three weeks each winter, put me within arm’s reach of the Ice Hotel and it seemed a shame not to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime chance to have what is billed as one of the “Top Ten Hot and Cold Adventures” in the world. However, on a tour of the place, just one day prior to my date with this “extreme overnight,” I suddenly had second thoughts about my intentions. It was just that while walking through this architectural wonder, reality set in and I realized that I was going to have to actually sleep here, and it was cold, real cold! Bundled up in my layers of down, fleece and wool, feeling like the Pillsbury Dough Woman, I could laugh about the cold because I knew I was leaving soon to return to my cozy bed at the Hilton Hotel in Quebec City.

Chill out with an extreme overnight at the Ice Hotel

Written by Deborah Stone

But the fact was that I would be returning to this palace of ice the next night and this time, I would be sleeping on an ice slab bed, encased in a mummy sleeping bag.

I must admit that I considered a change of mind, but I knew my reputation was at stake and I had to put my money where my mouth was if I were to ever show my face again back home.

All too soon, after engaging in a variety of high-spirited wintertime Carnival activities in charming Quebec City, including watching the locals take snow baths, rafting down snow-covered hills, ice fishing, sampling snow taffy at a sugar shack, dog sledding and oohing and aahing at the glittering nighttime parade, I was back at the Ice Hotel and listening intently to the orientation for overnight guests.

Our guide explained and demonstrated how to get in and out of the down-filled sleeping bags, as well as provided some useful tips for having a restful sleep.

The idea is not to overdress and to avoid wearing any cotton while in the sleeping bag (actually she said it's ideal to be in your birthday suit!), but don't forget to put on your toque (pronounced "tooque") or hat.



Chill out with an extreme overnight at the Ice Hotel

Written by Deborah Stone

Typical architecture in the old section of Quebec City. Photo by Deborah Stone. She also suggested to our hearty group that we put our clothes in the bottom of our sleeping bags to keep them warm during the night. Just watching the process of getting into the sleeping bag exhausted me and I feared I would not remember which toggle went to which cord when the time came to batten down the hatches.

I also prayed I would not have to use the bathroom in the middle of the night! For overnight guests, check-in is not until evening, as public tours of the place operate until 8 p.m. The plan is to feast well on dinner at nearby Auberge Duchesnay, a full-service hotel with a sumptuous dining room, just steps from the Ice Hotel, then groove to the tunes on the snow-covered dance floor at the N'Ice Club and indulge in a nightcap of, you guessed, Absolut Vodka, served in glasses made of ice. Following these activities, soak in the hot tub underneath a star-studded sky and run into the sauna to warm your blood before hitting the sack.

Close to midnight, after postponing the inevitable as long as we could, my companions and I headed to our suite, aptly named, "The Hilton," with its ice chair and table set, massive carved ice goddess, fireplace (for looks only, no heat emitted) and two queen sized ice cube beds. On closer inspection, I was relieved to note that the beds each had a wood frame over them plus a foam, fleece-covered mattress and to top it off, deer pelts or a wool blanket.

After wrestling with my sleeping bag and clothes, I settled in for the night, and attempted to get comfortable. I lay awake listening to one of my neighbors snoring away, first envying her for her ability to instantly drift off to slumber, then despising her because she was sleeping, while I was tossing and turning about in my sausage roll upon a hard block of ice.

At some point, however, I must have dozed off because the next thing I knew it was morning and I awoke feeling stiff, with my face semi-frozen.

However, the rest of me was warm and it took a huge effort to oust myself from my cozy straightjacket and don my clothes. My companions and I celebrated our success and quickly headed to the bathhouse, where a hot shower never felt so good!

For those who do not make it through their "extreme overnight," there are usually backup hotel rooms available at Auberge Duchesnay in which to take shelter. It's nice to know that this is an

Chill out with an extreme overnight at the Ice Hotel

Written by Deborah Stone

option, but somehow the idea of “wimping out” once I had made the commitment, didn’t sit right with me.

After surviving the night, I wanted to announce my accomplishment to all, but unfortunately, the hotel gift shop did not sell the proverbial T-shirt claiming of such an achievement, so I settled for an inner sense of satisfaction and pride.

This is one feat I knew I’d never forget!