

# Nice ice, baby

## A cold drink and warm bed awaits at Quebec's Ice Hotel

Once, on a winter road trip from Toronto to Montreal and Quebec City, I took a detour to Lac St.-Joseph – about 30 minutes outside Quebec City – to see the Ice Hotel in early January.

It was undoubtedly cold. It was most definitely icy. But the hotel wasn't built. Or at least it wasn't accepting guests, meaning the Ice Hotel I saw that winter was an intriguing collection of shapes hidden under covers – ready to be unwrapped like a late Christmas present in a few days time.

I was certainly intrigued enough to return the next winter. So, reservations confirmed, and after a reassuring call to check the hotel had in fact been fully constructed, the following January I checked into the warmest cold place I've ever called home for a night.

Affiliated with the original Ice Hotel in Sweden, the Quebec version is built each year from 500 tons of ice and 15,000 tons of snow. At 3,000 square metres and 32 rooms, it's one big igloo – complete with a chapel and nightclub. And pretty much everything -- from the floors to the walls, and the bar to the beds -- is made of frozen water. Apart from the bathroom facilities, which are mercifully located in a little oasis of heat.

But the Ice Hotel is no giant, hollowed-out ice cube. It's quite the magical place with an almost Cathedral-like feel, accentuated by moody lighting, 17 ft high curved ice ceilings, ice pillars, ice chandeliers and icy art installations.

Fully aware that the accommodations on offer are a tad unusual, the hotel's website (not made of ice and found at [www.icehotel-canada.com](http://www.icehotel-canada.com)) invites guests to download a "preparation guide" before your stay.

The guide cheerily informs readers that Quebec's winter temperatures can drop as low as an eyeball-freezing -25 degrees in January (although they don't actually say "eyeball-freezing"), and helpfully advises you to follow the "three-layer technique" which, on looking at the accompanying illustration, appears to mean wearing all the clothes you own at the same time.

Reassuringly, the guide insists there is "no need to worry" because the temperature of your actual hotel room will hover around a positively balmy -4 degrees. (Of course, anyone who bemoans the lack of central heating really doesn't get the concept of a hotel made of ice.)

No doubt conscious that guests waking up with frostbite is bad for repeat business, the guide also details how to sleep safely on a bed made of ice. (Basically, wear only about half of all the clothes you own.)

The chance to sleep on a bed made of ice is, of course, what staying at the Ice Hotel is all about. So, after a few drinks – served in ice glasses naturally – with fellow toque-wearing devotees of the three-layer technique at the Absolut ice bar, it was time to bed.

And what a bed.

In a way, it was a little disappointing that my ice bed was dressed up with a wooden board, foam mattress, fleece sheet, sleeping bag and deer pelts. But really I was extremely happy with this turn of events, and slept soundly, resplendent in wooly hat, socks and a mere two layers of clothing.

The next day I took full advantage of the heated outdoor hot tub – again remembering to follow the website guide’s advice to the letter: “remember your bathing suit”. Wise words indeed when -25 degree outdoor temperatures are involved.

Global warming permitting, Quebec’s Ice Hotel is open annually from January to March, at which point its grand chambers are returned to their watery origins.

More information at [www.icehotel-canada.com](http://www.icehotel-canada.com).