

journeys  
bon voyage  
trekking  
getaways

## excursions

escapes  
travel  
near and far

# Northern Exposure

## Québec's Winter Wonderland is a Day's Drive Away

CHERYL FENTON **writer**



YVES TESSIER, TESSIMA

**even with** pesky nor'easter nonsense and flakes aplenty, there are still mounds of ways to enjoy the colder months. From skiing the slopes to waiting at the bottom with cocoa (extra marshmallows, please), to visiting a breathtaking ice palace, or catching your breath on a skating rink, there are plenty of ways to celebrate the frosty months this winter the Canadian way. With passport in hand (now mandatory,) don the down (3°F to 19°F winter temps are chilly) and find a wonderful escape in our neighbor to the north and its Québec region.

*Petit Champlain street decorated for the holidays*

### City Fun

Celebrating its 400th birthday in 2008, Québec City is the only fortified city north of Mexico, the only urban World Heritage Site in North America, and a tribute to the French-Canadian spirit. More European than North American, its old-world romance captivates, with winding side streets and sidewalk cafés.

excursions “eat, drink, and be merry”

Stroll through its oldest neighborhoods, Petit Champlain, Place-Royale, and the Old Port; or stand at attention at the imposing Citadelle, North America’s largest fortification still occupied by regular troops and the official residence of the Governor General of Canada.

The lively Terrace Dufferin walkway along the cliff edge offers beautiful views of the Saint Lawrence River, one of the longest rivers on the planet. Also positioned on the cliffs above the river is the towering, iconic Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac. With its green copper roof, gables and turrets, it’s one of the world’s most photographed hotels.

Even though this capital city is steeped in history, the year-round activities are truly up to date, including a world-class winter carnival—the perfect way to enjoy winter’s wonder.

This year’s 17 days of festivities of Carnaval de Québec runs January 29th to February 14th. Celebrating and emphasizing winter activities for over 50 years, Carnaval is the world’s largest winter carnival and ranks third on the “Top Carnivals” list behind Rio and New Orleans.

As with most carnivals, its history is based on the “eat, drink, and be merry” concept, first established when habitants of this French colony created a rowdy tradition of getting together for celebration just before Lent. This intense period of revelry was designated as “carnival.” The first official edition of the Québec Winter Carnival took place in 1955 and has since snowballed into an unde-

*Québec City holiday parade*



J. BERNIER

niable manifestation of winter fun. Close to a million participants flock to this special event.

A magical Ice Palace created by 9,000 tons of snow compacted into enormous bricks serves as the main focus of the Carnival and the center point for many of its 300 activities. Built in honor of Bonhomme, the festival king and living incarnation of the city's enchanting snowmen, this palace is just one of the area's astounding frozen creations. In 2009, 370 tons of ice was used on Carnival sites, including the Ice Palace, Natrel Ice Tower, and ice sculptures. Every year, Place Desjardins and Place Loto-Québec become a giant outdoor museum where sculptors from all around the world make blocks of snow come to life.

Thrills await you with a variety of exciting activities and music. The first weekend features a spectacular opening ceremony with a musical performance and the famous dogsled race and dog agility competition. The high points of the second weekend are the Canoe Race and the International Snow Sculpture Competition. Finally, the third weekend features the Snow Bath and the Painting Symposium. All of these events are in addition to on-going carnival fun, which includes snow rafting, ice skating, horse-drawn sleigh rides, flapjack breakfasts, snow slides, dogsledding rides, outdoor night-time dance parties, a children's village, and much more.

People of all ages gather in the snowy streets of Québec City to attend the two Night

excursions “the intimacy of an igloo”



XAVIER DACHEZ

Parades. Last year's night parades included 14 allegoric floats, 7 dance troops, and 800 disguised participants for each parade—a true winter extravaganza.

### Too Cool

A seasonal treat 30 minutes from Québec City, the famed Hôtel de Glace (Ice Hotel) is a spectacular must-see, perhaps must-stay, of the area. This 32,000 square foot livable ice sculpture will be open from January 4th to April 4th on the grounds of Station touristique Duchesnay. (But don't carve these dates in ice, since the weather can wreak havoc on exact opening dates.)

Enter a magical world where snow and ice are transformed into dazzling decor. Since opening its doors ten years ago, the Hôtel de Glace has wowed over half a million visitors. Guests marvel at the snow archways towering over 19 feet and gaze incredulously at the crystal ice sculptures while standing by the warmth of a fire. North America's only ice hotel is redesigned and rebuilt every year in its entirety, beginning in early December. Fifteen thousand tons of snow and five hundred tons of ice are needed to complete the final masterpiece.

Although it might seem counterproductive to stay in a block of ice for a winter getaway, the Hôtel de Glace is actually quite cozy if you follow the rules. Before spending the night, guides will brief you on the equipment available and how to dress for the cold so your stay will be more comfortable. In addition to being an effective shield against the wind, the thick snow walls keep the Hôtel de Glace well insulated, so

*At the Hôtel de Glace (Ice Hotel) guests can unwind at the Ice Bar with a refreshing cocktail served in an ice glass.*

the ambient temperature varies only by a few degrees between 23°F to 26°F regardless of the outside temperature.

With 36 rooms and themed suites, the Hôtel de Glace offers a host of ways to experience the incomparable thrill of a night spent inside an ice hotel. With all the intimacy of an igloo, the Hôtel de Glace rooms are natural Nordic cocoons, while the larger theme suites allow you to sleep inside a real work of art. Every suite features its own theme with marvelous ice and snow sculptures, some complete with fireplaces, private spa, and a view of Lac St-Joseph.

All the beds have a solid ice base, with a wooden bedspring and mattress on top. Mattresses are covered with blankets, and guests sleep inside arctic sleeping bags designed to stay warm in temperatures as low as -22°F. The average stay is one night, with two-night packages available that include a one-night stay at the nearby Auberge Duchesnay.

A Nordic relaxation area provides heated restrooms and dressing rooms in the Hôtel de Glace, allowing you to prepare for a relaxing dip in the outdoor hot tubs and saunas should you so desire. Inside, you can wander through an art gallery, grab a bite at the Ice Café, or visit the Ice Bar where you can unwind with a refreshing cocktail served in an ice glass. A full array of outdoor winter activities include cross-country skiing, ice skating, snowshoeing, dog sledding, ice fishing, snowmobiling, and a Grande ice slide.

excursions “a wonderful retreat for city dwellers”



COURTESY OF STATION MONT TREMBLANT

*French countryside meets North American ski resort in one charming village at Mont-Tremblant.*

ing snowmobile excursion, take the reins of your very own dogsled team, or discover the excitement of ice climbing up a frozen cliff face. Enjoy the thrill of tube sliding or zip through the treetops 25 to 75 feet in the air on an Acrobranche zip line. An extreme, high-energy snow park of 40 perfectly-groomed acres features 40 different ramps, modules, jumps, and a huge Superpipe.

### A Mountain Getaway

To further escape city life, stroll through a charming pedestrian-only village, not a car in sight. Gaze up at Mont-Tremblant (“trembling mountain”) where French countryside meets North American ski resort in one charming village. The village is reminiscent of a European alpine resort with restaurants and international boutiques. The mountain alone offers endless outdoor activities, and Mont-Tremblant Provincial Park occupies 580 square miles of land in which to romp.

At 3,150 feet, Mont-Tremblant is the highest peak in the Laurentians Mountains and is most famous for the Mont-Tremblant Ski Resort, right at the foot of the mountain. Named the “No.1 Ski Resort in the North American East” for ten consecutive years by the readers of *Ski* magazine, the Tremblant continues to be ranked at the head of the Québec line-up for sports and the outdoors.

Skiing at Mont-Tremblant, has unparalleled possibilities from November through April, with 150 inches of annual snowfall. And if Mother Nature holds back on the white stuff, no worries: Tremblant boasts “The Avalanche,” one of the most sophisticated and powerful snowmaking systems in North America.

Besides skiing and snowboarding, winter fun at Tremblant encompasses a multitude of invigorating activities that will make you fall in love with the snowy season. Feel your adrenaline pumping on a rous-

You can slow things down with a peaceful sleigh ride through the snowdraped countryside or a quiet snowshoe excursion, followed by a mountaintop sunset complete with wine and a Swiss fondue feast. Or set out along scenic trails on cross-country skis to become one with the fauna and flora.

Pause at one of Tremblant’s many spas, including the slopeside spas located on the resort, as well as Scandinavian baths sprinkled throughout the village. A popular choice is Les Bains Scandinaves, located on the shores of the Du Diable River. Comprised of wood pavilions, solariums, terraces, outdoor fireplace, and relaxation areas, this spa is perfectly integrated to the surrounding nature. Take advantage of the beneficial effects of the baths by alternating a Norwegian steam bath, a Finnish sauna, and whirlpool baths followed by a quick rinse under the Nordic waterfall.

Whether it’s for the convenience of being only steps away from all the amenities or the desire to be in the heart of the action, a stay in Mont-Tremblant’s pedestrian village is a perfect place to be. The village features an array of accommodations within a short walking distance of all that Mont-Tremblant has to offer.

This year add a *oui* bit of excitement to your winter vacation, as you travel through the wonders that French-Canadian Québec offers as part of the pristine, great white north. **WW**