



Architectural Wonder at 14 Hotels Made of Ice and Snow

The *Game of Thrones* hotel in Finland is just one in a long history of ice hotels.



Elena Goukassian | February 19, 2018



AnnaSofia Mååg & Niklas Byman, "Follow the White Rabbit," 2017. Art suite inside the Icehotel Sweden (photo by Asaf Kliger, courtesy Icehotel Sweden)

By now, you've likely already heard of the new [*Game of Thrones*-themed ice hotel](#) in Finland. But the 30-room, snow-and-ice [SnowVillage in Kittilä](#) — which, for the record, is now in its 17th year, and decided to take on the HBO show as a this year's theme — is far from the first ice hotel. There are dozens of hotels around the world made with "snice" ([snow mixed with ice](#)), many of them rebuilt every winter after having melted into nothingness the previous spring.



Empress Anna Ivanovna staging her mock wedding in Valery Jacobi's "Ice House," 1878. Oil on canvas, 52.6 x 85 in (image via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

The first ice hotel was actually built in St. Petersburg, Russia under Empress Anna Ivanovna in 1739, not as a beautiful getaway, but as a "torture chamber," as Jennifer Wright explains in a [2015 article in *Slate*](#). Apparently, the empress was both vengefully heartbroken by the death of her husband and madly upset that one of the noblest princes of Russia had married a Catholic. The Catholic bride died soon after the wedding, but Anna Ivanovna was still unappeased, staging a mock wedding between the widower prince and one of her maids, forcing them to sleep naked in the ice-carved nuptial bed in the newly constructed ice palace. The couple would have died had it not been for the bride trading a string of pearls for a guard's coat.

In a strange historical twist, today ice and snow hotels are popular wedding and honeymoon destinations (many have ice chapels, go figure!) and fear not, you'll never have to sleep "on ice," as it were. Contemporary ice hotels provide high quality sleeping bags, furs, and fleece to keep you warm through the night. Many also have ice bars and restaurants, where even the glasses are made of ice. Elaborate snow and ice sculptures abound, and heated lobbies and storage areas for luggage are also standard. And in Scandinavia, hotels have the obligatory sauna. Below, you'll find some of the ice hotels currently open around the world.



Ice Hotel Chapel, Quebec, February, 2006 (photo by [Chensiyuan](#) via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Hôtel de Glace (Valcartier, Québec, Canada)

Located just outside of Québec City, the first Hôtel de Glace opened in 2001. It's the first and only ice hotel in North America, and its season runs for three months every year. This year, it's open until March 25, and rooms start from CAN \$219. All the furniture in the 45 guest rooms is made of ice (the provided sleeping bags thankfully are not ice). Perhaps somewhat ironically, in early January, a fire broke out at the hotel, temporarily shutting it down. Apparently one of the sleeping bags caught fire; luckily no one was hurt.