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Herman Chanen
#1 gal — Mis

INTERVIEW

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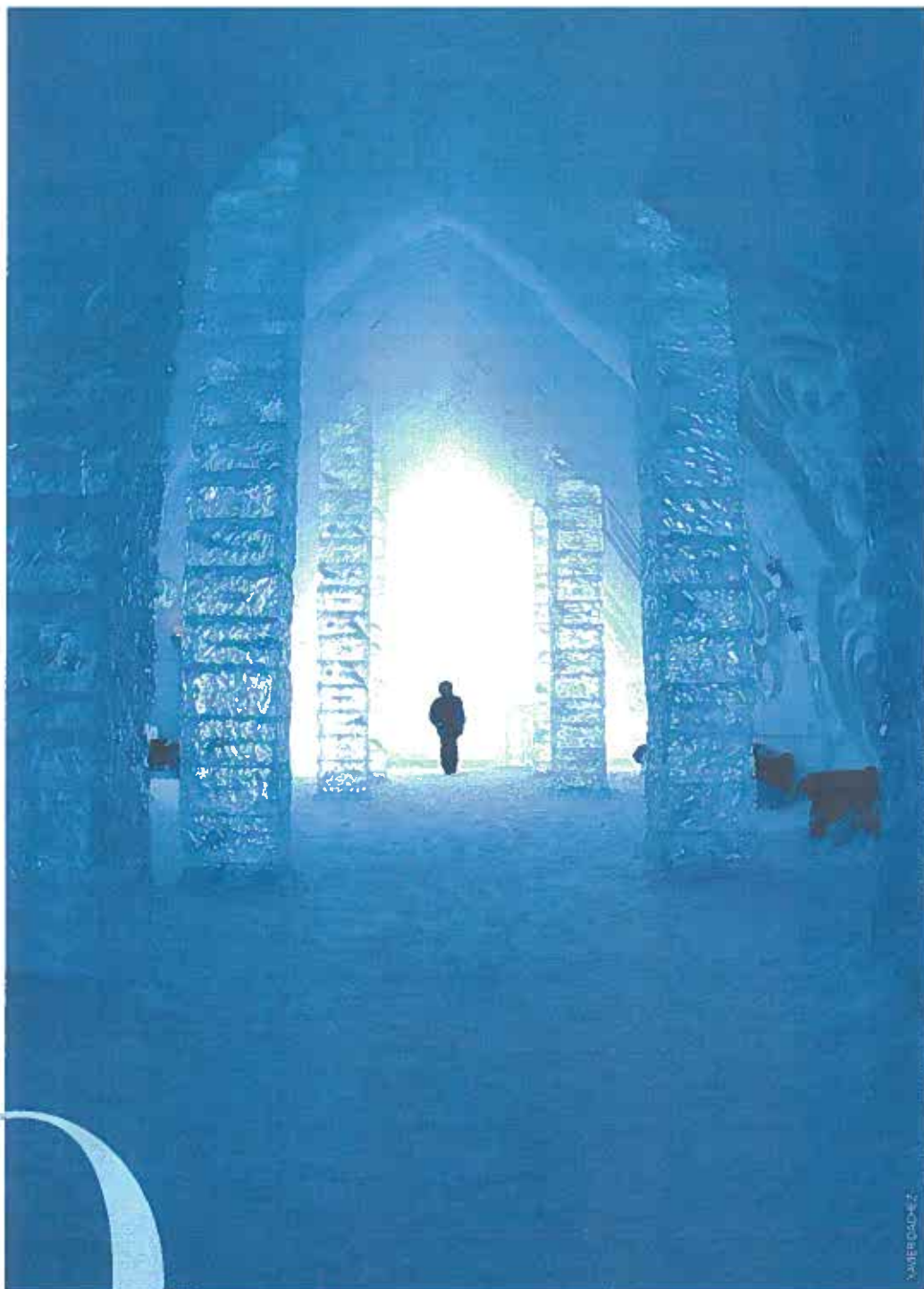
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UÉBEC CITY

If you're going to brave the cold this winter, pack your bags and head to Québec City for the Winter Carnival, chilling accommodations at the Ice Hotel and every excuse for a great cup of hot chocolate.

STORY BY JILL FERGUS

If you haven't ventured north of the border recently, winter is the ideal season for a Canadian getaway, and more specifically, for a visit to Québec City where people celebrate the cold and snow like no one else. Not only does this French-speaking city have the only ice hotel in North America, but it's also home to the annual Winter Carnival, a three-week event that somehow manages to make the bone-chilling temperatures bearable, filling the days with parades, parties and outdoor activities. The city was founded in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain on the site of a former Iroquois village on the banks of the St. Lawrence River and the walled Old City (Vieux Québec), with its historic 18th- and 19th-century buildings, cobblestone streets and Parisian-style cafes never fails to captivate. **Tom Hanks** and **Ethan Hawke** have been recent visitors.

Kick off your Canadian adventure with a stay at the Ice Hotel, located at the Duchesnay Ecotourism Resort, a twenty-minute drive west of the city. The Ice Hotel, also known as the L'Hotel de Glace Canada, is entering its fourth season and will remain erected from Jan. 9 to April 4. This 30,000-square-foot luxury igloo features four-foot thick ice walls, 16-foot arched ceilings, 32 rooms (yes, the beds and the night tables are made of ice) and plenty of public spaces. This includes an expansive lobby complete with carved couches and chairs covered with deer pelts, an ice chapel [which gives new meaning to the term "white wedding"; dozens of couples have tied the knot here], a bar, disco, and even a small movie theater. It's really quite an architectural and imaginative feat — something that must be seen to believe. Before the sun goes down, take advantage of the winter activities offered at the resort such as snowshoeing, snowmobiling, ice fishing and cross-country skiing.

The experience begins with dinner in the Duchesnay's wood-paneled lodge (there are also heated cabins with comfy beds for all the wimps). After a brief instructional meeting where the vital lesson learned is that you can't actually freeze to death, you are left to your own devices. You can visit the Absolut Ice Bar where shots of vodka are served in glasses of ice, then make your way into the N'Ice Club where a deejay spins records (this spacious club holds up to 400 and is often used for special events). There is even an outdoor hot tub if you're so inclined. Around midnight, most guests start to turn in and those staying in the cabins seem a heck of a lot smarter than the ones clutching their sleeping bags, but for many, it's a badge of honor to

make it through the night. And the people willing to give it a try are from all over the globe — Brazil, Japan, England, the United States, etc.

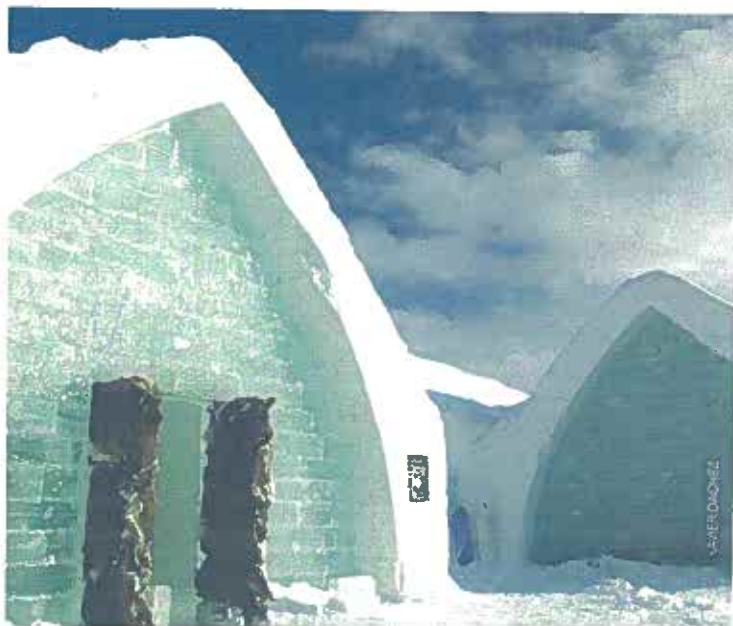
The rooms are spacious but bare (belongings are left in the main lodge), so basically you just sleep there. Curl up in your thermal sleeping bag on a deer pelt on your block of ice. Don't fool yourself, it's not comfortable! Given your sleeping conditions, it's unlikely that you'll sleep past 7 a.m.; hot chocolate awaits at the bar and a buffet breakfast of eggs, Canadian bacon, pancakes and maple syrup is sprawled out at the lodge. Staying in the Ice



Hotel isn't for everyone, but the mileage you'll get from telling your story to friends and family is well worth it.

Back in town, you earned the right to stay in the luxurious hilltop Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac, the castle-like building built in 1893 that towers high above the city. Everyone from **Princess Grace** to **Sarah Ferguson** and numerous heads of state have stayed here. The 618 rooms are elegantly decorated and the Bar St. Laurent with a cozy fireplace and views of icy St. Lawrence is one of the most romantic spots in town. On Terrasse Dufferin, just below the Frontenac, is a 285-foot-long toboggan run and an outdoor ice-skating rink. Just steps from the hotel is the Old Town where you can stroll along the main streets of Rue Saint-Jean and St. Louis lined with cafes, restaurants and boutiques. Take a peek in the Notre Dame Cathedral on Rue de Baude dating from 1647, with its impressive stained glass windows and hand-carved wooden bishop's throne. Visit the Musee du Fort on Rue Saint-Anne chronicling the many sieges of the city, including a 1759 decisive battle between the French and English on the Plains of Abraham. When you need to take a break from the cold, enjoy a cup of hot chocolate in a French-style bakery or sip a drink by the fireplace at the Pub Saint-Alexandre where you have your choice of more than 200 types of beer. In the evening, you can dine in romantic restaurants such as Saint-Amour on Rue Saint-Ursule housed in a restored Victorian mansion where they serve French-Canadian cuisine such as caribou steak with cedar jelly and arctic char with fennel.

The Winter Carnival (Jan. 30 to Feb. 15), this year celebrating the event's 50th anniversary, is presided over by a jolly snowman mascot called Bonhomme. Most of the action takes place on the Plains of Abraham which



are transformed into a winter wonderland playground with activities for the whole family: horse-drawn carriage rides (with plenty of wool blankets), inner tube rides and ice-climbing. Don't miss the snow bath — participants dressed in bathing suits only, frolic in the snow as bystanders shiver at the sight. There's also the annual canoe race across the St. Lawrence where entrants brave the ice floes and sub-zero temperatures. Marvel at the snow and ice sculpture competitions, and parades with festive floats and marching bands where bundled festival-goers dance and blow plastic horns; inevitably, the *caribou*, a potent mix of red wine, grain alcohol, maple syrup and cinnamon, is passed around to warm up your chilled body. You'll soon realize that part of the fun of winter in Québec City is braving the cold.

RESOURCE GUIDE

HOW TO GET THERE

There are flights to Québec via Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto on Air Canada (888.247.2262, www.aircanada.com). For more information, contact Québec Tourism (877.266.5687, www.bonjourquebec.com) and the Winter Carnival (866.422.7628, www.carnaval.qc.ca).

WHERE TO STAY

Ice Hotel

877.505.0423

www.icehotel-canada.com

It's \$204 per person, per night inclusive of dinner, breakfast and cocktail. If you don't want to spend the night, take an hour-long tour (\$11).

Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac

800.441.1414

www.fairmont.com

Historic hotel in the Old Town; doubles from \$152.

Dominion 1912

888.833.5253

www.hoteldominion.com

Chic boutique hotel with 60 ultra-modern rooms and cozy lobby lounge with fireplace; doubles from \$128. Oh, Tom Hanks stayed here.

Hotel Royal William

888.541.0405

www.royalwilliam.com

A comfortable 44-room hotel near the Old Town; doubles from \$98. The French bistro has jazz on weekends.

WHERE TO EAT

Au Petit Coin Breton

418.694.0758

Order crepes and choose from 50 fillings (ham, cheese, chocolate, jam, etc.); dinner for two, \$50.

Saint-Amour

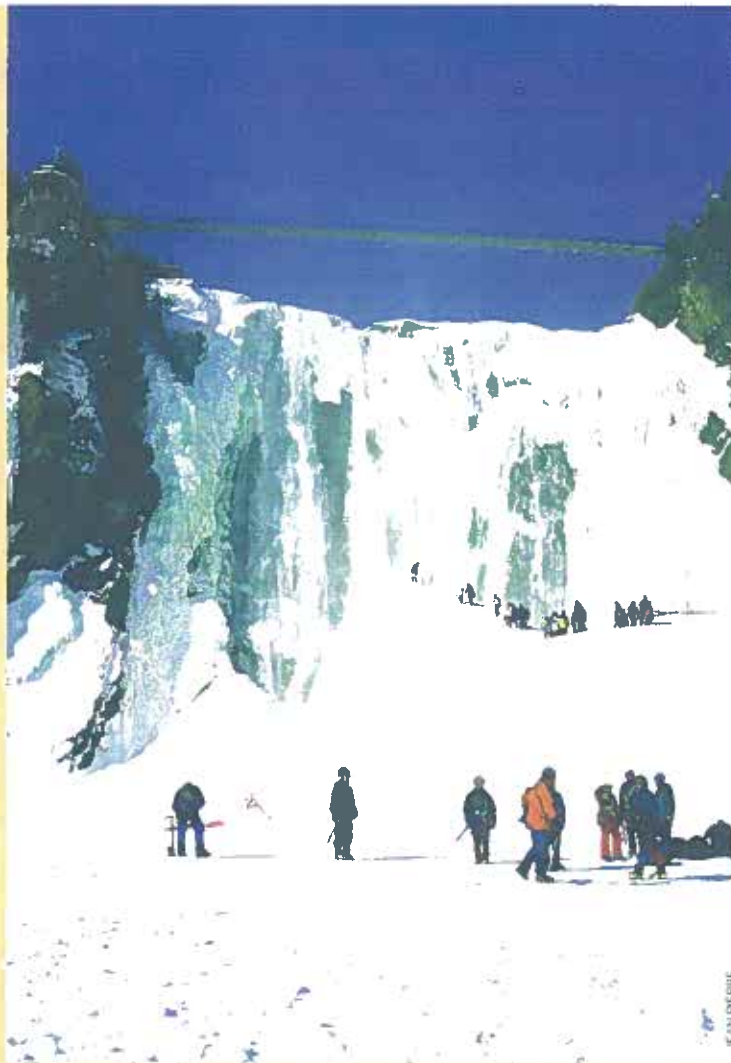
418.694.0667

Elegant restaurant with regional fare complemented by a fine wine list; dinner for two, \$80.

Portofino Italian Bistro

418.692.8888

Festive restaurant with delicious pizzas, pastas and Italian specialties; dinner for two, \$50.



WHERE TO GO

Just 15 minutes east of Québec, the Parc de la Chute-Montmorency Falls (418.663.3330, www.chutemontmorency.qc.ca) are definitely worth a visit. The Montmorency Falls are 272 feet high (which makes them higher than Niagara Falls); they're the climax of the Montmorency River. From the base, you can take a 20-person cable car to the top for great views of the St. Lawrence and Ile d'Orleans, a small offshore island. Anyone not afraid of heights can walk across the suspension bridge atop the powerful cascading waters.

Throughout most of the winter, the falls freeze over creating quite a unique sight; the spray from the falls forms a huge hill known as "Sugarloaf" which becomes a slide for both kids and adults. The surrounding icy rock faces are popular with rock climbers; the trails on either side of the falls are used by snowshoers. The Manoir Montmorency, housed in a restored 19th-century villa, is nearby. It's a great place to have lunch or in the evening, a romantic four-course dinner prepared by Marie-Chantal Lepage, Québec City's leading female chef. Book a table by a window overlooking the falls — it's beautifully floodlit at night. —JILL FERGUS