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On The Go

UPDATE: Quebec Carnival

12 58 PM, February 10, 2010 | David Paul Appell

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Snowpocalypse, schmowpocalypse — these past several days as blizzards have sent the Middle Atlantic into a tizzy, I was up in Quebec City, learning how folks who really know how to deal with winter do it. Their secret: among other things, throw an outdoor Carnival.

While Carnival season for most brings to mind the craziness of Bourbon Street and the Sambodrome, even folks swanning around a misty Piazza San Marco in fey masks. Ziplining, hot-tubbing and canoe racing? Not so much.

Yet for 17 days in February, even with temperatures from the teens and twenties, a few dozen acres on the Plains of Abraham, wrapped around this lovely old city's Parliament Hill, are crammed with some three quarters of a million folks in fur hats and parkas, kids, dogs and grannies in tow, keeping themselves busy with dozens of cool attractions, and many of them tooting blue and red plastic horns.

Some are on the traditional side, a la sleighrides, dogsledding, ice slides, ice sculptures, and maple-snowpop-making. Others have more of a whiff of modern adrenaline junkiedom — snowrafting and the aforementioned zipline — while still others update old traditions (the "Arctic spa" section sports not just a dry sauna but a bunch of bubbly hot tubs).

It's all punctuated with sundry contests, races, dances and other events (too bad I have to miss this Saturday's Snow Bath, where a few dozen revelers strip down to beachwear and roll around in the white stuff). At other locations, I watched canoe races across the slushy St. Lawrence River and a Mardi-Gras-style night parade in the suburb of Charlesbourg.

I even took a break from the festivities to head out to Duchesnay, a half hour

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About the Authors

DAVID LANDSEL
Post Travel Editor since 2004, he has visited all fifty states and every continent at least once. He prefers his native New York State to just about anywhere.

CHRIS BUNTING
California born. German blooded. Asia minded. Chris Bunting brings his unique brand of worldliness to his informative travel writing.

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north of the city, to a winter resort area for snowshoeing, some dogsledding of my own (they even let me drive, and nobody was injured, human or canine), and the highlight — an adventurous night in the 36-room Hôtel de Glace (Ice Hotel), now in its tenth year and running through April 4. But that's another story.

Anyway, all of this has been an invigorating reminder of how winter can be so much more than tromping through dirty slush on your way to work. As one Carnival-goer told me over a glass of hot caribou (a toddy of red wine souped-up with brandy), "It helps get us through the season."

Seventeen-day Carnival passes start at just over \$11. If you can't manage an impromptu visit this weekend (a 90-minute flight from New York), next year's edition will be held January 28 to February 13. The Ice Hotel and other Duchesnay activities run through March and even the beginning of April, as does the wicked 270-foot toboggan slide called Les Glissades de la Terrasse Dufferin, right by the famous Château Frontenac hotel.

More info: www.carnaval.qc.ca

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