



QUEBEC'S
**hotel
de
glace**
BY JILL GLEESON

It's the silence that surprises here. The sensation, as I wander the dim, chilled corridors, of supreme isolation. There are other guests staying in this winter palace carved entirely, as if by indefatigable arctic elves, out of snow and ice. But the four-foot-thick walls allow no sound to escape from one chamber to the next; even the crunch of my boots on the packed-snow floors is muted. Around me all is still and white, and the solitude only adds to the impression that I am strolling the passages of a dream, or perhaps a fairy tale made real. The Hotel de Glace is nearly too magical to be of this world.

The feeling continues when I arrive at my room, hidden behind a curtain strung across the doorway. Along the heavy fabric's edges a green glow escapes from the interior; a sign next to the portal announces this to be the "I'm a Frog" suite. I enter, my jaw dropping. The walls of this windowless snow cave are etched with the fanciful figures of gigantic amphibians, their eyes bulging comically, wide grins across their froggy faces. LED bulbs hidden throughout give the area its emerald blush and candles, lit here and there, add to the shimmer. There is an intricately carved ice bed, upon which lays a mattress layered with thick synthetic furs. This is where I'll sleep tonight, snug and secure as any fabled Nordic princess in her castle on the tundra.

Born anew each January on the plains of a former zoo outside of Quebec City in Canada, the Hotel de Glace glistens beneath lonely stars and cold winter sun though March's last Sunday. It is a colossal structure, crafted from five hundred tons of clear ice and twenty-five thousand tons of snow that fifty artisans spend six weeks fashioning into North America's only ice hotel. Something so heavy, so huge should by all rights squat indelicately upon the earth, but with its sculpted ice columns, its frozen chandeliers and soaring vaulted ceilings cool as forgotten love, there is an ethereal quality to the Hotel de Glace. Celebrating its fifteenth anniversary in 2015, it is luminous with the adoration its creator has long felt for the season of slumber.

"Winter, for me, is a big white blanket which makes the nature rest. The time is frozen in winter, everything stops. Not only is there no life, but I always look inward during winter. I have



since I was a child. It is very spiritual to me,” muses Jacques Desbois, the businessman with the soul of a poet who is the CEO of the Hotel de Glace.

He pauses, adding, “North Americans are, in a sense, descendants of people that have lost their way. They were looking for the Orient passage and instead discovered North America and its winter. That’s why we always hear people say, ‘winter is coming, we will have to fight against it!’ But more and more we are assuming our identity as Northern people and the Hotel de Glace is a magnificent testimonial to that. The ancestor of the Hotel de Glace is the igloo, which was a survival shelter. We’ve taken that concept and elevated it, so instead of only surviving, we amaze ourselves. And that’s the magic of the Ice Hotel.”

There is enchantment everywhere in the Hotel de Glace, I discover. It’s in the Grand Hall,

where shining chairs and tables of ice invite casual conversation beside a wall festooned with massive flowers made from snow, their curved petals soft-seeming as a real rose’s. It’s in the long ice slide twisting through this same hall, surprisingly slick and speedy I find after taking a turn behind two giggling, red-cheeked kids, their eyes wide with an excitement not even Christmas morning could produce. And it’s in the discotheque, a cavernous space that transports visitors into a fantastical habitat under the sea. Here, pouting fish swim along frosty blue-lit walls, there an octopus curls up a column of snow. Above the bundled-up bartender, who serves her concoctions in ice glasses, a jellyfish glimmering green appears almost to undulate, its tentacles trailing gracefully beneath its body.

But most lovely of all may be the chapel. A long, slender span, it is topped by a pointed barrel





vault ceiling and lined with two rows of ice benches draped in animal hides. They face the altar, which is framed by columns of ice etched with trees whose entwined roots form hearts. Behind this sacred spot where couples are forever joined, a large lotus flower is carved with stunning simplicity into the wall. I understand at one glance why dozens choose to marry each year in the Hotel de Glace, among them, I have heard tell, a Turkish bride who arrived at the ceremony on a dog sled driven by her father, and a groom who scaled a forty-foot ice wall to pluck a rose from its top for his new wife.

Sleepy from the cold and swooning with the romance of it all, I stumble toward my suite. Tucking myself in, I watch as my breath leaves my body, forming clouds of white at the tip of my nose. I think about this place of whimsy and beauty, quite unlike anything I have ever known, and how it will

be destroyed at the end of March, its frigid rubble left to evaporate in the spring sun. I can't help but mourn a bit for it, even as I know the Hotel de Glace will rise again come next winter, a glorious Phoenix ascending not from fire and ash but ice and snow. I'll be here.

The Hotel de Glace will reopen on January 5, 2015. As it is every year, it will be entirely redesigned and offer forty-four rooms, including seventeen themed suites. For more information, visit Hoteldeglace-canada.com or phone 877-505-0423.

When she's not at her computer, independent journalist Jill Gleeson tirelessly roams the globe in search of oddball adventures she can't tell her mother about. Find her at [Twitter.com/gopinkboots.com](https://twitter.com/gopinkboots) and [Facebook.com/jillgleeson.9](https://facebook.com/jillgleeson.9).

