



The Art of Snowshoeing Perfected by the Québécoise

By Ryan Alford

“In Québec City, we can either choose to be depressed during the winter or we can choose to appreciate it. We choose to love winter and have fun in the snow.” – François Calletta

The Québécoise – also known as citizens of Québec City – embrace the snow. They embrace it out of necessity. Yet, that embrace doesn’t come at a loss of love for winter, but an appreciation. To accurately capture how the Québécoise live happily with long winters and a consistent deep snow pack, you must celebrate with them. From the ice sculptures that rest outside the doorways of quaint retail shops to the elaborate Carnaval de Québec, the winter season is a reluctant lover that sometimes outlasts its stay. But it’s a love affair that the Québec City townspeople choose to observe – using the sculpting of snow and ice as the Carnaval’s founding fascination. Within this fête is an appreciation for winter sports and the city’s rich history. Snowshoeing is no exception. Behind every snowshoer in Québec, you’ll find a passion and devotion for the city...and Canada.

Today, Québec City is drenched with an enchanting history; it’s the city’s youthful residents that scatter an effervescent tone that noticeably sets a beautiful disparity between past and present. Among the dynamic adolescent is a respect for the preceding generations that helped mold a foundation that holds true to Québec’s heritage. This legacy is woven throughout the city’s architecture, its dazzling countryside, and the tide-stricken waters of the majestic Saint Lawrence River.

Among the 98 percent of Québec’s French-speaking citizens, you’ll find a warmly spoken “Bonjour” and a genuine smile. The Québécoise embody an enthusiasm for hospitality and penchant for generosity. In that same light, they are proud of their heritage.

When visiting Québec City, you’ll find an appreciation for the First Nation ancestral traditions and amazing architecture. This represents more than a 1,000 years of Canadian history. While supporting an artistic culture, the city is itself ... a work of art. Québec City’s historic grounds can be appreciated on snowshoes – from inner-city excursions on the Plains of Abraham to the unique snow-covered trails of Wendake.

As I prepare to tour Québec City, I reflect on a recent mantra I adopted: “Snowshoeing is about the experience, not the goal. Taking something with you in the end, calls you back for more.”



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Although the avenues of Québec City are easy to navigate during the summer, the entire city offers a “snowglobe” experience when the snow and ice arrive for a long winter. And the Québec winters are harsh – with the humidity always present, mixing with the often bone-chilling arctic air. The community’s rating as a “safe city” (and rather low unemployment) is a testament to the stability of its economy...and Canada’s.

The Québec province’s vastness is truly remarkable. Its two largest cities, Montreal and Québec City, are in close proximity to the United States. A majority of the province’s populous live in the two cities; while most of its countryside is home to a variety of Aboriginal Nations.

From the Mohawk to the Cris, the Québec Aboriginal peoples are diverse. Their one thing in common is a place called Québec. The Québec name was derived from the Algonquin word “kébec.” It means “where the river narrows,” which was influenced by the great Saint Lawrence River.

The Saint Lawrence is unique, simply for its extreme tidal behavior – best known for the largest inland tides in the world (up to 17 feet). It’s more accurately described as a seaway, inviting barges and large ice-cutting ships to its waters. The river’s ice levels can reach up to 12 feet high. And to see the river in action – as it flows backwards – is peculiar and wildly captivating (especially when large ice blocks are floating by).

Watch a video of the Saint Lawrence tidal phenomenon: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSTTIJWcRx0>.

Montmorency Falls is another “water in motion” attraction close to Québec City – about 12 kilometers to the northeast. During the winter, the falls are a big draw for ice climbers and, of course, tourists. At about 280 feet, the Québécoise are proud to say that Montmorency Falls is higher than the majestic Niagara Falls.

Visitors to Montmorency have the opportunity to view the falls from several different angles, including across a suspension bridge that hovers over the crest. Visitors can also take a cable car to the top and then view the falls via multiple viewing platforms. The bridge can be accessed near the Manoir Montmorency, a historic gourmet restaurant that is closed during the winter. However, during the summer, the Manoir’s seven dining rooms can accommodate up to 200 people.





The Québec history is a true Canadian commodity: Protected by the Québécoise. The province's roots stem from its Aboriginal peoples, French-based civilization, and a dash of Irish heritage. But like most countries, Québec's evolution and structure came at a tremendous price. Wars were fought as the British and French found their way into the Americas, leaving the Aboriginals to choose sides and defend their lands at great costs.

Sadly, war forces change – for better or for worse. As a result, Québec City is known to be the only fortified city in North America. Its walls are still lined with cannons that once protected the city from the oncoming British armies. The cannons stretch from the Petit Séminaire De Québec to the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac – swarming almost every historic structure in Old Town Québec City. According to local snowshoers, there is a difficult-to-find geocache in one of the cannons.

Within the fortified confines of the city – and among the world's most historic buildings – some amazing independently-owned shops and restaurants await eager, spendthrift patrons. Follow the foot traffic to the Quartier Petit Champlain, the oldest commercial street in North America. Its cobblestone streets provide a true slice of European commerce and lifestyle.

If you're keen on purchasing some local art and leave with it in hand, visit Artists Alley – not far from La Petit Champlain. Be on the lookout for the beautiful art of Sonia Gilbert. Born in Québec City, Sonia captures the true expressions and inspiration of the city through her etchings and engravings.

Not too far from Old Town Québec City, the Plaines d'Abraham (Plains of Abraham) accentuates a fairytale adventure with “The Snowshoer's Walk.” Guided by a 20th century-dressed snowshoer, participants will don traditional woodframe snowshoes (made by Faber) and explore the



famous Plains of Abraham. The guide will provide background information on the battles that were fought on the plains and some tidbits on the origination of how snowshoes were used by early Québec settlers.

Today, there is a true respect and admiration for the multitudes of Amerinatives that inhabit the Québec lands. Their history is honored daily, as opposed to the occasional holiday or brief celebration. In addition to the Mohawk, Cris and Algonquin, the province is home to the Inuits, Abénakis, Atikamekw, Hurons, Melécite, Micmac, Montagnais, and Naskapis.

Québec City and its citizens particularly admire the Huron-Wendat culture; a very friendly, warm and joyous group that still speaks its original language. Approximately 15 to 20 minutes north of the city you'll find the suburb of Wendake. This Huron-Wendat community is home to the l'Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations. This luxurious hotel is an architectural work of art that pays homage to the Huron people and their deeply-rooted ancestral traditions.

Each hotel suite frames the Huron-Wendat civilization in a unique lodging experience that is second to none. In addition, all the rooms (55 total) in the l'Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations face the Saint Charles River. This honors the beauty of the wilderness the Huron-Wendat people admired every day of their lives.

The respect for Huron culture and tradition is encased in the museum that's connected to the hotel. A tour of the museum reflects the Huron's agricultural heritage, which is exemplified through the "three sisters" –

bean, squash and corn. This trio can effectively grow together and can combat predatory elements through their combined resiliency.

After a museum tour, follow in the footsteps of the Aborigines in Wendake with a snowshoeing hike around the Saint Charles. Johanne LaFramboise, a guide at the museum, will treat you to a wonderful Huron adventure that includes historical tidbits and some reflections on Wendake's development over the years. Of course, to add to the flavor of the hike, the museum equips visitors with GV snowshoes. The tour concludes with the sipping of hot herbal tea in a warming hut that sits nearby the museum.

The l'Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations also pays tribute to the Huron-Wendat nation with La Traite Restaurant. According to Wendake locals, people from surrounding communities and provinces travel to the hotel to enjoy La Traite's tasty cuisine.



Among Executive Chef Martin Gagné's lunch entrées, the Red Deer Ribs and Duck Magret with Lingonberry are highly recommended. The dinner menu offers the choice of three combinations: First Nations Menu (four courses), Celebration Menu (four courses) and the Discovery Menu (six courses). Wash it all down with a pint of Kwe beer – brewed with corn and extremely smooth tasting.

During a visit to Wendake, it's important to visit the headquarters of two snowshoe companies: GV Snowshoes and Faber Snowshoes.

GV Snowshoes has a history rooted in Wendake and the Huron-Wendat natives. In 1982, Maurice Vincent partnered with Antoine Gros-Louis (and his snowshoe company). From this partnership the GV brand name was created (Gros-Louis & Vincent). Later, Vincent became the primary owner of the company and then officially named it GV Snowshoes.

To read about my time spent at the GV headquarters, visit http://www.snowshoemag.com/viewContent.cfm?content_id=830.

Faber also has a rich history in the Wendake community. Owned by Guy Faber, the company has been in business for more than 135 years. Still today, Faber manufactures some of the most rigid woodframe snowshoes on the market – exporting some of its materials to snowshoe companies in the United States. Among Faber's lineup of snowshoes, you'll find a mix of aluminum frame shoes, woodframes, and hybrid snowshoes that combine wood with more modern materials.

Vive Bonhomme!

The Carnaval de Québec is the darling event of the province. For people of all ages, all walks of life, the Carnaval is a display of Canadian pride and a powerful celebration of winter. No matter the temperature, the Québécoise will rejoice in the boundless opportunities that winter bestows to the Québec economy.





Tourists from afar and families of all nationalities visit Québec every year to witness the Carnaval spectacle. Overall, the Carnaval adds an additional value of \$31 million to Québec's gross domestic product. It supports more than 600 jobs, and it ushers in provincial and federal tax revenues of \$11.1 million.

The Carnaval de Québec is ranked among the world's top ten best winter festivals. It's also considered one of the world's 1,000 must-see destinations.

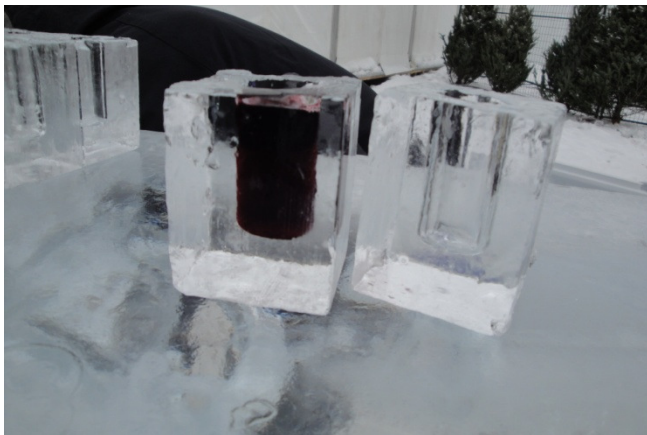
Tourists represent 51 percent of all visitors to the Carnaval. It invites more than 750,000 domestic and foreign visitors every year.

Inevitably, the Carnaval is more than a large elaborate party; it's a way of life for the Québécoise. Not only do they love the Carnaval but they also adore the Carnaval's mascot, Bonhomme. More popular than Santa Claus, Bonhomme parades through the Carnaval events and spreads joy among the attendees. His permanent smile adds to the palpable joy that fills the air in Québec City, especially during the night when the festivities continue.

Bonhomme travels the world promoting "his" event. The Carnaval de Québec, just concluding its 57th edition, offers an array of activities for everybody to enjoy. From skill-testing challenges to snow games, the Carnaval is a pageant of ice and snow.

As the centerpiece of the Carnaval, Bonhomme's Ice Palace welcomes all visitors, day and night. Made of approximately 6,500 blocks of ice, the Palace takes three weeks to construct. During the day, visitors can tour the Palace and learn more about the Carnaval's history. Of course, at night, the Palace transforms into an extravagant outdoor night club. A combination of lights and music dazzle the crowds as dancing and celebration ensue.

To assist in the enjoyment of the Carnaval, the Québec citizens partake in a sweet-tasting alcoholic beverage called Caribou. This popular drink consists of red wine (or port), white whisky, and brandy (or rum). Sweetened with maple syrup or sugar, Caribou can be served hot or cold. Of course, most people prefer their Caribou hot – especially during the cold Québec nights. However, a few too many



Caribous can sneak up on you rather quickly. (Caribou and slick, icy walkways don't mix very well.)

Adding to the merriment, the Carnaval features the Loto- Québec Ferris Wheel, ice sculptures galore, the Natrel Giant Slide, the WestJet Zipline, the TELUS International Snow Sculpture Competition, and several parades attended by more than 200,000 people.

Watch a video of the Natrel Giant Slide experience: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cIVAQr6JQE>.

Video of the WestJet Zipline experience:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh83nVKHkTk>.

Video of the Fire Dancers at the Ice Palace:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-g7DmVWjxFo>.

On Super Bowl Sunday, Québec City was preparing for the 2011 CMQ Ice Canoe Race. Locals explained that this was their “big sport” for the weekend. And the excitement felt among the community rivaled that of their neighbors to the south. While the Green Bay Packers and Pittsburgh Steelers prepared for their big game in the warmth of Cowboys Stadium, the CMQ canoe racers were battling sub-zero temperatures and large ice blocks that quickly flowed down the Saint Lawrence River.

“This race is insane,” said one spectator and fan. “To watch the racers drag their canoes over ice and slush on the river is so exciting. To see a Québec canoe race is to appreciate what true athleticism is all about. American football is for little sissies. Get in a canoe and row across the Saint Lawrence. Not for sissies.”

To read more about the CMQ Ice Canoe Race, visit http://www.snowshoemag.com/viewContent.cfm?content_id=832.

The start of the CMQ Ice Canoe Race: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfRqSkOdkM0>. The canoers crossing the Saint Lawrence River: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa4-9T7x_7I.

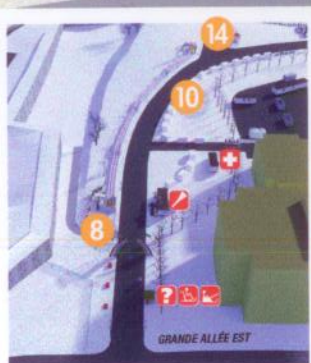


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- 1 Bain de neige COLD-FX
COLD-FX Snow Bath
- 2 Barbecue METRO
METRO BBQ
- 3 Bistro SAQ
SAQ Bistro
- 4 Cabane à sucre
Sugar Shack
- 5 Grande roue Loto-Québec
Loto-Québec Ferris Wheel
- 6 Derby St-Hubert
St-Hubert Derby

- 7 Glissades Desjardins
Desjardins Snow Slides
- 8 Grande Glissade Natrel
Natrel's Great Ice Slide
- 9 Nouveaux jeux d'hiver
New Winter Games
- 10 International de sculpture sur neige TELUS
TELUS International Snow Sculpture Event
- 11 L'univers de jeux de glace
The World of Ice Games
- 12 Jeu de soccer géant
Giant Table-Soccer Game

- 13 Promenades en carriole
Sleigh Rides
- 14 Promenades en traineau à chiens
Dogsled Rides
- 15 Rafting sur neige KRAFT
KRAFT Snow Rafting
- 16 Espace Hydro-Québec
Hydro-Québec Place
- 17 Tente M. Christie / KRAFT
Mr. Christie / KRAFT Tent
- 18 Tente METRO
METRO Marquee

- 19 Tyrolienne WestJet
WestJet Zipline
- 20 Village Arctic Spas
Arctic Spas Village
- 21 Village M. Christie / KRAFT
Mr. Christie / KRAFT Village
- 22 Zone interactive TELUS
TELUS Interactive Zone
- 23 Patinoire du Pentathlon des neiges
Skating Rink
- 24 Conquête des Châteaux Jean Coutu
Jean Coutu Castle Conquest

- ? Centre Info-Carnaval
Info-Carnival Center
- + Croix-Rouge canadienne
First Aid
- 🔪 Produits souvenirs
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- 🛶 Prêt de traîneaux pour enfants
Children's sleds on loan
- 🍽️ Restauration
Self-Service Restaurant
- 🍴 Table à langer
Changing Table
- 🚻 Toilettes
Public Restroom
- S Sécurité
Security
- 🛴 Prêt de trottinettes aux personnes
à mobilité réduite accompagnées
d'un adulte
Kicksleds (sleds that can be
pushed along the snow by an adult)
on loan for the mobility impaired

Fortress of Solitude

What's a week in Québec City without staying a night at the Hôtel de Glace? North America's one-and-only hotel made 100 percent from snow (15,000 tons) and ice (500 tons) is quite a vision. Touring the hotel is one thing...sleeping in the hotel is a peculiar luxury. And like all of Québec City, the Ice Hotel must be experienced in person – nothing written in this article will accurately depict the “wow factor” that it inspires.

Hôtel de Glace packs a total of 36 rooms and suites; an 88 person capacity; exterior spas and sauna; 32,000 square feet of snowy surface area; Ice Bar and Ice Café; an exhibition room; an ice slide for all ages; Ice Chapel; fireplaces (no joke); and a restaurant. An overnight stay at the Hôtel de Glace starts at \$235 per person and includes a cocktail; tour of the hotel; equipment for the night (sleeping bag, pillow, and bag liner); access to the hot tubs and sauna; and a hot morning beverage and breakfast.

However, it's not as straight-forward as it seems; it's not your typical night's stay at a hotel. There are some preparations and plans to be made before sleeping among the sculpted snow and ice. But that's part of its appeal. The time invested to prepare far outweighs this once-in-a-lifetime chance to stay in one of two official ice hotels in the world. (You'll find the other ice hotel in Sweden.)

Shed every pre-conceived idea you have about the Hôtel de Glace. Once a room reservation has been made, the hotel will send a preparation guide: what to wear, what to bring, what to expect, and how to enjoy every minute of your stay. Despite the varied winter temperatures in Québec – ranging from -13F to 41F – the inside of the hotel stays a very humid 20F to 25F.

Do you sleep on the ice? In a matter of speaking, yes. However, while a sleeping bag is spread over a very comfortable mattress, the bed frame is made of ice. It's more like sleeping among the ice – to best describe it.





Guests of the Hôtel de Glace can choose from several elaborately designed suites and basic chamber rooms. For instance, my suite was called the “Bee Room.” Portions of the walls were carved like a honeycomb and the headboard of my bed was carved like a large bee. LED lights provided a hypnotizing yellow glow throughout the entire suite.

Additional suites in the hotel demonstrated similar framework: elaborate wall carvings, ice furniture, an array of colored LED lights, and other conveniences. One suite boasted a flat screen TV mounted on the wall and fireplace near the bed. Another suite featured a fireplace, and a personal sauna and hot tub.

The exhibition hall is where guests can use the restroom and take a break from the hotel freeze. It contains the conveniences that most humans require

on a day-to-day basis.

Interestingly enough, the Hôtel de Glace is quite a family destination. While it’s great for couples, it’s more for the adventure rather than the romance. Guests will find that the experience is quite exhilarating and more accustomed to a high-end tourist attraction. But, it’s a pricey tourist attraction, and one that is highly unique to the flavors of Québec.

The Hôtel de Glace receives more than 85,000 visitors and 4,000 overnight stays every winter – from its grand opening in mid-January until its dismantling in late March.

Le Pentathlon des Neiges

Recently, Le Pentathlon des Neiges La Vie Sportive (based in Québec City) became Canada’s top outdoor winter event; it won the “Most Remarkable New Event in Canada” award, presented by the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance.



Distinguishing itself as the largest outdoor winter event in Canada, Le Pentathlon des Neiges La Vie Sportive doubled its efforts and presented several new activities. Thanks to an agreement signed with the Carnaval de Québec, Le Pentathlon offered 30 days of events – from Jan. 29 to Feb. 27.

The Pentathlon des Neiges is a non-profit organization that strives to promote winter sports as part of a healthy lifestyle. The event is supported by the Québec Triathlon and the Québec Speed Skating Association. The Pentathlon des Neiges is one of the world's unique sporting events in which participants must perform a relay race within the five following disciplines: cycling, jogging, skiing, skating and snowshoeing.

“In 2010, we increased the size of the facilities to accommodate a larger number of participants. In spite of these improvements, the Short Distance Challenge and the Long Distance Challenge were fully booked for the third year in a row,” says François Calletta, the event's general manager. “In order to maintain this growth as well as our position as the leading Canadian outdoor winter event, we added two new challenges to the 2011 program. In addition, the traditional trials have been improved.”

As part of the events, the GV Snowshoe Challenge consisted of a 10 kilometer snowshoe race that started in front of the beautiful (and historic) Château Frontenac. It continued through the snowy streets of Old Québec and ended on the Pentathlon site on the Plains of Abraham.

Two former Pentathlon champions competed in the event: Pascal Bussi res (professional cyclist and winner of the 2010 edition of the Pentathlon) and Charles Perreault (winner of not only the 2009 edition of the Pentathlon but also various Ironman races). Also participating are two-time Track and Field Olympian Jo l Bourgeois, Jimmy Gobeil (one of the best professional snowshoe racers in the world), and  ric Tourville (finishing 2nd at the 2010 Pentathlon). About 115 racers competed in the GV Snowshoe Challenge.

On the final weekend, the Pentathlon hosted the Short Distance Challenge and the Family and Friends Challenge, both sponsored by Merrell and the College Hospitality Tournament of the Qu bec Student Sport Network. To conclude its activities, the Pentathlon presented La Vie Sportive Elite Long Distance, an event reserved for high-performance athletes who





competed for more than \$6,000 worth of prizes.

For more information about Le Pentathlon des Neiges, visit <http://www.pentathlondesneiges.com>.

Thanks to the Province of Québec and Québec City tourism offices for organizing such a wonderful adventure.



Snowshoeing Resources:

Québec Snowshoe Association – <http://www.raquettequebec.com>

Plains of Abraham – <http://www.theplainsofabraham.ca>

Carnaval de Québec – <http://www.carnaval.qc.ca>

Vallée Bras-du-Nord Coop de solidarité:
http://www.valleebrasdunord.com/raquette%20de%20montagne_an.html

Les Sentiers du Moulin: <http://www.sentiersdumoulin.com>

Parc national de la Jacques-Cartier – Sépaq:
http://www.sepaq.com/pq/jac/index.dot?language_id=1

Station touristique Duschesnay: <http://www.sepaq.com/ct/duc>

Mont-Sainte-Anne: <http://www.mont-sainte-anne.com/1/Lamontagne/Raquette/infogenerale/tabid/339/Default.aspx>

Sentier des Caps de Charlevoix: http://www.sentierdescaps.com/randonnees_raquettes.php

Plaines d'Abraham / National Battlefields Commission: <http://www.ccbn-nbc.gc.ca/en/sportsloisirs.php>



Centre de ski de fond de Charlesbourg: <http://www.quebecvacances.com/centre-de-ski-de-fond-de-charlesbourg>

Accommodations:

Québec City Hilton - <http://bit.ly/hVsSGP>

Hotel de Glace (Ice Hotel) - <http://www.icehotel-canada.com>

l'Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations – <http://www.hotelpremieresnations.com>

Le Musée huron-wendat – <http://www.museehuronwendat.ca>

Gear Mentions:

Arc'teryx – <http://www.arcteryx.com>

Brooks-Range – <http://brooks-range.com>

Columbia Sportswear – <http://www.columbia.com>

Darn Tough Socks – <http://darntough.com>

Faber Snowshoes – <http://www.fabersnowshoes.com>

GoLite – <http://www.golite.com>

GU Energy – <http://www.guenergy.com>

GV Snowshoes – <http://www.gvsnowshoes.com>

Icebreaker – <http://www.icebreaker.com>



KEEN Footwear – <http://www.keenfootwear.com>

Mammut – <http://www.mammut.ch>

Marmot – <http://www.marmot.com>

Merrell – <http://www.merrell.com>

Mountain Hardwear – <http://www.mountainhardwear.com>

Oboz Footwear – <http://www.obozfootwear.com>

Osprey Packs – <http://www.ospreypacks.com>

Sherpa Adventure Gear – <http://www.sherpaadventuregear.com>

Talus Outdoor Technologies – <http://www.talusoutdoor.com>

Under Armour – <http://www.underarmour.com>

Wilderness Athlete – <http://www.wildernessathlete.com>



Photography by Ryan Alford (taken with a Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W290).





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