

Snow place like home

VILLAGE IGLOO, 30 KILOMETRES NORTH OF QUEBEC CITY, OFFERS CITY DWELLERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE A DISAPPEARING ASPECT OF INUIT CULTURE

MICHELE PETERSON
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

MONT TOURBILLON – “The secret to being warm in an igloo,” Jean-Pierre Bardy says, “is to sleep naked.” But, with the thermometer hovering at minus 25C and the north wind gusting solid sheets of snow, our group of seven campers is skeptical. No one is volunteering to strip off any clothing.

“An igloo is not cold,” guide Mona Belleau explains. “It stays a steady minus 3C to minus 5C because snow is the world’s best insulator.”

“Much warmer than ice,” Bardy adds, in case any of us were considering Quebec’s more luxurious icy option, the Ice Hotel. Along with business partner Jean-Luis Canet, Bardy operates Village Igloo, one of a handful of igloo camps in Canada. Located 30 kilometres north of Quebec City, the camp offers city dwellers an opportunity to experience a disappearing aspect of Inuit culture along with a weekend of traditional winter sports.

The igloos are located beside Mont Tourbillon, a winter activity centre in the Lac Beauport recreation area. The centre offers downhill slides with mechanical lifts for snowtubing plus snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and trekking from its clubhouse.

The entire Lac Beauport territory is known for its abundant snowfall and more than 60 square kilometres of lakes and forests, which offer visitors additional choices for winter sports like skating, dog sledding, ice fishing and snowmobiling.

Belleau, a young Inuit guide from Nunavut, conducts the cultural orientation for participants at Village Igloo’s Inuit experience.

“Technically, Village Igloo builds quinzees,” she explains. “They are used in Quebec because the snow is softer than in northern Inuit climates. There, it is almost like sand.”

Due to temperature differences within the layers of snow, specific steps are needed when building. First, a giant snowball between two and three metres in diameter is created. Then, wooden dowels are inserted to between 30 to 45 centimetres until the snowball looks like a por-



PHOTOS: MICHELE PETERSON SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE
Owners Jean-Pierre Bardy and Jean-Luis Canet take a break while building more igloos at Village Igloo.

cupine. Once solid, the inside is scooped out until the dowels are reached and a raised sleeping platform is created to keep the flow of cold air aimed downward.

As we assess our homes for the night, Bardy points to an opening the size of a microwave. We crawl inside the igloo. The ceiling is low and all sound is muffled. There is a small hole in the roof for ventilation.

Back inside the nearby Mont Tourbillon clubhouse, Belleau shares stories of her history while we wrap sealskin throws across our knees and enjoy Inuit herbal tea of cranberry and juniper. She explains that with the Arctic changing rapidly due to global warming and gas exploration, more Inuit live in prefabricated homes than in

igloos. But, despite changing customs, Inuit life continues to be based on the migration of wild game and survival in a harsh climate.

With thoughts of harsh climate in mind, Bardy distributes our survival gear: one candle, one flashlight, a sleeping bag, a liner and a walkie-talkie to call the night watchman in case of emergency (or a potty visit).

Outside, the night sky is black, and fresh snow is falling. A full moon, fuzzy as though wrapped in a gauze scarf, rises over the Laurentian mountains. Bidding each other good night, we head to our respective igloos. I am sleeping solo, so mine is the smallest. I slither inside, dragging my purse behind me. It is surprisingly cozy, and the fresh fragrance of pine rises from the layer of pine boughs beneath my sleeping tarp. A pillar candle glows steadily on a piece of birch trunk.

Sleeping inside an igloo is like being in one of those glittery snowglobes that sparkles with white confetti when you shake it. Shivering at first, once I settle farther into my sleeping bag, it is actually quite warm. Deep silence surrounds me.

The next morning, I awake to the glow of sunlight. My water bottle has frozen solid overnight. But, apart from some frost along the edges of my sleeping bag, I

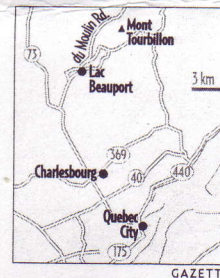
trees at the edge of the woods. As I head to the clubhouse for breakfast, I pass children carrying thick snowtubes up the hill

If you go

Mont Tourbillon, 55 Montée du Golf in Lac Beauport, is 15 minutes north of Quebec City via Highway 73 N and Exit 157.

Village Igloo, Mont Tourbillon, costs \$75 per person per night. Family rate is \$230 for a couple and two children. Group rates are available. Prices include use of polar blankets, sleeping bags, flashlight, candles, walkie-talkie and cultural orientation. Breakfast is included. Guest pick-up is available from the airport, Via Rail station or Old Quebec and costs \$35 for a round-trip. Season runs from Dec. 20 to March. Information: call (418) 648-8228, fax (418) 657-1766 or see www3.sympatico.ca/villageigloo

Mont Tourbillon offers two slides with lifts for snowtubing plus snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and other winter sport activities. A clubhouse has billiards and a restaurant offers a Sunday brunch. Call (418) 849-4418, fax (418) 849-0757, or see www.monttourbillon.com



Station Touristique Lac Beauport: the 45 businesses and institutions of this recreation area offer dogsledding, downhill skiing, snowmobiling and other winter sports as well as accommodation through their central office at 65 Chemin du Tour du Lac, Lac Beauport. Information: (418) 849-7141, fax (418) 849-0361 or www.lacbeauport.com

For more information: Quebec City and Area Tourism, (418) 641-6654, fax (418) 641-6578 or see www.regiondequebec.com/

(N)ice wedding

Nothing distinguishes a great wedding buffet like a good ice carving. So why not get married inside a giant ice sculpture? Quebec’s Ice Hotel is celebrating its fifth anniversary this winter in its biggest incarnation yet, including a snow-dome chapel with a 30-foot steeple. Organizers expect a record number of weddings at the ephemeral ice palace. Built entirely of ice and snow at the Duchesnay Tourism Station, a 22,000-acre park 30 minutes west of Quebec City, the hotel has had 220,000 visitors and 10,500 overnight guests since 2001. This winter’s structure will have 32 bedrooms and suites. Amenities include a nightclub, a movie theatre, indoor heated washrooms and outdoor hot tubs. At least 25 weddings are expected this season, compared with 18 last year, and the Ice Hotel will play host to its first gay wedding in February. A basic wedding package starts at \$1,088 (plus about \$585 in various fees), and it includes a civil ceremony, two meals and a night in a theme suite. Regular overnight rates start at \$438, including breakfast. Weather permitting, the hotel will be open from Jan. 7 to April 3. For reservations: (877) 505-0423 or www.icehotel-canada.com

Caribbean winter

The Grace Bay Club, a 21-suite Caribbean resort for couples on Providenciales, an island in the Turks and Caicos, has two packages in January that it says represent savings off regular rates. A three-night deal, the January Winter Special, with two three-course dinners for two, daily Continental breakfast and airport transfers, is \$1,700 a couple, a 35-per-cent savings. The January Blues plan provides a fifth night free, with one dinner included along with daily Continental breakfast and transfers. Rates under this plan start at \$705 a night per couple, tax extra. Good Jan. 2 to 31; call (800) 946-5757 or see www.gracebayclub.com.

Barge bargains

French Country Waterways, which will operate six hotel barges along waterways in Burgundy, Champagne, Alsace-Lorraine and the Upper Loire Valley next year, has \$600 discounts a couple for April departures and 50-per-cent discounts on certain Burgundy cruises for those celebrating their 50th birthdays next year. Also, couples celebrating an anniversary in multiples of five will get discounts on selected trips matching their anniversary (that is, five years, five per cent, and so on). Rates, with all meals but no air fare, are \$3,395 to \$4,995 a person, double, for six nights; (800) 222-1236 or www.fcwl.com

Cheap island hops

Island Air is taking 10 per cent off all fares on its Hawaiian inter-island flights when passengers book through the carrier’s new online reservations service, at www.islandair.com. Island Air, which uses 37-seat de Havilland Dash-8 aircraft, offers about 100 daily flights to

