

Provincial capital gets into festive spirit

Carnaval rocks Quebec City

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE FEBRUARY 1, 2013



The annual Carnaval de Québec is rocking the province's capital with a roster of winter activities, including dogsled racing.

Photograph by: Carnaval de Québec, The Gazette

Quebec's most famous festivities are in full swing.

The Carnaval de Québec will rock the province's capital until Feb. 17 with its thrilling roster of winter activities, such as ice sculptures, snow baths, dogsled rides, giant ice slides, zip-lining and the famed and treacherous canoe race that crosses the St. Lawrence River. There will be parades, a royal pageant with a queen and duchesses, dance parties in an Ice Palace and outdoor concerts on the Plains of Abraham. And there is a festive spirit in the air. Many people simply stroll along the four-century-old streets of Old Town or carouse along Grande Allée, Quebec City's strip of bars and bistros.

The city's first winter carnival took place in 1894, but the celebration was sporadic until 1955 when it became a formalized annual event. That's when mascot Bonhomme Carnaval made his inaugural appearance with his red tuque and a ceinture fléchée, both symbols of New France of the 1600s and 1700s.

With hundreds of thousands of people converging in Quebec City for Carnaval, getting a hotel room is a significant challenge. Here are some three-, four- and five-star choices:

The historic, five-star Fairmont Le Château Frontenac is as closely identified with Quebec City as landmarks such as La Citadelle, home of the Royal 22^{ème} Régiment (the famous Van Doos), and the provincial capital buildings, Hotel du Parlement. The Frontenac has an indoor pool, splendid views of the St. Lawrence River and a Carnival Package with a buffet breakfast and Effigy pass to all events (a \$15 p.p. value), starting at \$295 per night, for two, plus \$28-\$51 for children 6-18.

Loews Hôtel Le Concorde, just outside the historic St. Louis gates to Old Town, has a spectacular 360-degree view from l'Astral, its revolving top-floor dining room. The Carnaval buffet, \$59 on Saturday nights, today, Feb. 9 and 16, will be a gourmand's heaven with roast beef, seafood and stuffed quail. The terrific Loews Loves Kids program, year-round and all free, features books, games, toys, baby gear and a mini-gym, plus download cards for teens and X-Box and DVD libraries. Rooms start at \$119, Sun.-Thurs., or \$189 on Fri.-Sat.; Carnaval specials cost \$129-\$199 per night, for two, including Effigy passes and extras like VIP entry to the Maurice Night Club on Grande-Allée, a 15-per-cent discount at the hotel's restaurants and tickets to the Musée de la Civilisation or the Musée National des Beaux-Arts.

You can't get closer to the action than Le Grande-Allée Hôtel & Suites. A three-star member of the Quebec group Hôtellerie Champêtre, Le Grande-Allée has rooms that face the street with singular views of the Carnaval's parade Feb. 16. Parade day starts at \$249 for two, including a bottle of wine and a buffet breakfast. Other deals, Sun.-Thurs., until Feb. 17, add perks like shots of caribou and \$10-\$20 discounts on meals, shopping, a calèche ride and massages.

IF YOU GO:

Carnaval de Québec: 418-626-3716, www.carnaval.qc.ca.

Fairmont Le Château Frontenac: 800-441-1414, 866-540-4460, 418- 692-3861, www.fairmont.com/frontenac. Pet-friendly.

Loews Hôtel Le Concorde: 800-463-5256, 418- 647-2222, www.loewshotels.com/en/Quebec-City-Hotel. Pet-friendly.

Le Grande-Allée Hôtel & Suites: 800-263-1471, 418-647-4433, www.hotelsvieuxquebec.com.

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