

A Visit To The Ice Hotel

A hotel, constructed entirely from snow and ice, attracts thousands of guests and tourists each year.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of fairs and exhibits throughout the world featuring some really “cool” creations that attract ice lovers from far and wide. The most amazing of these are ice hotels—hotels made entirely of ice. Many find the very notion of an ice hotel mystifying. Who would actually want to stay in an ice hotel anyway, right? Well, read on to learn about some bona fide, functioning ice hotels and the fascinating way they are built.



Rachel March

An ice hotel is a hotel constructed entirely out of ice. That includes the walls, the ceilings, the foundation, as well as all the furniture—ranging from tables and chairs to beds. Even the light fixtures, mugs, and all the ornately carved moldings are made out of frozen H₂O.

Ice hotels are built in suitably frosty regions where temperatures typically hover in the below-zero range for months at a time. They invariably attract thousands of guests who relish the opportunity of “chilling out” in a really “cool” environment for a night or two. As one would expect, there is only a small window of opportunity to experience such a stay because these glacial lodges disappear as soon as the weather turns fair. But, not to worry, come next winter these frosty accommodations will be restored in their full splendor.



A magnificent wall in the hotel.



Yes, we accept MasterCard. (This is actually an advertisement for MasterCard outside the hotel.)

Ice hotels can be found in Canada, Finland, Romania, Japan, Norway (which boasts three) and Sweden. In this article we will visit the ice hotel in Sweden, which was the first one in history (well, barring igloos).

The first ice hotel actually came about as an afterthought, but it launched a new concept in architecture and tourism. Officially named ICEHOTEL, it is situated in the village of Jukkasjarvi in the province of Kiruna, and is about 90 miles (145 km) from the North Pole. This edifice was first built during the international ice art exhibition of 1989, which took place in that town.

The ice exhibition was an international affair that featured an impressive array of sculptures and structures of all sizes and attracted thousands of artists and ice aficionados. The size of the crowds attending the event exceeded all expectations, and accommodations were woefully inadequate, leaving many people literally out in the cold. Then, someone came up with the idea of allowing guests to take shelter in one of the ice structures. Apparently, the guests really enjoyed the cool experience in the makeshift ice hotel. So much so that one innovative guest decided to make something significant out of it and came up with the idea of the ice hotel—which other people could also enjoy.

The ICEHOTEL was erected on the banks of the Torne River, which boasts more than an adequate supply of ice. The hotel has over 80 rooms, besides the huge lobby, the ballrooms, restaurants and other amenities found in any other hotel. Its doors open in December and stay open until April, when the structure disintegrates.

Interestingly, the hoteliers regard the very fleetingness of the hotel as an advantage. They get to rebuild a new one each year in a fresh style and with different furnishings. Moreover, it makes people want to return year after year if only to “chill” in the newest groundbreaking (or is it ice-breaking?) structure.

Jukkasjarvi features something only found in some locations near the North Pole.



A cup of hot coffee in the elegant restaurant inside the ice hotel.



A ballroom in the hotel with a chandelier made of ice.



Beautiful furniture created from ice.



A comfortable armchair in the hotel.

During its long, harsh winter, it has 23 hours of darkness a day, with the sun coming up for an hour or less. The village itself is nondescript, and few people would have heard about it if not for the ice hotel.

During the spring and summer months, the village’s economy is sluggish. However, come autumn, crews of ice engineers and laborers descend on the town to begin the painstaking construction of the new hotel, replete with magnificent furniture, sculptures and a host of icy knick-knacks. The work needs to be finished in less than two months so that it can accommodate the cold-loving guests while the winter lasts. When the hotel opens its doors, it is flooded (figuratively, of course—the ice is solid) with excited tourists eager to get a glimpse of the one-of-a-kind hotel. The lucky occupants enjoy all the amenities of a typical five-star hotel—except there is no thermostat in the room.

And there will be plenty of lucky occupants. Annually, the hotel hosts approximately 60,000 guests before it closes in mid-April.

Every winter, the Torne River freezes over, forming a thick layer—over three feet—of compact, crystal-clear ice. The ice is

harvested and used to make sculptures and furniture for the ICEHOTEL.

During the coldest weeks of winter, huge tractors set out for the river and cut deep grooves in the ice to form ice bricks. The ice on the river surface is so strong that it will not splinter when cut with an electric saw. The ice bricks are then loaded onto flatbeds and transported to a large warehouse where they are stored until the next winter. Then, they will be utilized to build a new ice hotel. The warehouse is actually a gigantic freezer capable of storing and preserving 4,000 tons of ice at any given time.

Like other regions near the North Pole, summers are very short in Jukkasjarvi, lasting only a couple of weeks. In those weeks, the frozen Torne River is transformed into a flowing, rushing torrent of water. Several kinds of fish take up habitation in the river, and lush vegetation begins growing on the riverbanks. The summer weeks are very busy for the residents of the village, as they go about fishing and gathering vegetation. They make the most of these activities that are impossible to do in the long freezing winters.

The summer season is also the time when Ake Larsson, chief architect of the hotel, and Arne Bergh, the artistic director, design the structure. Artists from all over the world vie