

PAUSE



PLAY



QUEBEC IN WINTER

# Pause & Play

When the mercury drops, the fun kicks up a gear, finds Tom Irwin



**W**inters in Quebec can be mighty chilly, with temperatures dropping to -10C and below, but there are some extremely good reasons for braving the cold and visiting during the winter months.

Montreal and Quebec City, the two largest cities in the state, are very different – Montreal is a brash, bustling metropolis, while Quebec City is much more laid-back and oozes history, proud of its status as one of the oldest European settlements in North America.

The areas around both cities are outstandingly beautiful at any time of the year, but in winter the countryside has a still, otherworldly feel to it, with the landscape coated in deep, crisp snow and dotted with balsam fir and white birch trees.

But just because it's a bit nippy doesn't mean the whole place stops as it would in the UK – there's absolutely loads to keep your customers occupied, both inside and out, whether they want to take it easy or really ramp up the excitement.



**LEFT:**  
Schwartz's deli

**BELOW LEFT:**  
Parc Omega



**The areas around Montreal and Quebec are beautiful any time of the year, but in winter they have an otherworldly feel**

## ► MONTREAL: THE FRENCH CONNECTION

The mix of French and English influence that makes Quebec a truly unique place to visit is nowhere more noticeable than in Montreal, the largest city in the region.

**PAUSE:** Foodies will love Montreal.

There's a multitude of restaurants, but recommend Le Bistrot Fabrique, a trendy venue between the Latin Quarter and the Plateau that does a mean salmon tartar with homemade chips cooked in duck fat.

You'll be spoilt for choice for places to eat famous Quebecois dish poutine (french fries with cheese curds and gravy), but try the BH Poutine at Beaver Hall for an unusual (though heavy) brunch take on a classic.

Lower down the price scale, but a must-see, is the Montreal landmark Schwartz's. Claiming to be the oldest deli in Canada, it has been serving hot meat sandwiches to hungry locals and tourists for more than 80 years.

**PLAY:** In February and March, Montreal plays host to one of the largest winter festivals in the world, Montréal en Lumière, combining performing arts, gastronomic highlights and free outdoor family activities. The festival culminates in Nuit Blanche, when pretty much every tourist site, concert venue, restaurant and bar will have some kind of event going on, with partying continuing well into the wee hours.

## ► MONTEBELLO: WILD ENCOUNTERS

Montebello is most famous for the Fairmont Montebello hotel, the largest log structure in the world, but



## HOW TO SELL

Quebec is unmissable in winter, but it really does get very cold – even the iciest night in the UK is no preparation for the Canadian chill. The key is to make sure clients are properly prepared – advise them to invest in good thermals, sturdy footwear and a warm hat and gloves, and to dress in several layers.





**RIGHT:**  
Heli-Tremblant

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Huron-Wendat  
Museum,  
Wendake

**BELOW:**  
Rafting in  
Valcartier



**Prestige Holidays** offers a multi-centre in November from £1,540, including Air Canada flights to Montreal, three nights each at Chateau Versailles, Montreal; Residence Inn by Marriott, Mont Tremblant; and Chateau Laurier, Quebec City; with private transfers and Via Rail from Montreal to Quebec City. [prestigeholidays.co.uk](http://prestigeholidays.co.uk)

**Explore** offers an eight-day Family Canadian Winter Adventure from £1,969 including flights. The tour visits Montreal, Montebello and Ottawa, and includes ice skating on the Rideau Canal. Accommodation is in hotels and cabins. [explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk)

➔ there's plenty to keep visitors occupied wherever they're staying.

**PAUSE:** Do your clients like cheese? What about chocolate? If the answer to these questions is a resounding 'yes!' (and really, how could it not be?) there are a couple of places in Montebello that they'd be mad not to visit. At Fromagerie Montebello you can try out the cheeses on offer to decide which one to take away and scoff later, while Chocomotive offers the sweet-of-tooth a vast array of delicious chocolates and other local products.

**PLAY:** Canada is well-known worldwide for its unique animal life, and you can cross most of them off your must-see list at Parc Omega, just north of Montebello. Some of the creatures you can get up close and personal with are moose, wolves, bears and bison – it's a fantastic way to see the wildlife of this enormous country in one fell swoop.



**Strolling between pools in a dressing gown while snow gently drifts down around you is a surreal but magical experience**

## ► MONT TREMBLANT: MUSH OR MOOCH

Mont Tremblant is a ski resort and holiday destination in the Laurentian mountains, about 80 miles northwest of Montreal.

**PAUSE:** An outside spa might not be the most obvious place to go when it's 10 below zero, but a couple of hours at Scandinave Spa Mont-Tremblant is surprisingly relaxing; strolling between water pools in a dressing gown and slippers while snow gently drifts down

around you is a surreal but magical experience.

The hydrotherapy technique applied here operates on a warm-refresh-relax cycle. First, you heat up in a warm pool or sauna, then dunk yourself briefly in one of several cold-water pools (the bravest can even submerge themselves in the Diable river, which runs through the spa) to close the pores, then relax at regular indoor temperature, before repeating the process. It might sound odd, but you come out feeling fantastic – and there's nothing to stop you enjoying the last half hour just soaking up the warmth in the hot baths.

Alternatively, for something extra special that doesn't involve dunking yourself in a freezing river, clients can book a helicopter ride with Heli-Tremblant for a different perspective on the region (from £120 for 10 minutes).

**PLAY:** Active clients will love Mont Tremblant during winter. Beyond ➔







## DALMATIAN COAST LUXURY YACHT CRUISES

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## DESTINATIONS

→ the slopes, cross-country skiing, snowmobile tours and the wonderful moonlit Snowshoe and Fondue tour (available locally December to March, from £53) are just some examples of the snow-based fun available.

An experience that's often high on people's bucket lists is dog-sledding – and it doesn't disappoint. Thundering through the forest along the narrow tracks at the Kanatha-Aki Nature Center is a wild ride from start to finish, whether you're helping to drive from the back or are closer to the ground as a passenger.

### ► QUEBEC CITY: HISTORY WITH HEART

Situated by the Saint Lawrence river, Quebec City is one of North America's oldest and most interesting settlements, and its picturesque Old Town is a Unesco World Heritage Site.

**PAUSE:** Get a taste of aboriginal history – in more ways than one – with a visit to the Hôtel Musée Premières Nations in Wendake, in the northwest of Quebec City. A hotel, restaurant and museum all in one, features include an

impressive full-scale traditional wooden longhouse and a museum with exhibits explaining the culture and history of the Wendat people.

The complex also contains the excellent La Traite restaurant, which fuses aboriginal cuisine with French Canadian fare. I had the duck confit with lingonberry chutney – don't miss it!

**PLAY:** A visit to La Forêt Montmorency, 45 minutes north of Quebec City, is like being transported into another world. The largest teaching and resort forest in the world, it's open for multiple winter activities including skishoeing – a skiing/snowshoeing hybrid that involves walking up slopes and sliding down them. The beginning of our trip took us across a frozen lake, the only noise coming from our feet as we slid through the snow – a truly breath-taking experience.

For something that's moving in an entirely different way, try snowtubing at Villages Vacances Valcartier – jump in an inflatable ring and chuck yourself down the slopes for yet another experience you won't find at home. **TW**

## ✓ Tried & Tested

### FAIRMONT LE CHATEAU MONTEBELLO

Described as 'the largest log cabin in the world', the Fairmont Montebello is unique even in the world of luxury hotels. Stepping inside, the lounge area centres on a 360-degree fireplace, topped by a magnificent high ceiling criss-crossed with sturdy wooden beams. The vibe is rustic, comfortable and elegant, creating a homely mood that is well-executed considering the size of the 211-room hotel. The Montebello boasts a fine-dining restaurant, large pool and a luxurious spa, but more surprising is the full-sized curling rink, which few hotels could claim to offer. Other winter activities include dog-sledding, snow-shoeing,



cross-country skiing, ice fishing and more – as long as you've brought your thermals there's loads to do, and you can't beat the feeling of coming in from the cold to warm up with a hot drink. **Book it:** From £142 per night. [fairmont.com/montebello](http://fairmont.com/montebello)