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Quebec Winter Carnival – a winter wonderland

February is the month of winter carnivals in Canada. Nearly every one of Canada's ten provinces holds some kind of mid-winter celebration but by far the liveliest and most famous is the Quebec Winter Carnival held in the old French Canadian city of Quebec during the two weeks preceding Lent. Although winter is at its chilliest at this time of year, thousands of visitors from miles around, augmented by thousands more from the United States and even from as far away as Europe, converge on the city by air, railroad, bus or car to help the nearly 500,000 men, women and children of Quebec celebrate their festive fortnight. The Quebec Winter Carnival, which was first held in 1955, has grown in such magnitude and repute that it is now claimed to be one of the biggest and best in the world.



Bonhomme Carnaval, ruler of Quebec's carnival.

It begins with the arrival of "Bonhomme Carnaval", the talking snowman, a jovial seven-foot giant dressed in a white suit with an arrowed sash and a bright red tuque, who rules over the merry-making with a carnival queen

and a court of seven duchesses, chosen from among the city's most beautiful young women.

A huge procession headed by Bonhomme Carnaval and his court and followed by a succession of colourful floats, marching bands and clowns, makes its merry way laughing and singing along the snow-covered streets of the city towards a huge ice palace built with blocks of ice cut from the frozen river. This will be the residence of Bonhomme Carnaval during the weeks of the festivities.

Along the way are many other glittering ice-monuments specially erected for the occasion, surrounded by dancing spectators. As the spirit of carnival grips everyone, people lock arms with friends and strangers alike enjoying both planned and spontaneous fun. A reception follows, attended by provincial and city officials, and then the sympathetic Bonhomme Carnaval reigns supreme.

Sports events

From that moment on, day and night, a continuing round of events resounds through Canada's oldest city. It is physically impossible to see them all. Besides several daytime and night parades, there are balls, concerts, street dances and fireworks displays. And there are the sports events – the skiing and ice-skating contests, motorcycle and car races on ice, snowmobile races, a curling bonspiel, an international "Pee-Wee" hockey tournament which includes up to 100 teams of players aged 12 or under, snowshoe races and a two-mile canoe race across the ice-choked St. Lawrence River, just below the walls of the city. Hundreds of thousands of shouting spectators line both shores to watch crews in specially-designed canoes row against the tide and current, dragging their craft up and over ice floes and plunging again in the icy water.

Snow sculpture

For the more culturally minded there's the international championship of snow