

# Norway's Unique Snowhotel

By Kathy Chin Leong



Welcome to Motel Meat Locker, otherwise known as the Snowhotel of Kirkenes, Norway. Here, up beyond the Arctic Circle, for approximately \$310 per person per night, you too can turn into a human popsicle.

The concept is simple. Every season, from December to April, the Snowhotel operates 25 themed, meltable rooms that can accommodate up to 65 lodgers. In early December, professional snow artists breeze in from Harbin, China for 10 days to create the temporary structure completely made of 15 tons of snow and ice they have coined, “snice.”

To build this single story structure, a huge balloon is blown up and covered with snice. After it solidifies, the balloon is removed. The Chinese artists go to work, creating a single hallway with 12 rooms on one side and 13 on the other. This year, the staff picked their favorite theme rooms from the past decade, and the walls are carved and shaped with 3-D precision.

If you go by April, you can sleep under the playful eye of Marilyn Monroe wearing her signature white dress flaring up in the wind. Fans of the movie *Frozen* can book the *Frozen* room featuring an ice sculpture of the snowman Olaf along with the sisters Elsa and Anna carved

on the wall. Other themes include the Taj Mahal, Santa Claus, and of course, a Viking.

What everyone asks is, “Are the beds really made of ice?” Actually, no. Thankfully, beds are comprised of foam mattresses on a wood slat frame with short legs. The headboard and footboard are shaped with sculpted ice to create the illusion that the bed is also made of the frozen stuff.



Ceilings are about 10 feet tall and the walls are rounded and up to 27 inches thick. For this one night, you are living inside a high-end igloo. It's just you, the walls and the bed. No side tables, no closets. You enter your room through a short curtain. At the end of the corridor is a solid door made of metal. Behind this door you are home free because this is the entrance to a deliciously warm building. This is where you can leave

your belongings in the hotel's storage closet. An up-to-date bathroom, tile showers and clean sauna are among the saving grace amenities.

Everyone receives a special mummy bag rated at -22 degrees Fahrenheit, a sheet to slip inside the bed for sanitary reasons and a pair of thick socks. Anna, one of the guides, instructs participants to wear just one layer of long underwear but this untrusting writer chooses to go the Michelin Man route by donning four stacks of winter garb including a thick coat.

By midnight, people figure out it's time to do the inevitable—try to go to sleep. You first must make sure you have used the toilet and relieved yourself of all liquids. Then, you wriggle yourself with gloved hands into your sheet and sleeping bag combination and pull the top over your head, which of course, is already covered with a knit cap. Note that the temperature is about 25 F degrees so breathing in cold air all night may be difficult.

After all are bedded, it's eerily silent inside this tombed residence. If you do have to get up, you may pass another bundled sojourner in the hallway who has also come back from a bathroom break. For folks who cannot handle the cold or feel claustrophobic, they can go up to the adjacent warm building and ride out the night in the lodge's sitting room, resting on one of the couches. This writer managed to survive the night but slept little. Others slept well.

The once-in-a-lifetime Snowhotel adventure is exactly that, an adventure. While it may not be for everyone, all who have survived the night admit they will never find another hotel as cool as this one.

*Snowhotel*

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