



Ice Villages in Canada



## The Wonderful, Colourful World of Ice Huts

photography by Richard Johnson  
[www.icehut.ca](http://www.icehut.ca)  
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Individual Ice Huts





Ice Huts from Quebec, Canada



written by Debra Usher

Something indefinable seems to drive Canadians out of doors. Even under extreme conditions. The ice fishing hut (also known as the ice shack, fishing shanty or bobhouse, among other colloquial names) is tangible proof of this phenomenon. Perhaps the enduring tradition of venturing out into the cold of a northern winter is ultimately about 'getting away' and 'escaping' our modern world. After all, in many ways ice fishing huts are akin to 'tree forts for grown-ups.'

Especially in northern communities, ice huts belong to a rich and amusing cultural folklore. Much of the storytelling centers upon the inherent danger (or thrill) of erecting a structure atop frozen water – a fickle mistress. It is a common adage that every Canadian lake has at least one bobhouse at its bottom (and at least one snowmobile, too!). Many of the adventuresome and dare devilish fishermen playfully decorate their shanties in audacious, distinctive and humorous ways.

Nonetheless, like its distant cousins – the native teepee and the igloo – the ice fishing hut has its own practical purpose. Designed for the function of providing fishermen with a place to sleep and protection from the winter weather, ice huts were invented to prevent anglers from having to walk, row or sail back and forth from their homes each day. Fundamentally, therefore, they must be weather resistant and transportable, giving basic shelter and access to the ground beneath them.

As varied as the individuals who build and occupy them, ice fishing huts range from the collapsible draped tarp over two-by-fours, all the way to small cabins comfortably equipped with heating, electricity and cooking facilities. Whatever its form, once a hut is in place, an ice axe, saw, auger or chisel is used to create a small hole into which fishing lines



Ice Huts from Manitoba

or spears are plunged. Different fish are active at different times of day, so anglers must fish for them accordingly; however, these remarkable villages are typically most active around dusk and dawn.

Photographer Richard Johnson has spent the past six years traveling across Canada, comparing the similarities and the differences of ice fishing architecture between provinces. These provisional shelters offer Richard a fascinating and colourful glimpse into the Canadian culture of ice fishing. Existing in a variety of shapes, sizes and materials – including faux wood paneling, sheet metal, tarpaulins, peak roofs and even modified camping trailers – ice fishing huts challenge and inspire us to imagine the infinite forms these unique structures may take.

In 2010, Richard encountered hundreds of huts grouped together in northern Quebec and Manitoba. This series, entitled Ice Villages, consists of wide panoramic photographs that integrate the structures amidst their characteristic landscapes. Hockey rinks for the children, restaurants, and even the hydro poles that illuminate these villages at night bear witness to the vitality of these transitory seasonal communities.

Richard's latest series Ice Huts Storm concentrates on a small community in northern New Brunswick on Chaleur Bay. Colourful shapes poke out from a seamless background, lost in a landscape of driving snow. Birds hover overhead waiting for fishermen's scraps. Tarpaulin enclosures flap like weathered flags in the relentless wind. Milky atmospheres of rain, fog, frost and snow convey the variety of natural conditions the ice fishing huts protect against.

Through his photography, Richard Johnson is documenting for future generations of Canadians a spectacular record of this inspiring and idiosyncratic architectural form. Now with over 650 individual huts preserved in his collection, Richard has taken up the torch as a storyteller, spreading the folklore of Canadian ice fishing huts around the world.

Explore more of Richard Johnson's ice fishing huts at [www.icehuts.ca](http://www.icehuts.ca)



Individual Ice Huts in assorted shapes and sizes



Ice Huts from Prince Edward Island, Canada

Ice Huts from Saskatchewan, Canada



Quebec Ice Village



British Columbia Ice Village



Ontario Ice Village