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A snowmobiling adventure in Charlevoix, Quebec: Part 1

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31 January 2012



Canadian writer Karen Briggs had never been on a snowmobile — until she got the chance to travel to a snowmobilers' paradise in Charlevoix, Quebec. In Part 1, she discovers snowmobiles are not as nimble as cats.

STORY BY:

KAREN BRIGGS

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My dinner companions eyed me sceptically. “You’ve NEVER been on a snowmobile?” they asked. Phrased like that, it did suddenly feel as if I was a very feeble excuse for a Canadian.

I’ve pursued all sorts of winter activities over the years with mixed success. I’m a passable downhill skier, an enthusiastic snow-shoer and a somewhat wobbly skater who doggedly traversed Ottawa’s iconic frozen highway, the Rideau Canal, a few years ago during *Winterlude*, just to say I’d done so. (Okay, the beavertails were also some incentive.)

I do my best to embrace winter, but snowmobiling, I had to admit, had eluded me. That all changed when I traveled to the wild, wintry, spectacular *Charlevoix region of Quebec*, two hours northeast of Quebec City.

With the St. Lawrence Seaway, roiling with ice, on one wide, and the snow draped Laurentian mountains on the other, it’s little wonder Charlevoix attracts snowmobilers from across North America every year. The views are nothing short of stunning, and the snow itself is deep and crisp: the region enjoys average snowfalls in excess of 600 cm a

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year.

Hundred of kilometres of groomed trails criss-cross the region, many of them well-marked and maintained strictly for snowmobile traffic in the winter months. For those who hanker to cover hundreds of kilometres per day with their machines, Charlevoix offers unparalleled opportunities and vistas.

I was the lone female in a group of hardcore sled riders who, despite their extensive experience, had opted to hire a guide for our three-day journey into the sparsely populated and rugged terrain inland of the St. Lawrence Seaway. That I started out as a passenger turned out to be a good call – for although snowmobiles are simple to operate, they're less easy to operate with skill, and my companions were determined to cover a lot of ground on our first afternoon.



Turns out, snowmobiles are not the nimble creatures you see in the Arctic Cat commercials. They routinely get stuck in deep snow, and when they do, they wallow like landlocked walruses — and you may find yourself floundering ungracefully in a snowbank too. But if you're wisely attired in multiple waterproof layers, there's generally no harm involved. This is why the buddy system is important out on the trail: you never know when you're going to need a little help getting dug out.

With so many trails to choose from, you can select to stay on level ground or tackle some of the more technical trails, which ascend into the mountains

and offer, on a clear day, some magnificent views of valleys, forests, and lakes.

Our first visit to a mountaintop scenic lookout was a bust, as a snowstorm swiftly moved in and obscured the entire valley in a dense, impenetrable blanket. Shortly thereafter, the wind kicked up, making visibility even on the level stretches a serious challenge. That was when our Canadian spidey-sense was all telling us that we were experiencing something close to a blizzard and that it was time to call it a day!

Read [Snowmobiling in Charlevoix, Quebec, Part 2](#) for the rest of the story.

If you go: There are several hotels and independent outfitters who will rent snowmobiles and gear, including helmets and boots, to newbies or those who prefer not to haul their own equipment to Charlevoix. Guides are also available and are recommended for novice riders and those without an excellent sense of direction – there are a LOT of trails! — though experienced ones may prefer to trail blaze with the help of the region's excellent trail maps.

Visit [Tourisme Charlevoix](#) for information on Charlevoix region. [Quebec City](#), your gateway to the region, is easily reached by car, train or plane.

KAREN BRIGGS



With four horses at home, Karen Briggs doesn't get to travel as much as she'd like to, but when she does, she makes every second count! Based near Toronto, and of South African and Maritime Canadian parentage, she has seen her share of airports and likes to veer off the beaten track. She writes about horses and equestrian sport, agriculture and science ... and finds that exploring the world on horseback is especially apropos.

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