

Title:

The World's Coolest FranchIce

Word Count:

723

Summary:

The famous IceHotel in northern Sweden has begun to export the unique experience of its IceBar to some of the world's more stylish cities, and that's brought it to London.

Keywords:

Ice Hotel, Ice Bar, Ice Bar London, London nightlife, London pubs, London sightseeing, Absolut, Cyberiter

Article Body:

Samuel Johnson said it almost 300 years ago, and I still believe it today ...

"If you're tired of London, you're tired of life."

I enjoy many locations around the world, but none so much as London. It's the center of civilization, as far as I'm concerned. If something is 'happening' there, then it's worth taking note.

That's why I was quite impressed to see the IceBar had set up shop on Heddon Street.

You don't need to have a taste for vodka in all its forms, but it helps. That's not only because Absolut is the financial power behind this motif, but because there is a historically-established reason why cultures from cold climates got this creative with a potato. Not only does it 'warm' a soul from the inside, but in the realm of Absolut, it comes in more guises than you've got time to try in a 30-minute session. That happens to be a customer's time limit in the IceBar, which also limits the number of icebarfights on record.

This is a spinoff of the famous IceHotel in the Swedish arctic zone. If you like to travel, then this is a required destination. It's only a 90-minute flight from Stockholm to Kiruna, where you've got a choice of snowmobile or dogsled (hint: take the sled) to complete your journey to the icy climes of Jukkasjaervi in Sweden's portion of Lappland. It's situated along the banks of the Torne River, widely acclaimed as being the source of the purest water in Europe, if

not the world.

I think this is one of the most spectacular scenes in existence. Everything is constructed of pure ice, from the chambers to the furniture to the decor (world-class sculptures from global artists are commissioned to create them each season) to the glassware. The all-ice wedding chapel is booked far in advance and the theater stages world-class productions.

The beds do make the concession of thermal sleeping bags, which are amazingly comfortable, but even if you do get a bit chilled here, I guarantee you'll be convinced it was worth it. I cannot think of a more majestic locale to view the Northern Lights flashing across the cold, crisp sky, bathing the ice in a blue-green glow that melds Nature's wonder with that of man's. The IceHotel is breathtaking in every sense of the word. It's an experience which will be etched into your memory forever.

Thus, it wasn't a surprise to me when, during a trip to Stockholm a couple of years ago, I checked into the Nordic Sea hotel and noticed a scaled-down replica of the IceBar adjacent to the lobby. I loathe queues, so fortunately, I was there on a quiet night and there was no 30-minute limit in effect. I donned the thermal cloak and gloves they provide, ordered an Absolut citron and proceeded to mingle in search of someone to share a toast of 'Skol!'. Trust me, it wasn't hard to do!

Its presence was such a 'natural' in Stockholm that I've thought more than once since then that the IceBar meets the criteria for being a fixture in that center of chic that is London. And now it's happened.

The £12 cover is reasonable, the drinks are Absolut, the sculptures and decor are changed periodically --- the cumulative body heat does cause melting over time, so re-building is a necessity --- and the atmosphere is the only thing that is always warm. After all, who's going to pay for a 30-minute stay, garbed in silver thermals, and not be in a festive mood? It's a perfect addition to any festive itinerary.

In chatting with the lovely blonde svensk flicka tending bar that evening, I discovered that Absolut is so pleased with the IceBar concept that they're deploying them elsewhere. Besides Stockholm, they opened a franchise (I couldn't resist the pun) in Milan before venturing into London. That makes sense. Stockholm's ambience is quite-stylish and Milan's is lively-stylish. If the IceBar succeeds in those cities, then it's ready to move up to a London setting.

It succeeds spectacularly. After one visit, and 30 minutes of Absolut, you may

just reach for the cellphone and book reservations for the IceHotel, then and there.

If so, you'll join a growing list of those who have found that drinks in your ice can be more fun than ice in your drinks.