If we haven’t met, maybe you don’t know this: I sign a lot of waivers. Like, a lot. It’s sort of a joke among my really awesome friends that whenever we hang out, you’ll have to sign a waiver. [Befriend at your own risk – don’t say I didn’t warn you!] I’m not particularly dangerous to be around if that’s what you’re thinking, though I do tend to cause paralyzing fits of laughter and possess a rather eardrum-piercing laugh. The real risk comes with my inclination towards trying out new, potentially fatal activities and recruiting my friends to join me. They really are very tolerant and just THE BEST.

So of course while planning my recent trip to CANADA in the WINTER I thought, “There’s got to be some borderline life-threatening activities to be found in the arctic wilderness!” And I was right. Canada never lets me down, Justin Bieber aside.

Photo courtesy of Marc Tremblay, hanging over the edge for the sake of one bitchin’ photo.
ICE CANYONING IN QUÉBEC

So... “canyoning” is a thing. Did y’all know this? If you did it’s most likely because you’re Canadian and I dig that because so are many of my favorite people: Martin Short, Drake, Dan Aykroyd, Bryan Adams, and Mike Myers. Although, my condolences on that whole Nickelback thing. That’s just unfortunate.

Canyoning is traveling through rock canyons via waterfalls, hiking, swimming, rappelling, and whatever else the Québécois can think up. And these are the people who invented poutine so I think their ingenuity goes without saying. Ice canyoning is basically the same but with some killer footwear. Oh, and it’s really, really cold.

Our trek at the foot of Mont-Sainte-Anne involved:

- Rappelling down three waterfalls of various heights, the tallest, Jean-Larose Falls, being 42 meters to the bottom – that’s French for 138 feet
- Climbing 400 wooden steps back up to the top
- A scenic hike through the snow-covered forest
- Crossing a river on some wooden planks - I think we can all agree this was the scariest part.
- And, according to our guide, the most dangerous activity of the day: crossing the highway
Somebody’s gotta be the first to fall down.

CANYONING-QUÉBEC

I came across Canyoning-Québec during a last minute search for activities through QuebecRegion.com, my go-to site for all things Québécois. I scrolled through the page of death-defying activities available (knocking it outta the park on that one, Canada!) and immediately stopped at Ice Canyoning. What the hell is ice canyoning? I DON’T KNOW but when I found out it involved suspending myself from a frozen waterfall by a piece of string, I was sold.
With just a couple of days until our trip, I sent out a text tornado to the other five people I would be traveling with and all of my amazingly open-minded friends were in! I promptly emailed Canyoning-Québec, crossing my fingers there would be an opening.

There was no opening. I was destined to spend the whole weekend waist deep in poutine with the dog that lives in my hotel lobby.
UNTIL!

The next morning Marc Tremblay, owner/guide/geologist/badass called to tell me he would make it happen for us. I couldn't believe how accommodating they were for the six of us at the last minute but we were psyched. Now gimme that waiver!

We were going ice canyoning…. whatever that is!

WHO IS ICE CANYONING FOR?

One rule of thumb I have when choosing adventure activities: If you can find photos of children completing the activity, YOU'RE DOING THE DAMN ACTIVITY. Ice canyoning was no exception. No special skills are required (thank you, gravity), the equipment is provided, and you’re led by guides I would trust with my life. Literally since.. well, ya know, the cliff/piece of string thing…

If you fall into any of the following categories, ice canyoning is for YOU so stop whining and harness up!
• **Beginners** – because you just learned that “ice canyoning” is a thing.
• **People who love winter** – because you probably haven’t tried ice canyoning and it fits perfectly between ski weekends and ice fishing or whatever it is you people who love winter do.
• **People who hate winter** – Maybe all you need is to embrace winter and find something you love that involves ice and snow because no matter how hard you pray to Mama Nature, winter isn’t going anywhere. And no one has tried harder to make that happen than me.
• **Adventure seekers** – because it does involve hanging backwards off the side of a 138' frozen waterfall by a thin, bouncy rope. Just because this is for beginners doesn’t mean it’s completely without thrill, y’all. Like the first time you flew in a airplane or that time you ripped the tag off your mattress.
• **Bears** – They’re probably really good at this – let’s wake ’em up.

**WHY YOU SHOULD BE ALL UP IN THIS**

**THE CHALLENGE**

I’m sure your life is challenging enough as it is – managing the work/social life balance, staying awake, something having to do with kids, remembering to floss, not punching people at work – but what is life without challenges? BORING! That’s what. It’s easy and it’s boring and there is no risk of gum disease!

• **Learning a new skill** – I don’t know about you, but I don’t know anyone to whom rappelling is an everyday activity. Scratch that. I know one but he’s in the military and that doesn’t count because they KNOW HOW TO DO EVERYTHING!
• **Staying warm** – Think you can do it? Maybe the ever present threat of frostbite to your extremities will help push you to become the ice canyoner you were meant to be.
• **Ice climbing** – Marc threw in an even bigger challenge for me, ice climbing. Because getting safely down a mountain wasn’t challenging enough, I had to try to get back up with just some ice picks and my toe spikes. I don’t like to brag, but yeah, I made it like three feet up on only 45 tries.

• **Style** – There’s a right way and a wrong way to ice canyon. The right way involves proper body form, feet positioning, and the ability to listen to instructions. The wrong way looks like this:

![Image of ice climber](image1.jpg)

WHAT AM I DOING? Ahem, I mean… Does this harness turn you on? Ice canyoning is SEXY! I hope you know that five hours later I finally figured it out. Sorry to disappoint those of you who find my ice canyoning form irresistible.

• The climb – Don’t forget about the trip back up. Nothin’ like a climb up 400+ steps to get the blood pumpin’ in the ice forest!
I love a good hike through some forested mountains; it's my happy place. That, and a really good mosh pit. But this is my first time entering the forest in the winter of my own volition. Like, nobody's life depended on it. THANK GOD because three feet in 45 tries is actually not as phenomenal as it sounds. I'm more of a middle-of-June-at-high-noon kind of hiker. We walked through the woods along frozen streams and over beams. I like to rhyme, all the time. I'm such a good writer.

We could see for miles through the trees, the snowy Canadian landscape, the mountains, and just exactly how far we would fall if we weren't wearing such sexy harnesses. #waivers

We saw frozen waterfalls, silent and sparkling on top but with water still roaring underneath – like that friendly smile I flash every time someone mentions the weather to me at work and all I want to do is flip my desk over and throw highlighters. STOP
The waterfall’s spray is the first to freeze and grows over time, creating an ice tube around the flowing water. This was a first for me. I prefer my water hot, nay, \textit{geothermal}.

My favorite view was after going over the edge of the last and tallest waterfall. Seeing your friends so tiny, you really get a sense of \textit{WHAT IN THE NAME OF GOD HAVE I SIGNED UP FOR!} Rappelling down this waterfall you look to the right and there’s the water, rushing down the mountain just a few feet from your face. You half think to yourself, “Holy shit, I’ve got to get down this thing.” But the other half just wants to stop, turn around, take it all in, chill in the harness and think about how sexy you are right now.

\textbf{THE GUIDES}

How lucky we were to have Marc and Jeff as our guides for the day. Marc knows everything there is to know about mountains, ice, ropes, crampons, bears, sub-zero temperatures, taking badass selfies, and where to get the best chicken. Jeff is absolutely fearless and one of the friendliest people I’ve ever met on the road. His English is fantastic!

Marc, teaching us about ice fingers.
Jeff – ice canyoning madman
Just Marc taking selfies next to the waterfall, totes normal
I went into this thinking we’d head to the falls, rappel down, bada bing, bada boom, I’m
too sexy for this harness, let’s go home. We got so much more than we bargained for.
The earth science nerd I am loved learning all we did about the Canadian wilderness
and Marc even put my crampons on for me, Cinderella style.

If the crampon fits…

THE EQUIPMENT
Did you not see the “ice canyoning is sexy” photo? Anytime you have to sign a waiver
before being strapped into a harness, it’s going to be a good day. Also, crampons are
my new favorite accessory. I was sad to see them go. Obviously I need to practice
walking more.
Did somebody order a JLo booty?

SHOTS SHOTS SHOTS!
After Jeff, the six of us, and finally Marc descended the frozen waterfall, Marc did the best thing anyone can ever do – he passed out shots. This wasn’t any old toast, y’all. This was PIPING HOT CHICKEN BROTH business and it was the best toast of my life. Atop a snow covered Canadian mountain, with my husband and 4 friends, one or two of whom I just recently met who now know what they’re in for with me, having just rappelled down a 138’ frozen waterfall by a string of dental floss. Just when I thought I probably should have worn more than one thin pair of leopard print socks or some legit winter gloves, I’m handed a cup of the hottest beverage I’ve ever handled.

So my fave new shot is chicken broth. But don’t tell my peeps on the street, I’ve got a reputation to maintain here.

THE LIFE-GIVING MEAL JUST DOWN THE STREET
So we were told, “There’s a place down the road with a big chicken on it. Eat there.” A few miles from the resort is one of the many locations of St. Hubert, a restaurant specializing in rotisserie chicken and bringing people back to life. The deals here are fantastic and everyone gets half a hamburger bun – my kinda joint.
Also, just for the sake of education I’d like to point out that the actual Saint Hubert is the patron saint of hunters, mathematicians, dogs, and FOREST WORKERS. There’s nothing in here about chicken but I think the last thing speaks for itself. An appropriate meal to end our day with our forest workers.

ICE CANYONING TIPS

- **Wear a lot of clothing.** Like… 3 or 4 shirts, some thermals, some fleece-lined pants, MORE THAN ONE PAIR OF SOCKS, headbands, hats, gloves, just keep going and going. Don’t stop. It’s not enough.
- **Trust your guides.** Going down a mountain backwards is weird but if they say you’ve got it, you’ve got it.
- **Wear your sturdiest boots.** Personally, I like being told, “You have the weakest boots of anyone here.” If this is you too, they have boots you can rent on the cheap.
• **Know that you will produce a freakish amount of snot during the course of your trek.** In my case, quickly shove half a roll of toilet paper in your pocket before leaving the ticket office. You’ll be glad you did. So will everyone you’re with.

• **Look down.** OMG I JUST BLEW YOUR MIND! Forget what you’ve heard your entire life about dealing with heights. You will miss out on the entire experience if you keep your eyes on the ice. There’s no thrill in the activity without seeing exactly what you are accomplishing. I’M HANGING BY A STRING! I AM AWESOME! AND SEXY! NO ONE AT WORK WILL EVER ASK ME ABOUT THIS!