

LIFE & ARTS



FROM TOP: JASON WESSEL; THE STANDARD; EAST VILLAGE; JEMMA DAVIS

Icy Nightspots Are Cool This Winter

BY ALINA DIZIK

JIMMIE ESPO enjoys knocking back a winter drink with friends at a Boston hotel's rooftop bar. The chilly temperatures outside don't deter him—he takes shelter in a heated tent at the hotel's "Igloo Bar."

But sometimes, the elements intrude. On one visit, melted snow started dripping inside the tent. Mr. Espo flagged down a staffer, who managed to patch the hole with duct tape. To numb the cold, he ordered another round. "Do I find myself drinking in excess because it's a little bit colder? Absolutely," says Mr. Espo, a 41-year-old who owns a wedding DJ business. (The hotel, the Envoy, has since upgraded the tent material. "Each year we've learned how to improve," the general manager says.)

In an effort to generate year-round revenue from outdoor areas like rooftops, courtyards and gardens, more hotels are turning those spaces into winter-themed

dining and drinking venues. Hotels have discovered that guests will pay a premium to huddle under blankets in structures described as "ice huts" or "alpine yurts," warmed by powerful heaters or rustic fire pits outside. Cold-weather treats like hot spiked cider and fondue dominate the menus. "They create pop-up restaurants...for a sense of place and a sense of season," says Aaron Allen, a Chicago-based restaurant consultant for the hospitality industry. "Parts of the brain are triggered by this type of nostalgia."

Frigid weather can complicate the efforts. At the Standard East Village in New York, managers wanted to generate winter revenue from a side garden that's a popular summer dining spot. In 2016, they erected five wood-and-canvas yurts in the space: three "romantic" yurts, a "drinking" yurt and a "feast" yurt for dinners, says general manager David Lopez. "We really wanted to activate a space that would typically not be activated," he says.

But as the venue became more popular, servers who were spending more time outdoors got cold. This season, the hotel added heaters near the bar area to fend off the chill, and built two additional "drinking" yurts. Maintenance staff also must clean out snow and sleet from the yurts. "We constantly clean everything up, we don't need anybody slipping," says Mr. Lopez.

Despite the challenges, the space is a hit with customers: Yurts get booked weeks in advance, Mr. Lopez says. The hotel this year is decorating each one with its own theme, including in the style of a 1980s ski lodge.

Jemma Davis, 28, recently dined in one of the clear domes in the courtyard at the Hoxton hotel in Brooklyn, N.Y., which required a \$300 food and beverage minimum to reserve. The atmosphere inside the tent was cozy. Guests had to pass food to those sitting farthest away from the zipper-sealed door, and servers juggling dishes were

still trying to master "one-handed zipper skills" to open the door, Ms. Davis says. One friend who needed to use the restroom opted to crawl under the table to keep from disturbing the crowd, says Ms. Davis, a digital agency director, who went with a group of eight. "There's not much room to move around, so once you're in there, you're in there," says Ms. Davis.

The domes themselves aren't immune to cold. In recent weeks "our domes suffered some damage



Clockwise from top: Heated igloos at Boston's Envoy Hotel extend rooftop drinking season; a yurt at New York's Standard East Village; dining under a dome at Brooklyn's Hoxton hotel

in the polar vortex," according to a spokeswoman. The Hoxton has closed them and plans to reopen the attraction next winter.

In Minneapolis, rooftop visitors to the Hewing Hotel can hop in a heated outdoor pool or 24-person sauna, near two fire pits and an ice bar, says Katie Szczepaniak, director of lifestyle at the hotel. The hotel is hiring DJs for winter-themed

"night swim" parties, she adds.

Patrick Hazlewood, a 40-year-old model and event producer, took three friends for a late brunch at the heated "ice huts" in a courtyard of New York's Arlo Soho hotel this winter, which have faux fur throws and whimsical rocking sheep. He didn't tell his guests about the fake snow show the hotel creates every hour. At first, his friends panicked. "It was the horror of, 'How are we going to get Ubers, it's snowing,'" he

says. Eventually, they got into the spirit. "People loved it," Mr. Hazlewood says, although he concedes that after two hours, his ankles got cold.

The ice huts are part of an Antarctica explorer theme at New York's two Arlo-branded hotels. Guests can order the Royds Toddy with whisky, tea and oat milk, which arrives hot in a thermos

when ordered for two, while the South Pole pizza is topped with cured meat and ricotta cheese. The company decided to repurpose courtyard and rooftop spaces this fall, which were previously closed in the colder months, to create a new revenue stream, says Dayna Castano, Arlo's corporate director of marketing. The offering has increased foot traffic and social media engagement, she says. "People go out of their way to take a picture with these things," she says.

