

72 Hours in Montreal

DISCOVER COUNTLESS CULTURES
IN THE LIVELY CANADIAN ISLAND CITY.

BY HANNAH DOYLE



Old Montreal architecture dates back to the 17th century.

Set between the St. Lawrence and Prairies Rivers and near the U.S.-Canada border, the island city of Montreal embodies its geography: a place in the middle where many cultures coalesce. The street signs are written in French, yet most residents also speak English. The city was first inhabited by Iroquois, and a Scottish merchant founded McGill University here in 1821. Thousands of Irish immigrants left their mark on Montreal in the form of St. Patrick's Basilica and a host of other Catholic churches. This is a city that embraces its plurality—just look to Montreal's flag, which carries five emblems, one each for its Indigenous, French, English, Scottish, and Irish heritage. Today more than 200 ethnic groups call Montreal home, resulting in a delightful blend of cuisines, art, and shops. Say yes, *oui*, or aye to it all over the course of a weekend.

DAY 1

SPRING OUTSIDE

At the open-air **Jean Talon Market**, open daily in Montreal's central Little Italy neighborhood, you'll find more than 150 vendors selling local fruits and vegetables, as well as maple syrup every which way—in cookies, candies, and on nuts. Mounds of garlic bulbs pile on countertops, peppers hang from stands like wind chimes, and violet eggplants the size of your forearm cluster together in baskets. Other stalls carry foods from an array of nationalities: Spanish empanadas, French crêpes, and German sauerkraut. *Pasteis de nata* (Portuguese egg tarts) are only \$2 Canadian a pop.

To savor your spoils in the fresh air, walk to Mont Royal, the small mountain from which Montreal takes its name. On the way, pass through **McGill University** to admire its grand ivy-clad stone buildings. The university abuts the west side of the mountain along a steep upward incline, which means your legs will get a bit of a stretch. But don't worry—it's not that far to the summit of Mont Royal, and wooden steps with handrails go all the way to the top. Your reward: a sweeping view of the city from 764 feet up and a choice spot for a picnic.

Now it's time for a rest at **Bota Bota**, a spa in Montreal's Old Port. In a converted ferry that floats atop the St. Lawrence River, you can get a massage or a three-hour pass to use the facilities: pools of varying temperatures, a sauna, and plenty of sun decks. Along with a robe, you'll be given a wristband when you enter, which you can use to pay at the on-site restaurant. But save room—a short walk away, beyond Old Montreal's tourist-filled center, an outwardly



Above, from left:
McGill University;
Maison Pepin's
airy dining room.

nondescript basement houses **Le Bremner** restaurant. It's the kind of place you have to know about to seek out, and the waitstaff treat you like a friend. Take your time, starting with the freshly shucked oysters then moving on to the halibut in brown-butter hollandaise. Cap off the meal with the dessert pancakes, soft enough to pass for bread pudding.

DAY 2

ANGLE ON ART

UNESCO named Montreal a Creative City of Design in 2006, partly because the agency found that there were more than 25,000 professionals working in design here. This emphasis on the arts is on display in the Plateau neighborhood, where murals line cobblestoned streets and iron staircases cling to the fronts of colorful Victorian residences. Another sign of the neighborhood's creativity is its high number of cafés per capita—and the unusual places where you'll find them, from inside a clothing store to

an ice cream shop. You can even get your java at bike-repair shop **Le Club**, also the meeting place for **Spade & Palacio's** Beyond the Bike Lanes tour, during which two native Montrealers show off their perspective of the city. You'll glide by street art and through La Fontaine, a public park spanning 84 acres between downtown and Plateau's eastern edge. Cofounder Danny Pavlopoulos says on any given weekend you're bound to pedal past a birthday party, a picnic, or a couple's first date.

After cycling up an appetite, you can stop by **Schwartz's Deli**, a temple to smoked meat since 1928. The deli's classic brisket sandwich is similar to what you'll often see in the States, but the technique used to prepare the meat is slightly different. After being dry-cured, the brisket is soaked to remove some of the salt, unlike pastrami in the States, before it's seasoned and smoked. The texture is marbled and tender, which yields a fatty richness that will keep you warm on cooler spring days.



You can wrap up your design-filled day at the **Canadian Centre for Architecture**, 20 minutes south on the green line from Plateau's Saint-Laurent metro station. The city's underground transit system is extensive and simple to use, making it a great option for getting around. The Centre's stone facade and manicured premises are something to behold; inside, you'll find contemporary art, artifacts, and videos. To get a bird's-eye view of all the ground you've covered, dine at **Les Enfants Terribles**, about a mile north. It's equal parts restaurant and observatory, and you can feast on complex dishes like duck confit.

DAY 3

SHOP THE CULTURE

Montreal's knack for design extends to fashion. Boutiques are widespread throughout the city, but the highest concentration can be found in the Mile End neighborhood. Strike out on Rue Saint Viateur Ouest, where you can find clothing from Montreal designers—as well as that Montreal staple, the bagel. There are two **St. Viateur Bagel** shops in the area. Both sling bagels with the city's signature honey-sweet taste and holes almost big enough to slip your hand through. You can grab a classic sesame hot from the

weekenders GUIDE TO MONTREAL

EAT

Jean Talon Market 7070 Ave. Henri Julien; 514-937-7754; marchespublics-mtl.com

Le Bremner 361 Rue Saint Paul E.; 514-544-0446; crownsalts.com; dinner for two, \$70*

Le Club 3801 Rue Saint Denis; 514-379-1552; leclub.cc; drinks for two, \$8

Les Enfants Terribles 1 Pl. Ville Marie Entrée; 514-544-8884; jesuisunenfantterrible.com; dinner for two, \$43

Mandy's 425 Rue Saint Nicolas; 514-379-1979; mandys.ca; dinner for two, \$18

Schwartz's Deli 3895 Blvd. Saint Laurent; 514-842-4813; schwartzsdeli.com; lunch for two, \$15

St. Viateur Bagel 263 Rue Saint Viateur O.; 514-276-8044; stviateurbagel.com; breakfast for two, \$5

EXPLORE

BAnQ Vieux-Montréal 535 Ave. Viger E.; 800-363-9028; banq.qc.ca

Canadian Centre for Architecture 1920 Rue Baile; 514-939-7026; cca.qc.ca; adults, \$8; children, free

McGill University 845 Rue Sherbrooke O.; 514-389-4455; mcgill.ca

Spade & Palacio 514-806-3263; spadeandpalacio.com; bike tours with lunch and craft beer, \$85 a person

RELAX

Bota Bota Old Port of Montreal at the corner of Rue McGill and Rue de la Commune O.; 514-284-0333; botabota.ca; spa passes, from \$34; massages, from \$76

Le Petit Navire Jacques-Cartier Pier; 514-602-1000; lepetitnavire.ca; adults, \$15; children 2-14, \$7; children 2 and under, free

SHOP

Annex Vintage 56 Rue Saint Viateur O.; 514-903-4404; annexvintage.com

Frank and Oak 160 Rue Saint Viateur O.; 438-384-0824; frankandoak.com

Maison Pepin 378 Rue Saint-Paul O.; 514-844-0114; thepepinshop.com

STAY

RCI® AFFILIATED RESORTS NEAR MONTREAL INCLUDE:

Auberge du Lac Morency D467
Enjoy the lake life: Waterskiing, tubing, and wakeboarding are on offer at this red-roof resort. 42 Rue de la Chaumine, Saint-Hippolyte, QC
MEMBER REVIEW: "We loved the spa."

Privilege Mont-Tremblant - Voliere 2272
The feel of a cabin with modern comforts, such as an on-site spa and hot tub. 2140 Chemin Du Village, Mont-Tremblant, QC
MEMBER REVIEW: Not yet rated

For complete member review (as member review has been condensed) and additional resort listings, visit RCI.com or call 800-338-7777 (Weeks) or 877-968-7476 (Points). Club Members, please call your specific Club or RCI telephone number.

NON-RCI AFFILIATED RESORT:

Hotel Gault
A converted textile warehouse in Old Montreal whose updates feel at once contemporary and cozy. 449 Rue Sainte-Hélène, Montreal; hotelgault.com; 514-904-1616; doubles from \$144 a night

oven to munch on as you stroll over to **Annex Vintage**, where you can browse sun-faded Nike pullovers and Levi's from the '90s. Farther down Saint Viateur, **Frank and Oak** stocks minimal silhouettes and 70's-era shapes.

When you've finished exploring Mile End, head east toward the St. Lawrence River to the city's archival library, **BAnQ Vieux-Montréal**. You can pore over magazines dating back to the '40s, watch VHS tapes about the city's architecture, and see old typewriters. These analog objects and the library's ambience—its white spiral staircase, voices hushed to a whisper—affirm what Mile End, with its vintage shops, knows well: The past is cool.

Twenty minutes south, **Maison Pepin** is many things in one—a bakery and café, clothing store, home store, apothecary, outdoor dining area, and workshop. For a quick bite, walk about two blocks

northeast to **Mandy's**. The inside looks like a '60s parlor, with its black-checked tile, teal walls, and velvet booths; try one of the quick-serve gourmet soups or salads. The Belle comes with avocado, pear, pita chips, and shaved Parmesan.

You can watch the sunset with a glass of wine aboard **Le Petit Navire**, a small boat that takes off at the Old Port. A father-daughter duo run the tour, guiding you along the St. Lawrence River for a slow, pleasurable look at the sights. The boat sails past Bota Bota spa and, later, Les Enfants Terribles, making for a kind of visual recap of your weekend. As you gaze out at Mont Royal and the many places you have yet to explore—the Montreal Clock Tower, the city's waterfront Ferris wheel, the steel-net dome of the Biosphere—you may find yourself planning your return before the boat even docks. ☺



MONTREAL IN BLOOM

More than 300 urban gardens are dotted throughout the city, adding extra color beyond its many planter boxes. Here are some of the flowers you'll spot starting in mid-May.

CHERRY BLOSSOMS

The first signs of spring can be found in **Westmount Park** (327 Ave. Melville), just south

of Mont Royal, and in **Île de la Visitation** (2425 Blvd. Gouin E.), a park along the Prairies River.

SCILLA WILDFLOWERS

You can see these blue beauties (pictured) pop up on Mont Royal, in residents' front gardens, and on street corners.

TULIPS

Shades of pink, red, and yellow take up swaths of the **Montreal Botanical Garden** (4101 Rue Sherbrooke E.; espacepourlavie.ca; admission, \$16), north of Plateau, and in front of **Christ Church Anglican Cathedral** (635 Rue Saint-Catherine O.) downtown.