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Montréal, mon amour: why it's fast becoming the food capital of North America

Inventive chefs have turned Canada's most European city into the foodie capital, says Valentina Valentini

VALENTINA VALENTINI | 1 day ago | 0 comments



Le Marche Jean-Talon *Tourisme Montréal*

NYC for a foodie break? Not so fast. Montréal is an hour closer to home, has more restaurants per capita than New York, and has stolen back one top chef from the Big Apple.

Direct flights from London take seven-and-a-half hours and it celebrated its 375th anniversary this year. What's more, Montréal is becoming the foodie destination in North America.

At least, that's what Montréal-bred Mehdi Brunet-Benkritly thinks. He followed his career path to New York, heading up the kitchens at NYC's Chez Sardine and Fedora, but in 2015 he came home to open his own restaurant, **Marconi**, an upscale bistro full of inventive sharing plates such as asparagus with duck jerky and ginger vinaigrette that's now one of the hottest places in town.

For Helena Loureiro, New York was a dream destination when she started cooking in her native Portugal. But she ended up in Montréal, soaring to culinary heights with three restaurants including **Portus360**, which rotates slowly at the top of a skyscraper while serving tapas dishes such as shrimps and garlic, and octopus and lima beans.



Busy at work: Helena Loureiro

“Montréal has got that European feel I know so well,” she says. “It’s so open-minded when it comes to food. I love that you can travel the world eating food from all over in just a few blocks.”

Tasting menus seem to be Montréal’s magnum opus, with chefs keen to show off their creativity. “Food is 10 per cent of it,” says Charles-Antoine Crête, the eccentric founder of seafood restaurant **Montréal Plaza**.

“You have to be a disease and get inside people.” It’s the kind of place you’ll find a toy dinosaur filling up extra space on your plate and Star Wars music in the background. Crête has been known to tape sparklers to his head and do the splits in front of guests. His energy is also reflected in the food: razor clams in ponzu sauce and marinated lobster in bone marrow, bone included.

Year-old **HIVOR** – Danish for “here” – also prides itself in its tasting menu, which changes daily according to what’s available from producers, the rooftop garden and 15,000-strong beehive. Chef Jean-Philippe Tees plans to own a small farm with his wife and operate a restaurant on Friday and Saturday nights – his Montréal stint is just the prep for that.



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A weekend away in Montreal



Hip city: Montréal, with Parc Jean-Drapeau in the foreground

A fun way to get a taste of the town is to go on a culinary walking tour. [Spade and Palacio's](#) Beyond the Market hike (£50) is a three-hour trek around the restaurants in northern neighbourhoods – with a difference. “We don’t do the big three – smoked meat, bagels and poutine,” says co-owner Anne-Marie Pellerin. Instead, S&P offers homemade pupusas from Los Planes and sustainably sourced coffee from the female-owned [Dispatch](#).

There are also tastings of cheese, meats, fresh vegetables, foraged greens and ice cream during a visit to the Marché Jean-Talon, the largest open-air market in North America. They’ll help you pair sour beer with creamy cheese at [Brasserie Harricana](#) and end with fried chicken doused in homemade sauces at [Dinette Triple Crown](#).

Back in the Golden Square Mile, [Bar George](#), the new restaurant in the Le Mount Stephen hotel, does a fine line in English classics such as beef wellington, chicken pie and cream of mushroom soup. For something lighter, there’s [LOV](#), whose Instagrammable décor is almost as much of a draw as its vegan food.

Details: Montreal

[Air Canada](#) flies direct from Heathrow from £540 return. [Epik Hotel](#) has doubles from £159, B&B. ■

