

LIFE | TRAVEL | TAKE MONDAY OFF

An Enviably Great Long Weekend in Montreal

A don't-waste-a-minute guide to three days in the French Canadian metropolis, including where to sleep, shop, bike, eat and eat some more




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Waiter and clients on the front part of Canal Lounge Café Flottant, Lachine Canal, Montreal, GUILLAUME SIMONEAU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



By *Gabriella Gershenson*

 40 COMMENTS

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MUCH HAS BEEN made about the duality of Montreal—a major North American city with a staunchly Francophone identity—and its antiquity, too. While Canada marks its 150th birthday this year, Montreal, an early French-colonial fur-trade town, is turning 375. But far from a quaint Gallic relic, the country's second-most-populous city has a restlessly creative spirit, with homegrown and immigrant influences driving its food, art and music scenes. Locals, who scuttle down frozen streets during infamously harsh winters, treat summertime with euphoric reverence: riding miles along riverside bike paths, insisting on picnics and hopping from one festival to the next. You'll still see remnants of June's public mural fest (including a 9-story likeness of native son Leonard Cohen) in July and August, which usher in music performances as varied as the riffs on poutine, Quebec's peculiar French-fry delicacy. Here, a three-day guide to help you seize summer too.



ILLUSTRATION: JAMES GULLIVER HANCOCK

DAY ONE // FRIDAY

6 p.m. Arrive at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport, named for Canada's four-term prime minister and father of the current prime minister. Cab it to **Hotel William Gray**, an upscale boutique hotel on the old port of the St. Lawrence River (*from about \$320 a night in summer, hotelwilliamgray.com*) or to Casa Bianca, a stylish B&B in the bohemian Plateau neighborhood (*from \$130 a night, casabianca.ca*).



RAW AMBITION A plateau de mer at Joe Beef, a foodie pilgrimage site known for its raw bar offerings. PHOTO: GUILLAUME SIMONEAU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

7:30 p.m. Every traveler who arrives in Montreal armed with a list of must-try restaurants invariably seeks out **Joe Beef**, the inventive restaurant that put the working-class Little Burgundy neighborhood on the map. At the risk of being predictable, hit it up first but order an aperitivo at the bar instead of dinner. Try the plateau de mer with oysters, Quebec snow crab and cold-smoked scallops in maple syrup (*You'll need a reservation, even at the bar; 2491-2501 Notre-Dame St. W., joebeef.ca*).

9 p.m. Walk a few doors down to Joe Beef's veggie-focused sister restaurant **Le Vin Papillon**. Sit in the garden and round out your evening repast with hyper-seasonal tempura-fried ramps with shrimp taramasalata and blackcurrant soft serve (*2519 Notre-Dame St. W., vinpapillon.com*).

DAY TWO // SATURDAY

9:30 a.m. Start with breakfast at **Patrice Pâtissier**, back in Little Burgundy, where the kouign amann and other pastries are reliably excellent. Starting at 11 a.m., brunch is served; the savory dishes, such as baked eggs with homemade sausage and juicy cherry tomatoes, are as finely honed as the sweets (*2360 Notre-Dame St. W., patricepatissier.ca*).

11:30 a.m. Browse the other shops and cafes along Rue Notre Dame Ouest. **Beige** offers tasteful housewares, like bottle-green tumblers (*2480 Notre-Dame St. W., beigestyle.com*), while **StockMarkt** (*2664 Notre-Dame St. W., boutiquestockmarkt.com*) is a discount outlet disguised as a chic boutique (think James Perse and Maison Kitsuné). At **Marché Atwater**, a sprawling art-deco-era market, choose provisions for an al fresco snack (*138 Atwater Ave., www.marche-atwater.com*). **Fromagerie Hamel** is a good one-stop shop for bread, fresh cheese curds, and Palette de Bine chocolate made in nearby Mount Tremblant (*138 Atwater Ave., fromageriehamel.com*).



Atwater Market PHOTO: GUILLAUME SIMONEAU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

1:30 p.m. Pick up a bike from the Bixi bike-share terminal at Charlevoix and Duvernay Streets, and take Charlevoix into Lachine Canal Park, a rehabilitated industrial canal with a leafy bike path. Ride about 20 minutes to Old Montreal, stopping along the way to refuel with your market spoils.

3 p.m. Dock your bike at Place Jacques Cartier and walk five minutes to **Scandinave Les Bains**, a spa in Old Montreal that promotes relaxation the Scandinavian way—by alternating between hot and cold pools, steam rooms and saunas and with excellent massages (*71 de la Commune W., scandinave.com*).

8:30 p.m. For dinner, go to **Moishe's**, a Jewish-Romanian steakhouse that's been in business since 1938, and was a local haunt of Leonard Cohen's. Order the chopped liver and the grilled rib steak (*3961 St. Laurent Blvd., moishes.ca*).

11 p.m. Walk five minutes up St. Laurent to **Divan Orange**, a funky venue for national and local music, with acts ranging from DJs spinning vintage Afro-Caribbean vinyl to quirky Québécois folk. The vibe is relaxed (kombucha plus vodka equals a cocktail) and dancing is encouraged (*4234 St Laurent Blvd., divanorange.org*).

DAY THREE // SUNDAY

10 a.m. Brunch at **Hof Kelsten**, a casual bakery-cafe opened by a fine-dining veteran in the Plateau neighborhood. Order the merguez sausage shakshuka, or go light with the vegetarian sandwich—labneh, pickled vegetables and cilantro, served open-face on pumpernickel (*4524 St Laurent Blvd., hofkelsten.com*)

11:30 a.m. Walk 10 minutes to the corner of Mont Royal and Parc Avenues and enter Mount Royal Park, a nearly 500-acre urban sanctuary designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Hike uphill to **Chalet du Mont Royal** (about a 40-minute trek), a 1932 villa with spectacular views of downtown Montreal, the St. Lawrence River and on a clear day, the Quebec countryside (*1196 Voie Camillien-Houde*).

2 p.m. Exit the park and take a cab 10 minutes to **Jean Talon Market**, located in Petite Italie (*7070 Henri-Julien Ave.; marchespublics-mtl.com*). Snack your way through roughly six city blocks of seasonal bounty, prepared foods, charcuterie and cheeses, with a stop at the incomparable spice shop **Épices de Cru** for a nonperishable memento of Montreal steak seasoning (*C-11, 7070 Henri Julien Ave., 514-273-1118*).



THE GREAT BITE NORTH A beer with cassis and cherries at Brasserie Harricana. PHOTO: GUILLAUME SIMONEAU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

3 p.m. Explore the rest of Little Italy. **Caffè Italia**, a frozen-in-time espresso bar that's been open since 1956, guarantees prime people watching day and night (*6840 St Laurent Blvd.*). Nearby is **Quincaillerie Dante**, a family-run kitchenware and hunting store where you can buy a butter curler or a rifle (*6851 St Dominique St., quincailleriedante.com*). Since this is Quebec, great poutine—the French Canadian fries, gravy and cheese curd specialty—is just a few minutes away at **Chez Tousignant**, a retro-style snack bar. Have a late lunch of poutine and a hot dog, whose bun and sausage are made from scratch (*6956 Drolet St., cheztousignant.com*). After that you'll welcome the 10-minute walk to **Brasserie Harricana**, a brewpub for beer obsessives; it boasts the city's sole Flux Capacitor draft system, which regulates each beer's gas composition, gas pressure and temperature (*95 Jean-Talon St. W., brasserieharricana.com*).

7 p.m. Though many restaurants in Montreal are closed on Sundays, you still have some desirable dinner options. **Lémeac**, a destination French bistro on elegant Avenue Laurier in Outremont, is the place to order classics, like an exemplary kir royale and steak tartare with matchstick frites (1045 Avenue Laurier W, restaurantlemeac.com).

10 p.m. End the night at **La Sala Rossa** performance space in a former Spanish social center—in the heart of a historically Jewish neighborhood. The venue pays homage to the area’s multiculturalism with eclectic programming that, on any given night, could feature folk, spoken word or breakdance. Cover is about \$15 (4848 St. Laurent Blvd., lasalarossa.com).

DAY FOUR // MONDAY

10:30 a.m. Check out of the hotel but leave your bags to pick up later. Take a 15-minute taxi to **Mile End**, a former Jewish enclave, and setting of the 1959 novel, “The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz,” written by notable Montrealer Mordecai Richler. Now it’s one of the city’s coolest neighborhoods. Eat breakfast at the hip all-day restaurant **Larry’s**. Order a flaky scone or the breakfast sandwich with house-made sausage and egg (9 Fairmount Ave. E., larrys.website).



The front window of Les Étoffes. PHOTO: GUILLAUME SIMONEAU FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

drawnandquarterly.com).

12 p.m. Indulge in last-minute souvenir shopping in and around Mile End. Grab a bag of Montreal-style bagels (skinny, sweet, covered in sesame seeds) at 98-year-old **Fairmount Bagels** (74 Avenue Fairmount W, fairmountbagel.com). For a piece of Montreal cool, stop at **La Montréalaise**, a women’s boutique that sells tees and sweatshirts with slogans like “Je Parle Feministe” (65 Rue St. Viateur E., lamontrealaiseatelier.com), or chic high-end apparel at **Les Étoffes** (5253 St. Laurent Blvd.) For the boys, men’s outfitters **Frank + Oak** is a block away, with a barber shop on premises for emergency beard trims (160 St. Viateur St. E., frankandoak.com). One avenue up is the singular **Librarie Drawn & Quarterly**, an indie bookstore devoted entirely to graphic novels (211 Bernard St. W.,

2:30 p.m. On your way back to the hotel, stop at **Schwartz's**, purveyor of the Montreal smoked meat sandwich, a cross between pastrami and corned beef. Order two for the flight home, specify lean, medium, or fatty, and don't forget the pickle (*3895 St. Laurent Blvd., schwartzdeli.com*).