

# Where to find the world's top comics

By Lawrence Ferber

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Jerry Seinfeld, Jane Krakowski and Trevor Noah will all be performing at Montreal's Just for Laughs. Jeff Kravitz/FilmMagic; JP Yim/WireImage; Jack Vartoogian/Getty Images

Toronto may spawn funny folk royalty — Mike Myers, Jim Carrey, Dan Aykroyd, Martin Short and Andrea Martin, to name a few — but it's Montreal that becomes the world's comedy mecca every July.

That's because its Just For Laughs (JFL) festival has launched marquee names like Dave Chappelle, Kevin Hart, Jimmy Fallon and Judd Apatow to fame. *Mon dieu!*

Running from July 12 to 31 this year, the 35th annual showcase is as bold-faced as ever, featuring stand-up sets, showcases and galas with, among others, Jerry Seinfeld (July 26), Colin Jost and Michael Che of “Saturday Night Live” (July 26), Jane Krakowski (July 27), Ali Wong (July 27), Trevor Noah (July 28), Howie Mandel (July 29) and “Get Out” breakout Lil Rel (July 26-29). Check the [festival's Web site](#) for a full lineup; tickets start at \$16.



Montreal native Sugar Sammy sweetens up the crowd at his city's annual Just For Laughs festival.  
Montreal Tourism Sugar Sammy

Festival organizer Bruce Hills, who has worked for JFL since its inception, says big leaguers sometimes perform surprise sets during lower-profile showcases at smaller venues like [Katacombes](#).

“Two years ago, I had a call from [JFL regular] Louis CK four days from the end of the fest,” he recalls. “He wanted to come ... and said, ‘I want to do spots where I’m not overshadowing someone who is having a breakout moment. If you can give me shows where everyone is equal and I can come and leave, I’ll do that.’ ”

JFL aside, Montreal is a funny place all year long, with a robust stand-up, improv and open mic scene. A comedy superstar in France, Gad Elmaleh (who co-headlines with Seinfeld and has a Netflix special out now) got his start here as did longtime Stephen Colbert writer Barry Julien.



Ali Wong  
WireImage

Current Montreal crack-ups worth catching — in any season — include Joey Elias, David Pryde, Mike Ward and JFL headliner Sugar Sammy (real name: Samir Khullar, July 27-28).

Here's where to get your ha-has on any time. [Comedy Works](#) and [The Comedy Nest](#) are the city's two major English-language comedy clubs. Billed as a "bilingual DIY comedy night," eight-month-old [Comedy at The Art Loft](#) is a successful weekly spin-off from a scrappy arts and activism festival, [Montreal Infringement](#). Cover is \$4 and it's BYOB.

"There was a local poll about the best Montreal comedy nights, and I think Art Loft's was No. 1," says Sammy. A Montreal native of South Asian

descent, Sammy notes that visitors should expect a unique point of view from Québécois comedians, who draw influence from North America and France as well as Montreal's diverse population. That said, international politics currently provide plenty of fodder: "I definitely have some Trump jokes."

A venue for JFL and early summer's [Fringe festival](#), the [Mainline Theatre](#) hosts humorous productions at other times of year, as does the [Theatre Sainte-Catherine](#), where Ethiopian-Australian comedian Joe White (he's been called Down Under's Trevor Noah) will reprise his Fringe show "Ethiopian & Still Not Hungry" on Aug. 11. "Off-season, [Sainte-Catherine] does great showcases of local talent: sketch, improv, spoken word," says Hills.

Theatre Sainte-Catherine's weekly Sunday Night Improv show at 8 p.m. (\$5.50) boasts a "Survivor"-like twist, with low-rated performers given the boot each round. A free improv workshop is open to the public beforehand. [Montreal Improv](#) also hosts several weekly shows.

A larger French-language comedy industry flourishes in Montreal, according to Sammy. If fluent, check out Francophone-centric stand-up club [Le Bordel](#). But bilingual performances rule at some venues, like Wednesday night vaudeville revue Voix de Ville at the [Wiggle Room](#) and the monthly [Cous Cous Comedy Show](#) at the Rialto Theatre. "They'll do 10 minutes in either language," Sammy adds. "And they pack a crowd!"

One thing that comedians take seriously is Montreal's food scene. Aziz Ansari is a fan of farm-to-table favorite [Joe Beef](#) and inventive bistro [Nora Gray](#), while Seth Rogen [tweeted his thanks](#) to Québécois cuisine outpost [Au Pied De Cochon](#) — the foie gras poutine is beyond decadent — for "one of the craziest meals I ever had."



Judah Friedlander

Phil Shuchat



Seth Rogen quashes his munchies at Au Pied de Cochon.

Au Pied de Cochon

As for Sammy, you'll find him savoring Portuguese chicken at [Grillades Da Silva](#), Japanese izakaya fare at [Biiru](#), Korean- and South American-inspired sushi at [Park](#) and breakfast at [Café Orange](#). "It lends itself well to discussions and chat," he says of the latter.

And laughs, naturally.

### **Where to stay**

The year-old, Ace Hotel-esque [Hotel William Gray](#) brings 127 rooms of fresh hipster chic and design to buzzy, historic Old Montreal (from \$230). Plus, it has the fabulous Maggie Oakes restaurant and bar.