

6 Ways Montreal Out-Innovates Other Cities

By Darryn King | May 30, 2017 | 10:25am

Photo below courtesy of Tourism Montreal

[TRAVEL](#) > [LISTS](#) > [MONTREAL](#)

f Share

🐦 Tweet

👍 Submit

📌 Pin



With its thriving startup scene, large proportion of college students and high concentration of tech jobs, Montreal is in many ways a city of the future. The cultural scene of the city is a fascinating, seamless blend of art and innovation, old and new.

For the adventurous Montreal visitor, there's a unique array of exciting sights to see and experiences—all made possible through Montreal's fixation on cutting-edge technology. With the city celebrating its 375th anniversary in 2017, there's even more going on. Best of all, you don't have to be a tech-head yourself to enjoy any of it.

1. Step into a Virtual Reality



Photo courtesy of Phi Centre

You can appreciate the appeal of virtual reality to a city that succumbs to agonizingly short days for much of the year. Located in Old Montreal, the [Phi Centre](#) regularly hosts dazzling multimedia exhibitions, such as 2016's Björk Digital, but their Virtual Reality Garden is something else. As the name suggests, it's a free permanent installation showcasing a curated and diverse selection of outstanding virtual reality (VR) experiences.

The works offer widely different takes on the young medium and varying levels of interactivity. Recent displays ranged from Eagle Flight, developed by Montreal-based video game company Ubisoft, which sends visitors soaring above a post-apocalyptic Paris; to the Emmy-winning Henry, narrated by [Elijah Wood](#) and developed by Pixar alumni, which tells the charming tale of a lonely hedgehog; to Minotaur, a 3D psychedelic journey with an original soundtrack by Kid Koala. If you've tried VR before, you know you're in for something astonishing; if you haven't—strap on a headset and prepare to have your mind blown.

2. Summon the Spirits of Old Montreal

Sure, for insight into the rich history of Old Montreal, you could visit a museum (the modern Musée d'Archéologie et d'Histoire Pointe-à-Callière, for its part, presents a fantastic audiovisual presentation on the area). Or, you could simply take a wander along the cobblestone streets after dusk. As part of the [Cité-Mémoire](#) project, the thick stone walls, trees and even grounds of Old Montreal are currently serving as the canvas for luminous and informative video projections. In a series of dreamlike tableaux, figures from the city's past come to life to tell their stories, and the stories of the fortifications, churches, chapels, warehouses and waterfront of the oldest part of the city.

For the full Cité Mémoire trip-through-time experience, download the free Montreal en Histoires app on your smartphone. It provides a handy map of key destinations, an evocative soundtrack and augmented reality features, as well as narration in four languages. No need to worry about download charges either: further testament to the forward-looking ethos of the city, you can enjoy free Wi-Fi connection to MtlWifi throughout Old Montreal.

3. Interact with the Jacques-Cartier Bridge



Photo courtesy of Tourism Montreal

Imagine interactive artwork that involves the participation of an entire city. From May 17, 2017—Montreal’s founding anniversary—the Jacques-Cartier Bridge will be blazing brightly with the energy of actual Montrealers. The turrets and piers of the Bridge, inside and out, will be bathed in an ever-changing array of dynamic light effects. But this is no arbitrary light show—in the concept developed by multimedia entertainment studio Moment Factory in collaboration with six other Montreal studios, the effects will be determined by tapping into the real-time data of various urban systems, such as weather conditions, traffic patterns and social media activity. Precisely how these diverse variables will be converted into light is a tightly guarded secret for now, but as far as algorithm-based spectacles go, it’s sure to be wondrous. Think of the light show as a kaleidoscopic ECG machine of the pulse of the city.

4. Behold the Satosphere



Photo courtesy of Tourism Montreal

At the Society for Arts and Technology, in the former red-light district of Saint-Laurent Boulevard, you’ll discover the world’s first immersive modular theatre. Opened in 2011, the [Satosphere](#) is a semi-spherical-shaped projection screen, 60 feet in diameter and comprising eight video projectors and 157 speakers. It immerses visitors, lying on their backs, in a 360-degree audio-visual experience that makes the IMAX feel relatively quaint. Rather than a theater for screening blockbuster movies, think of it as an unconventional gallery space, exhibiting immersive experiences designed by local and visiting international artists. You might find yourself convincingly transported to a tranquil forest environment, or else plunging into a mind-bending realm of CG shapes and Escher-inspired imagery.

5. Get Swept Away with Montréal AVUDO



Photo courtesy of Tourism Montreal

In summer of 2017, the west part in Montreal's Old Port, near the Convoyeurs Pier and the Science Centre, will host 100 outdoor performances of a light show and multimedia spectacular, taking place on the water of the St. Lawrence River. An ode to Montreal's great river and created especially for the city's 375th anniversary celebrations, **Montréal AVUDO** is the brainchild of Daniele Finzi Pasca, the visionary director behind two Olympics closing ceremonies, among other epic-scale productions. Early concept art is indeed spectacular: a steamboat on the water, looking like a ghostly apparition. Finzi Pasca promises "an explosion of images that will be poetic, surprising." More than 180,000 spectators are expected—and, best of all, it's free.

6. Wonder at the Illuminated Biosphère

OK, you wouldn't ordinarily think of it as high-tech, but for half a century, Montreal's Biosphère (pictured at top) has neatly encapsulated the revolutionary mindset of the city. Designed by Buckminster Fuller as the American pavilion for the party that was the 1967 World Fair, the Île Sainte-Hélène Biosphère is an icon and an architectural marvel in its own right. But if you think the skeletal structure is eye-catching during the daytime, just wait until night falls: recently, the geodesic dome has gotten an ultramodern makeover that not only befits but enhances its space-age design. In 2016, lighting company 4U2C and Cirque du Soleil lighting designer Yves Aucoin teamed up to reimagine the building, now an [environment museum](#), as a shimmering beacon. Since December 2016, the Biosphère's façade has lit up every night with alternating colors—like a gentle ballet of light. This particular lighting scheme, the city says, will illuminate the Biosphère for 20 more years. After that—well, you can be sure that this city of the future will have come up with something even more impressive.