



48 HOURS IN MONTREAL

For a taste of Europe just a few hours from New York, head north for an indulgent weekend

by ALICIA KENNEDY
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A tourist assumes the position at the Belvédère Kondiaronk scenic overlook in the Parc du Mont-Royal.

ROBERT WRIGHT

Accessible in a day's journey, Canada's second largest city is just far enough away that you feel like you're leaving New York behind — but close enough that you don't have to spend a fortune getting there. Like New York, Montreal has a subway that makes it cheap and easy to get around, and it's small enough to be walkable, allowing you to take in the beauty of Old Montreal and the city's other neighborhoods: Le Plateau feels homey but cool, while in La Petite-Bourgogne (a/k/a Little Burgundy) you'll find the epicenter of the city's food scene. With old-world architecture and distinctive local culture, it's a perfect change of pace when your bank account isn't feeling a trip to Europe.

New York Times Magazine and *Vanity Fair* freelance culture writer Elisabeth Donnelly says she makes it to Montreal nearly every year, even when she's broke. As she puts it: "It's like cheap France with cuter boys."

Amtrak is a popular way to make the trip north, at a cost of about \$138 round-trip. You'll lose an entire day on the train — between eleven and thirteen hours, depending on how the border crossing goes — but you'll have Wi-Fi and can soak up the scenery as you glide past Lake Champlain. (If the romance of the train doesn't appeal to you, nonstop flights aren't much more pricey, and take a little under two hours.)



Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel in Old Montreal

KEN KAMINESKY

Once you arrive, Montreal allows enough room to choose your own adventure. Social-media manager Corey Kindberg went the lavish route on his quick solo trip. “My first night, I lived my lady-of-leisure life at the Ritz-Carlton Montreal and went to Daniel Boulud’s restaurant there,” he says. “It was delicious and super-affordable.” Even if you want to go to the spa, you don’t have to spend wildly: Bota Bota is “this very chic spa on an old boat right on the water,” Kindberg says, and offers a variety of packages: A facial and sixty-minute massage runs you \$219. Airbnb options are also plentiful, with many entire apartments going for under \$50 a night, and you’ll be spending so much time running around the city that a luxe home base won’t be worth the cost.

Much of that running around will include Montreal's phenomenal eating and drinking scene. Get a morning croissant and coffee at the adorable bakery [Sophie Sucree](#), which is on the outskirts of Le Plateau. On another day, try both [St-Viateur](#) and [Fairmount](#) bagel shops in Mile End, offering Montreal's smaller and denser cousin to the New York staple; at the former, you can expect to be handed a plain, hot bagel, while the latter will give you a schmear and lox. Donnelly prefers the Montreal varieties to New York's: "They are sweeter and they are fresh and they demand being eaten at that exact moment."



The Bridgetown, served at Le Mal Nécessaire.

COURTNEY KELSEY

For lunch, pop by [Drogheria Fine](#). In the tiny pasta shop's window, someone will be stirring a giant pot of gnocchi, filling Chinese takeout containers with generous \$5 portions freshly dusted with parmesan. Like the bagels, street gnocchi warms you up immediately on a cold winter day — the trick is in eating it on the sidewalk without making a mess of your scarf. At dinner, [Agrikol](#) (invested in by Arcade Fire members)

in Gay Village serves Haitian food and warm, celebratory Caribbean vibes no matter the time of year. Carnivores shouldn't miss the famous Joe Beef, located in Little Burgundy, where you can expect the richness of veal tongue and foie gras. For vegan fare, try the omakase dinner at Le Plateau's Sushi Momo or Chu Chai on Saint Denis near the Parc la Fontaine.

Maybe it's those long winters, but Montreal does drinking especially well. For those of us from the States, there's illicit pleasure in simply being able to drink Cuban rum: Going for classics like the cuba libre made with actual Havana Club takes the experience up a notch. At pinball bar North Star Machines à Piastres, a dark 'n' stormy made with delicious homemade ginger beer makes for a spicier, cleaner taste that complements whichever machine you choose to play — whether it's Dolly Parton, Xenon, or one of the dozen or so others.



Pinball paradise at North Star Machines à Piastres

YANNICK GRANDMONT

Subterranean tiki bar Le Mal Nécessaire (you'll know it by the neon-green pineapple calling you downstairs), located in Chinatown, offers some of Montreal's best cocktails. From the Argentinian Sour, made with Dominican Brugal rum and Fernet Luxardo, to the Bloody Caesar, made with gochujang, you can't really go wrong with your selection. In classic tiki fashion, you can also order Chinese food from a restaurant upstairs to pair with your piña colada supremo.

When you've sufficiently stuffed yourself and want to go shopping, Boutique Unicorn in Mile End stocks such local designers as Betina Lou and brands you know, like Cheap Monday, plus a selection of accessories and housewares. For vintage, La Gaillarde in Saint Henrie and Mile End's The Annex let you dig for the perfect find. Once you've got it, show it off at a show. The city's music scene boasts a ton of venues, including Casa del Popolo (founded by the bassist of Godspeed! You Black Emperor) and Divan Orange, which is run cooperatively.



Every winter, thousands of revelers descend on the Place des Festivals for the culture-packed Montréal en Lumière.

FREDÉRIQUE MÉNARD AUBIN

There are great yearly events, too, such as the Montréal Jazz Fest, going down from June 28 through July 8. This year, the city is also celebrating its 375th anniversary with programming around art, fashion, and history running through September. If you're interested in a winter hang, Chantal Martineau, a native of the city and author of *How the Gringos Stole Tequila: The Modern Age of Mexico's Most Traditional Spirit*, has her favorite: Montréal en Lumière. "It's a winter festival that literally lights up the city and also has art, music, dance, and food events," says Martineau. "It's basically an excuse to get people out of the house when it's colder than a witch's teat."



The Montreal-style bagels at St-Viateur: smaller, denser, and sweeter than their Big Apple cousins.

DAVID DE STEFANO

Whether your build-your-own Montreal adventure takes you to every restaurant and bar or just sees you soaking in a boat spa, even a long weekend in the city can make you feel like you've gotten far, far away. It might not be France, but it feels as rich as foie gras.

How to get there



Amtrak is \$69 each way; flights will run you just under \$200. Once you arrive, the Métro gives you a super-simple and cheap means of getting around.

Where to stay

The Le Plateau and Mont Royal neighborhoods offer cheap Airbnbs; the former is pretty, arty, and quiet, with many shops and places to eat and drink. For easier access to Montreal bagels, go for Mile End. If you're looking for the hotel experience, Sofitel on Rue Sherbrooke comes highly recommended.

Where to eat

Sophie Sucree provides excellent vegan pastries and treats; try their pain au chocolat. The Drogheria Fine window delivers a \$5 serving of delicious gnocchi. Au Pied au Cochon will provide you with hearty Québécois fare.

Where to go/What to see

Mont Royal, the hill that is the city's namesake, is a popular hike for all ages — no special footwear needed. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts offers wonderful exhibits, such as a recent retrospective on Robert Mapplethorpe's career. The Old City is where you'll get that distinctly European vibe, with architecture and curving, narrow streets that recall Paris.