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# The Best Full-Day Tours



# The Best in One Day



Previous page: Stained glass windows inside the Oratoire St-Joseph.



**T**ackling the major attractions of Montréal in one day may seem daunting, but follow the tour below and you'll be weaving your way through the bilingual boulevards of the city with surprising efficiency. Don't forget to slow down once in a while, or you'll miss the little street-side occurrences that make the city so enchanting—like the wafting aroma of freshly baked bagels from St-Viateur or the sounds of a saxophone busker on Rue Ste-Catherine. **START:** Take the **Métro to the Peel or Guy-Concordia station and walk along rue Sherbrooke ouest to the Musée des Beaux Arts.**

**1 ★★★ Musée des Beaux Arts.**

Opened in 1912, the renowned Musée des Beaux Arts is home to more than 30,000 works ranging in style from French Impressionism to 20th-century modernism to contemporary Canadian. The newer Jean-Nöel Desmarais Pavilion, designed by noted Montréal architect Moshe Safdie, contains the bulk of the museum's collection of 12th- to 19th-century art—painted, sculpted, or sketched by such names as Brueghel, Renoir, Monet, Picasso, and Cezanne. Though the original building is home to incredible pieces, you're best off spending the majority of your visit in this modern addition. ⌚ **2 hr.** **Avoid coming here on the weekends.** 1379–1380 rue Sherbrooke ouest. ☎ 514/285-2000. [www.mmfa.qc.ca](http://www.mmfa.qc.ca). Free admission to permanent collection. Temporary exhibitions: C\$15 adults, C\$7.50 for seniors and students, C\$30

for families (1 adult, 3 kids under 16; or 2 adults and 2 kids under 16), free for kids 12 and under. Tues 11am–5pm, Wed–Fri 11am–9pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5pm. Ticket counter closes 30 min. before museum closes. Métro: Peel or Guy-Concordia.

The prices and ambience at the tiny, eclectic **2 Architecture Café** reflect its status as one of the few student-run cafes at McGill University. Students bring their own mugs (there are paper cups for the unprepared) to this cozy little nook, where you can get a fresh cup of surprisingly tasty joe for C50¢ and other cafe fare (various pastries, scones) while kicking back on almost-antique furniture. 815 rue Sherbrooke ouest (in basement of McDonald-Harrington building). [www.arch.mcgill.ca/asa/archcafe.html](http://www.arch.mcgill.ca/asa/archcafe.html). \$.

*Montréal's Musée des Beaux Arts is home to over 30,000 works.*







*Sculpture at the Museum Contemporain.*

**3 McGill University/Redpath Museum.** Prestigious McGill University, home to over 30,000 undergrads and graduate students, was born when, in 1813, Scottish merchant James McGill bequeathed the land it sits on for the creation of a “Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning.” Today the campus is a small green oasis among the austere office buildings and neon-lit malls that pervade downtown Montréal. Walk the campus’s winding paths to admire its interesting collection of architectural styles—from the

*Artifact from the Egyptian collection at the Redpath Museum.*



modern Lorne Trottier building to the historic Arts Building. Also nestled inside the campus is the small, but noteworthy, Redpath Museum. Housed in a grand, 19th-century building, the museum is home to an intriguing Egyptian collection (second-largest in Canada) and a slew of fossils that draw lots of local elementary school kids on field trips. ⌚ **30 min.** *Rue Sherbrooke and Rue McGill College.* [www.mcgill.ca](http://www.mcgill.ca). *Open daily. Free admission to museum. Museum open Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sun 1–5pm. Métro: McGill.*

**4 ★★ Musée d’Art Contemporain de Montréal.** The Canadian equivalent of New York’s MoMa displays modern works of every conceivable style, from the 1940s to the present day. Though most of the permanent collection’s works are the products of Québécois artists, there’s also a fair amount of famous international names (such as Ansel Adams and Vik Muniz) to be found on the placards next to the paintings, sculptures, and photographs.

Because new exhibitions arrive every few months, take advantage of the guided tours (Wed at 6:30pm and Sat–Sun at 1pm and 3pm) to

get acquainted with the newest works.

⌚ **1½ hr.** *185 rue Ste-Catherine ouest.*

☎ **514/847-6226.**

[www.macm.org](http://www.macm.org).

*Admission (includes guided tour) C\$8*

*adults, C\$6 seniors,*

*C\$4 students, free for kids under 12, C\$16*

*for families; free*

*Wed 6–9pm. Open*

*Tues–Sun 11am–*

*6pm (until 9pm*

*Wed); open Mon*

*June 20–Sept 10.*

*Métro: Place des Arts.*

**5 ★★★ Basilique Notre Dame.**

James O'Donnell, architect of this immense Catholic basilica (it can hold 4,000 worshippers), became its first parishioner though he was a Protestant when he began working on it. His creation (finished in 1824) was so breathtaking and moving that once it was completed, he quickly converted. While visitors may not be motivated to get baptized after their visit, they are usually taken aback by its sheer beauty. The ethereal lighting, gilded adornments and striking wooden altar are enough to warrant a good helping of "ooohs" and "aaaahs" from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The appreciation continues for the basilica's light shows, which are set to music and make for an experience that's quite a bit more exciting than the usual Sunday service. 🕒 **30 min.** **110 rue Notre-Dame ouest.** ☎ **514/842-2925.** **Admission for basilica C\$4 adults, C\$2 ages 7–17, free for those attending services. Light show C\$10 adults, C\$9 seniors, C\$5 ages 7–17, free for kids ages 6 and under. Open Mon–Fri 8am–4:30pm, Sat 8am–4:15pm, Sun 12:30–4:15pm. Guided tours in English and French daily 9am–4pm. Call for light show times. Métro: Place d'Armes.**

Maple syrup is synonymous with the Laurentian forest outside Montréal,



*Locals love to hang out at Vieux-Port on sunny days.*

and you can shop for excellent maple syrups, spreads, and candles while you take a breather at **6 Les Delices de l'Erable.** In addition to the usual cafe fare, this branch of a small chain of shop/cafes serves gelato. A plus: Curious customers can peer into the kitchen through a large window, tucked in the back of the cafe, and watch the cooks manipulate maple into its various forms. **84 rue St-Paul est.** ☎ **514/765-3456.** **Métro: Place d'Armes.** \$.

*The breathtaking interior of the Basilique Notre Dame.*



**7 ★★★ kids Vieux-Port.** The city's Old Port catapulted Montréal's commercial and economic status over the last 200 years, but was a bit dreary until it got a face-lift in the early 1990s. Now, the converted waterfront, known as the Quays, is a playground for in-line skaters, cyclists, and couples out for a stroll. Bike rentals start at C\$9.50 an hour (Conveyors Quay-Alexandra entrance; ☎ 514/289-9927). Quadricycles for couples and families are also available for C\$4.35 to C\$5 an hour (Jacques Cartier Quay; ☎ 514/849-9953). Any one with sore feet can opt for the tram that scoots back and forth the length of the Old Port or for a relaxing daytime cruise on the St. Lawrence. By the end of the day most of the activity will have died down. Enjoy a meal in one of the restaurants, or head to the IMAX theater off Quai King Edward (p 37, bullet **6**) for a film. ⌚ 1 hr. **Information Center:** 333 rue de la Commune ouest (at Rue McGill). ☎ 514/496-7678. [www.quaysoftheoldport.com](http://www.quaysoftheoldport.com). **Tram day pass** C\$7 adults, C\$5.50 seniors, C\$5.50 teenagers 13–17, C\$5 children 12 and under, C\$20 family. **Métro:** Champ-de-Mars, Place d'Armes, or Square Victoria.

**8 ★ Hôtel de Ville.** The mayor of Montréal spends enough hours locked in his office in this impressive French Empire–style building that he probably only gets to enjoy the exterior's wonderfully lit details during his lunch break. If you arrive before it closes, visit the ornate Hall of Honour and marvel at the impressive French chandeliers and Italian marble. But it's after dark that the 19th-century city hall (restored after a fire in the early 1900s to resemble the Hôtel de Ville in Tours, France) is truly a sight. It's then that dramatic lighting drapes the Hôtel de Ville's exterior in soft hues, accentuating every nook and cranny of its



*The impressive Hôtel de Ville, overlooking Place Jacques Cartier, is especially picturesque at night.*

extraordinary architecture. Easily one of the most photogenic sites in Old Montréal. ⌚ 30 min. 275 rue Notre-Dame. ☎ 514/872-3355. **Free admission.** Daily 8:30am–4:30pm. **Métro:** Champ-de-Mars.

*The Marché Bonsecours dominates the skyline of Vieux-Montréal. See p 59.*



# The Best in Two Days





**N**ow that the big-name sights have been crossed off the list, it's time to stray from the downtown area. The northwest reaches of the city are home to one of the world's best and biggest gardens, and to Olympic Park—a financial folly built for the 1976 Summer Olympics that nevertheless gifted Montréal with the infrastructure for some medal-worthy attractions. **START: Viau Métro Station.**



*Biodôme and Stade Olympique were both built for the 1976 Summer Olympics and are now two of the top attractions in the city.*

**1 ★★★ Kids Biodôme de Montréal.**

Few places in the world can boast having more than 4,000 creatures and 5,000 species of flora in four completely separate ecosystems under the same roof. But that's exactly the case at the one-of-a-kind Biodôme, originally built as the velodrome for the 1976 Olympic Summer Games. The eco-friendly attraction is home to four distinct biomes: the familiar Laurentian forest, a marine system modeled after the St. Lawrence river, a tropical rain-forest, and a polar environment. Each biome is constructed so that most of the plants and animals (including many endangered species) found within are growing, crawling, or running in their respective environments.

2 hr. 4777 av. Pierre-de-Coubertin (next to Olympic Stadium). 514/868-3000. [www.biodome.qc.ca](http://www.biodome.qc.ca). Admission C\$13 adults, C\$9.50 seniors and students, C\$6.50 kids 5–17,

free for kids under 5. Discount combination tickets available for Jardin Botanique, Insectarium, Stade Olympique, and Biodôme. Daily 9am–5pm (until 6pm in late June, July–Aug). Closed most Mon Jan–Feb and Sept–Dec. Métro: Viau.

*Penguins are just one of the many species of animal that call the Biodôme home.*





### Travel Tip

Be sure to take advantage of the free shuttle bus that stops at Stade Olympique, the Biodôme, and the Jardin Botanique. It's essential in summer, when the mercury can rise to blistering temps. Schedules are available at all of the participating attractions.

**2 ★★ Jardin Botanique.** It's time to stop and smell the flowers. Just over 75 years old, Montréal's sprawling 75-hectare (185-acre) Botanical Garden is home to 22,000 species of plants. Instead of using all that space for random flower arrangements and shrubby sculptures, here you'll find individual greenhouses and cultural gardens (especially notable are the Chinese Garden—the largest outside of Asia—and the Japanese Garden)

and the Insectarium (p. 36, bullet **2**), where kids will have a blast shrieking and giggling at the creepy, crawly displays. Covering the major sights here in less than 2 hours is an ambitious undertaking, so take advantage of the tram that runs around the entire garden—it's well worth the small fee. The Jardin Botanique, despite the city's frigid winters, is open year-round, and you'll always discover something blooming. ⌚ 1½ hr. 4101 rue Sherbrooke est. ☎ 514/872-1400. [www.ville.Montreal.qc.ca/jardin](http://www.ville.Montreal.qc.ca/jardin). Admission C\$9.75–C\$13 adults, C\$7.25–C\$9.50 seniors and students, C\$4.75–C\$6.50 ages 5–17, free for kids under 5. Combination tickets available for Jardin Botanique, Insectarium, Stade Olympique, and Biodôme. Daily 9am–5pm (until 6pm in summer, until 9pm mid-Sept to Oct). Closed Mon early Jan to mid-May. Métro: Pie-IX.

*Montréal's botanical gardens are among the largest and most beautiful in the world.*





*The Olympic Tower offers spectacular views of the city.*

**3 Stade Olympique.** Compared to modern stadiums, The “Big O” is undeniably grotesque. Built for the 1976 Olympics, it became the home of Major League Baseball’s expansion Montréal Expos, until they packed up and moved to Washington, D.C., in 2005. The stadium is now home to exhibitions, trade shows, and the occasional concert. An observation deck sits atop the slanted Olympic Tower (you ride a funicular to the top) on the stadium’s roof and offers some of the best panoramas of the city. Visitors looking to cool off can dive off the platforms in the complex’s natatorium or swim in its six pools. 🕒 **45 min.** **4141 av. Pierre-de-Coubertin (bd. Pie IX).** ☎ **514/252-4737.** **www.rio.gouv.qc.ca.** **Admission C\$13 adults, C\$10 seniors and students, and C\$7 kids.** **Discount combination**

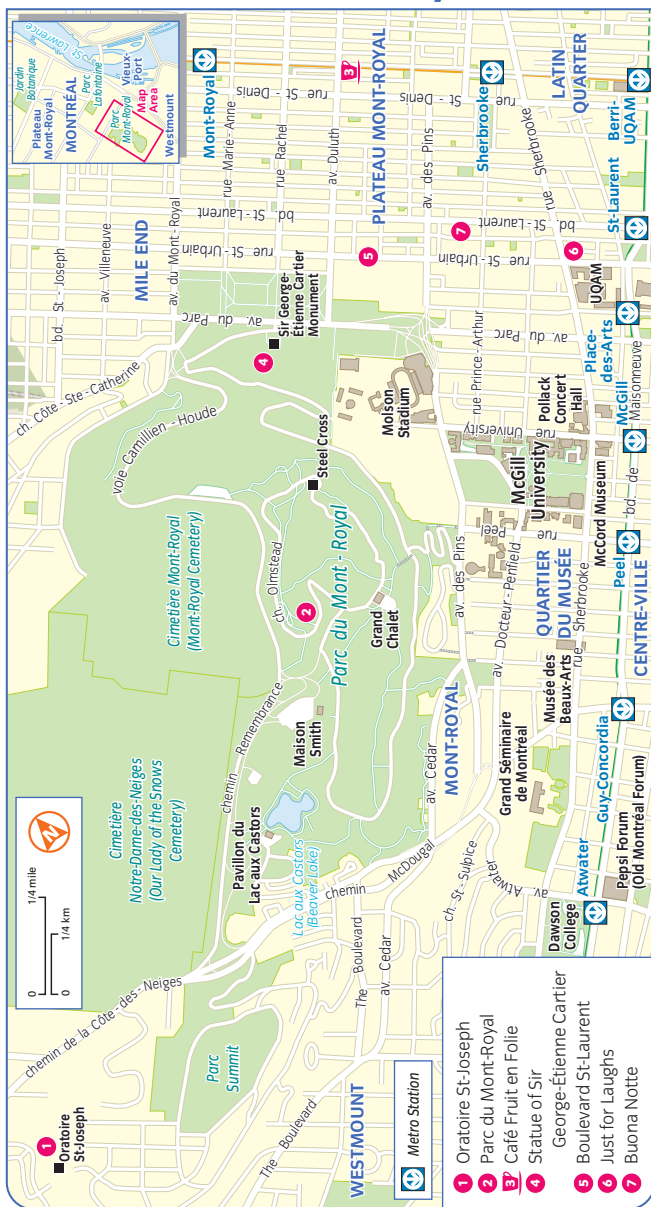
*tickets available for Jardin Botanique, Insectarium, Stade Olympique, and Biodôme. Tour of stadium. Public swim sessions daily (call for exact schedule). Tower open mid-June to early Sept Mon noon–6pm, Tues–Thurs 10am–9pm, Fri–Sat 10am–11pm; early Sept to mid-Jan and mid-Feb to mid-June daily noon–6pm. Closed mid-Jan to mid-Feb. Métro: Pie-IX.*

The Montréal version of the bagel is made quite differently than its more famous New York rival (smaller, denser and boiled in honeyed water before it’s fired up in the oven). The distinctly textured version turned out by **4 Fairmount bagels** is well worth a trek. **74 Fairmount ouest.** ☎ **514/272-0667.** **www.fairmountbagel.com.** \$.

### **5 Spectrum de Montréal.**

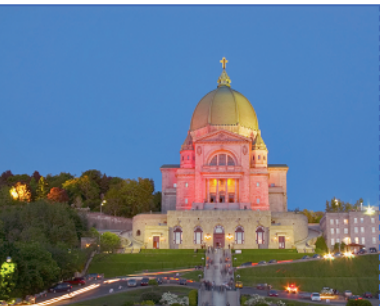
A truly special way to top off your day is to unwind at a show in downtown’s Spectrum de Montréal, a major blip on the city’s cultural radar. This celebrated venue, housed in a converted movie theater, hosts everything from International Jazz Festival performances and local music groups to some of the biggest names in rock ‘n’ roll. People who’ve played here in the past include Miles Davis, Pavement, The Fugees, Massive Attack, and Peter Dinklage. And if you show up when the city’s famous film festival is in full swing, you’ll find the section of Rue St. Catherine around the Spectrum closed off to create a free open-air theater. For more details on the theater, see p 118. 🕒 **2 hr.** **318 rue Ste-Catherine.** ☎ **514/861-5851.** **www.spectrumdeMontreal.ca/spectrum.** **Métro: Place des Arts.**

# The Best in Three Days





**With two days of heavy sightseeing done, you deserve to take it easy and enjoy the more relaxing side of Montréal.**

People-watching and soaking up the outdoor spirit of the city are as rewarding experiences as visiting the city's museums and cultural institutions. On this third day of exploration, take advantage of the opportunity to see how the city got its name—and its reputation as the most vibrant metropolis in Canada. **START: Côte-des-Neiges Métro station.**



*Religious pilgrims flock to the Oratoire St-Joseph in search of miraculous healing.*

**1 ★ Oratoire St-Joseph.** This enormous copper-domed structure is one of the most recognizable in Montréal, although you'll need to trek to the northern side of Mont-Royal to see it. The basilica, completed in 1967, honors the patron saint of Canada, St. Joseph. On the premises is a museum detailing the life of Brother André, a lay brother in the Holy Cross order and legendary healer, who first built a shrine to St. Joseph on this site in 1904. Many still visit Brother André's burial site on the basilica grounds in the hopes of a miracle healing. Others admire the gargantuan dome atop the Italian Renaissance building, listen to the 56-bell carillon (originally cast for the Eiffel Tower), or climb the 100 steps (some religious pilgrims do it on their knees!) leading to the highest point in the city to pray at the shrine. You can explore on your own, or you can take a 90-minute guided tour (in one of several languages) daily in summer and on weekends in fall.

 **1 hr.** 3800 Chemin Queen Mary (north side of Mont-Royal).  514/733-8211. [www.saint-joseph.org](http://www.saint-joseph.org). Admission and tours are free, but donations are requested. Crypt open daily 6am–10:30pm; museum daily 10am–5pm. Tours 10am and 2pm daily June–Aug, Sat–Sun only, Sept–Oct. Métro: Côte-des-Neiges.

**2 ★★ Parc du Mont-Royal.** Renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903), after designing New York's Central Park, left his mark on Montréal by creating the Parc du Mont-Royal (Royal Mountain Park) in 1876. More hill than mountain, Mont-Royal, the 232m (761-ft.) peak for which the city is named, provides Montréalers with a slew of facilities for recreational activities. Hikers can trek

*The view from the top of Mont-Royal is one of the best in the city.*



through the miles of paths that snake through the park, sunbathers and Frisbee tossers can hang out near man-made Beaver Lake in summer, visitors in winter can opt for skiing or tobogganing on the mountain's slope, and shutterbugs can snap panoramic photos from the Chalet du Mont-Royal's terrace (at the crest of the hill) year-round. Before tackling Mont-Royal on your own, head to the park's information center, **Maison Smith**, 1260 chemin Remembrance, for specialized maps and/or books. For full details on the park's offerings, see p 49. 🕒 **2 hr. Entrance on av. des Pins and rue Peel.** ☎ **514/843-8240.** [www.lemontroyal.com](http://www.lemontroyal.com). **Park grounds open 24 hr.; information center Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm.** **Métro: Peel for the south side, Côtes-de-Neiges for the north.**

A relaxed walk in the Parc du Mont-Royal can quickly turn into a tiring one if you're running on empty. Refuel at the

**3 Café Fruit en Folie**, a popular breakfast nook in the Plateau. Traditional recipes are given a unique, fruity twist here, with amazing results. Each breakfast plate comes with enough fruit to

satisfy your fiber needs for a week. It also serves American standards for lunch. **3817 rue St-Denis.** ☎ **514/840-9011.** \$\$.

**4 Statue of Sir George-Étienne Cartier.** Just north of the park's gazebo, set on a large swath of grass on the eastern flank of the park, is the statue of Sir George-Étienne Cartier (1814–1873), a leading French-Canadian statesman known as the Father of Confederation. The best times to relax here are Sundays in the spring and summer when the statue sits in the center of an enormous percussion jam. During the event, dubbed “Tam Tams” by students and locals, the area around the statue fills with hundreds of sunbathers, hackey-sackers, jewelry vendors, LARPer (live-action role-playing), hippies and, most notably, bongo drummers. Mr. Cartier passively looks on as one main “conductor” leads a horde of pounding participants. If you have a set of bongos, congas, an empty plastic tub, or anything that makes a loud banging sound, you're more than qualified to join in the cacophony.

🕒 **1 hr. Av. du Parc (near av. Duluth).**



*Statue of Sir George-Étienne Cartier.*





*Musicians play at Montréal's world-famous International Jazz Festival.*

### 5 ★★★ Boulevard St-Laurent.

Also known as “The Main,” St-Laurent continuously hums with off-beat boutiques and trendy restaurants packing the sidewalks with shoppers, students, and sightseers. Spend some time strolling, snacking, and people-watching your way up the boulevard. It becomes a 20-something’s playground when the sun goes down—the dive bars and dance clubs that

line the bustling street are immensely popular with the city’s ubiquitous college undergrads. **Tip:** For one weekend in the spring, a long stretch of St-Laurent north of Rue Sherbrooke is closed off for what locals call “Main Madness,” a massive street fair during which store owners and bartenders move their racks and tables out onto the asphalt. **Bd. St-Laurent, north of Rue Sherbrooke.**

🕒 1½ hr. Métro: St-Laurent.

*The spectacular International Fireworks Competition is held each summer in Montréal.*



## City of Festivals

Few cities in North America can rival Montréal when it comes to celebrations lasting more than a couple of days. Throughout the year, the city is home to some of the biggest and most heralded festivals in the world. Attending one of them can make for a very memorable vacation. A small year-round sampling includes **Mutek** (electronica), **Francofolie** (French-language music), **Beer Tasting Festival**, **International Fireworks Competition**, **Montréal Bike Fest**, and **Image & Nation** (gay/lesbian film). The summer months are when the city hits full festival stride—the most renowned occurring within just weeks of each other. Most notably, there’s the **International Jazz Festival** (June–July), **Juste Pour Rire Comedy Festival** (July), and **World Film Festival** (late Aug–early Sept). Booking a hotel room during one of these major events can be impossibly difficult, so make sure you try months in advance or you’ll have to settle for some roadside motel in Vermont. For dates and more information on all of these shindigs, see “Festivals & Special Events,” on p 144.

**6 Just for Laughs.** Boulevard St-Laurent, just below Rue Sherbrooke, becomes chuckle-central in the balmy month of July. The Juste Pour Rire Comedy Festival's main performance area also doubles as a venerable comedy museum. Gilbert Rozon founded this homage to comedy's legends in 1993, just as the festival was garnering great acclaim and popularity. Various exhibitions are held here throughout the year, with displays celebrating cartoonists, comedians, and magic and comedy histories. Call for ticket reservations ahead of time; the museum usually only allows groups into the permanent International Humour Hall of Fame Exhibition, but you may be able to gain admission if you call and convince them otherwise (and you should). In any event, you can always catch a show or concert in one of the spaces within the building. 🕒 1 hr. 2111 bd. St-Laurent. ☎ 514/845-4000. Tickets ☎ 514/845-5105. <http://musee.hahaha.com>. Admission C\$9 adults, C\$5 kids ages 4 to 11. Métro: St-Laurent.

**7 Buona Notte.** Finish off your day in Buona Notte, Montréal's glitziest restaurant. As you get to the corner of Boulevard St-Laurent



*The Just Pour Rire Comedy Festival is held in several venues across the city, including the Just For Laughs comedy club.*

and rue Milton, you'll trip over the expensive, pimped-out cars parked outside only to find more bodywork on the eerily beautiful people inside. If you can avert your eyes, a delicious meal here will momentarily distract you from the celebrities and models mingling and dining on *penne alla vodka*. 3518 bd. St-Laurent. ☎ 514/848-0644. Métro: St-Laurent. See p 91 for details on the restaurant. ●

*The Buona Notte restaurant is where Montréal's beautiful people congregate for dinner and cocktails.*

