

The Best of Montréal & Québec City

If Montréal had a tagline, it could well be “Any excuse for a party.” An enormous *joie de vivre* pervades the way the city presents itself, organizes itself, and goes about its business. The calendar is packed with festivals and events that bring out natives and guests from around the world.

To boot, a billion-dollar building boom has filled most of the vacant downtown lots. Over the past 40 years, and especially in the most recent 15, Montréal has become a modern city in every regard, with skyscrapers in unexpected shapes and bright, noncorporate colors; a beautifully preserved historic district; and a large area of artists’ lofts, boutiques, cafes, and miles of restaurants.

American and European travelers will likely find Montréal an urban near-paradise. The subway system, called the Métro, is modern and swift. Streets are safe. Montréal’s best restaurants are the equals of their south-of-the-border compatriots in every way.

Québec City, more traditional and more French, is replacing its former conservatism with an ever-expanding aura of sophistication. With its impressive location above the St. Lawrence River and its virtually unblemished Old Town filled with 18th- and 19th-century houses, this city looks like France and is almost impossibly romantic—it’s unlike any other city in North America.

1 UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

MONTREAL

- **Listen to Jazz:** In downtown, Old Town, the Plateau, and all over, this is a favorite pastime of locals and visitors, especially in late June and early July during the renowned Festival International de Jazz. See p. 29.
- **Savor Top-Notch Cuisine at Affordable Prices:** Experience all of French cuisine’s interpretations—traditional, haute, bistro, Québécois—the way the locals do: by ordering the *table d’hôte* specials. You’ll get to indulge in three or more courses for a fixed price that is only slightly more than the cost of a single a la carte main course. Most full-service restaurants offer the option, if only at midday. See p. 81 for more information.

- **Explore Vieux-Montréal:** The old quarter has an overwhelmingly European flavor. Wander Place Jacques-Cartier, the district’s most popular outdoor square; explore museums and the churches’ stunning architecture; stroll or bike along the revitalized waterfront. See chapter 8 for more information, as well as the walking tour of Vieux-Montréal on p. 112.

QUEBEC CITY

- **Linger at an Outdoor Cafe:** Tables are set out at Place d’Armes in Upper Town, in the Quartier du Petit-Champlain in Lower Town, and along the Grande-Allée—a quality-of-life invention the French and their Québécois

Moments Romantic Québec City

"Romance" could be Québec City's middle name. Every narrow street, leafy plaza, sidewalk cafe, horse-drawn *calèche*, pitched roof, and church spire breathes recollections of France's provincial towns. But to get the full Québec City treatment, amble those streets under a full moon and find a bench on **Terrasse Dufferin**, the promenade alongside the Château Frontenac in Upper Town. The river below will be the color of liquid mercury in the moon's glow, and there will be more stars than you can ever remember seeing. Streaks of comets and music faintly heard from the *boîtes* in Lower Town are possibilities. Romance is a certainty.

brethren have perfected. See chapter 15 for more information.

- **Soak Up the Blossoming Lower Town:** Once all but abandoned to the grubby edges of the shipping industry, the riverside neighborhood of Basse-Ville/Vieux-Port has been reborn, with antiques shops, bistros, and boutique hotels filling its rehabilitated 18th- and 19th-century buildings. See chapter

16 for more information, as well as the walking tour of Lower Town on p. 255.

- **Relax in Battlefields Park (Parc des Champs-de-Bataille):** This beautifully situated green space overlooks the St. Lawrence River. It's particularly lively on weekends, when families and lovers come to picnic and play. See p. 239 for more information.

2 THE BEST SPLURGE HOTELS

MONTREAL

- **Hôtel Le St-James**, 355 rue St-Jacques ouest (☎ 866/841-3111): Setting the standard against which any boutique hotel in town must measure itself, this former 19th-century bank in Vieux-Montréal lets no luxurious detail escape its attention. From its opulent main hall to the sybaritic subterranean spa to its immaculately trained staff, Hôtel Le St-James provides an experience that may well be the highlight of your visit. See p. 76.
- **W Montréal**, 901 rue Square-Victoria (☎ 888/627-7081): If you qualify as hip, aware, and on the fast track, waste no time booking a suite at this local branch of the spreading chain. It won't hurt if your platinum card is paid up and you don't need much sleep. There

are three bars and lounges, a hyperchic restaurant, and a clientele composed of knockouts of both sexes. See p. 77.

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- **Auberge Saint-Antoine**, 8 rue St-Antoine (☎ 888/692-2211): Sure, there's the Château Frontenac, looming up above, the very symbol of the city. But for a more intimate, less overwhelming visit, stay in Basse-Ville, or Lower Town. This auberge started as a stylish but largely unexceptional B&B and has grown in calculated phases into one of Québec's most desirable lodgings, with a chic lounge and a top restaurant to boot. See p. 215.
- **Dominion 1912**, 126 rue St-Pierre (☎ 888/833-5253): Also a key player in the redevelopment of the once dreary

House Swapping

House swapping is becoming a more popular and viable means of travel; you stay in their place, they stay in yours, and you both get an authentic and personal view of the area—the opposite experience of the escapist retreat that many hotels offer. Try **Homelink International** (www.homelink.org), the largest and oldest home-swapping organization, with more than 13,000 listings worldwide; it costs \$75 for a yearly membership. **InterVac.com** (\$69 for more than 20,000 listings) is also reliable. Many travelers find great housing swaps on Craigslist (www.craigslist.org) too, though the offerings are not vetted or vouched for, so swap there at your own risk.

Basse-Ville/Vieux-Port, the Dominion has rooms so large and bedding so cozily enveloping that you may not

want to go out. Do, though, at least for the fireplace, croissants, and café au lait in the lobby. See p. 216.

3 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS

MONTREAL

- **Auberge Bonaparte**, 447 rue St-François-Xavier (☎ 514/844-1448): When the long-established restaurant on the ground floor, Bonaparte (p. 92), was accorded a massive rehab and expansion, its owners built the comely inn upstairs. Rooms are simply furnished, but they're clean and roomy enough, and a rooftop terrace overlooks Vieux-Montréal's Basilique Notre-Dame. See p. 80.
- **Auberge Les Passants du Sans Soucy**, 171 rue St-Paul ouest (☎ 514/842-2634): Just around the corner from Bonaparte, this charming little B&B helped pioneer Vieux-Montréal's recovery to its current status as the must-see quarter of the city. Fireplaces and jet tubs are standard in all nine bedrooms. See p. 80.

QUEBEC CITY

- **Hôtel Sainte-Anne**, 32 rue Ste-Anne (☎ 877/222-9422): Practically in the shadow of the Château Frontenac (p. 210), this Euro-design hotel occupies a row house in the middle of Upper Town's most touristy district. Rooms are stripped to the minimum, but as equipped as can be reasonably expected at these relatively gentle prices. See p. 215.
- **Hôtel Champlain**, 115 rue Ste-Anne (☎ 800/567-2106): Even the smallest rooms boast silk curtains, king or queen beds, and 300-thread-count sheets. A self-serve espresso machine by the front desk ensures free cappuccinos at any time of day or night. See p. 214.

4 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE DINING EXPERIENCES

MONTREAL

- **Nuances**, 1 av. du Casino, in the Casino de Montréal (☎ 514/392-2708): This

gourmet resto at the top of the city's casino got an impressive face-lift in 2007 that made the decor as contemporary

and elegant as the food—all creamy walls and pale leather banquettes. It's a room with real star power. See p. 105.

- **Toqué!**, 900 Place Jean-Paul-Riopelle (☎ 514/499-2084): Superstar chef/owner Norman Laprise has been thrilling Montréal gourmands for years. In dishes of startling innovation, he brings together diverse ingredients that have rarely appeared before on restaurant plates. There's little point in describing individual dishes, for he replaces them with some new invention before any of his entrees achieve signature status. See p. 90.

QUÉBEC CITY

- **Initiale**, 54 rue St-Pierre (☎ 418/694-1818): From its gracious tone and subdued lighting to its carefully paced multicourse menus, Initiale exudes silky polish from greeting to adieu. You will dine gloriously. See p. 225.
- **Laurie Raphaël**, 117 rue Dalhousie (☎ 418/692-4555): Dazzling. Given the growing local competition, the owners transformed their setting and shook up the menu. Service is spot-on and the food creative and artfully presented. See p. 228.

5 THE BEST MUSEUMS

MONTREAL

- **Musée des Beaux-Arts**, 1379–80 rue Sherbrooke ouest (☎ 514/285-2000): Canada's first museum devoted exclusively to the visual arts started out in 1912 in a neoclassical space on Sherbrooke's north side. A newer pavilion on the opposite side is now connected by an underground series of galleries. Temporary exhibits are strong, and the permanent collection is largely devoted to international contemporary art and Canadian works. See p. 108.
- **Pointe-à-Callière (Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History)**, 350 Place Royale (☎ 514/872-9150): A first visit to Montréal might best begin here. This strikingly modernistic structure at the edge of Vieux-Montréal marks the spot where the first European settlement put down roots in the city. It

stands atop extensive excavations that unearthed not only remains of the French newcomers, but also of the native bands that preceded them. On the self-guided tour, you'll wind your way through the subterranean complex. See p. 113.

QUÉBEC CITY

- **Musée de la Civilisation**, 85 rue Dalhousie (☎ 418/643-2158): Here is that rarity among museums: a collection of cleverly mounted temporary and permanent exhibitions that both children and adults find engrossing, without talking down or metaphysical maunderings. Make sure to make time for "*People of Québec . . . Then and Now*," a permanent exhibit that is a sprawling examination of Québec history. See p. 234.

6 THE BEST OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

MONTREAL

- **Traverse the Lachine Canal**: First constructed to detour around the rapids of the same name, Lachine fell into disuse after the St. Lawrence Seaway was built.

Over the last few years, however, it has been renovated to serve as a recreational resource. It connects the Vieux-Port with Atwater Market, a little more than a mile away. You can explore the canal

and its surroundings by guided boat tour or on foot—or you can rent a bicycle or in-line skates at Vieux-Port. See chapter 8.

- **Bike the City:** Montréalers' enthusiasm for bicycling has provided the impetus for the ongoing development of bicycle paths that wind through downtown areas and out to the countryside. Cyclists are allowed to take their bikes onto designated Métro cars, and some taxis and buses sport special racks for them. Rentals are available from several outlets. See "Outdoor Activities" in chapter 8.

QUEBEC CITY

- **Take a Walking Tour:** Combine immersion in Québec's rich history with a good stretch of the legs among the battlements and along the ancient

city's cobblestoned streets. Use the walking tours in chapter 17 or go on a group tour; information about meeting points, times, and routes is at the information center at Terrace Dufferin, opposite Château Frontenac.

- **Visit Montmorency Falls:** A 15-minute car or bus ride north of the city is this spectacular iron-tinged cascade—it's higher than Niagara Falls, as you will frequently be reminded. You can walk to the base and, if sufficiently motivated, to the top. You can also take a cable car to the other side. Incredibly, there's a footbridge, open to anyone brave-hearted enough to walk it, crossing directly over the plunging water. In summer, this is the site of an international fireworks festival. See "Montmorency Falls" in chapter 20.

7 THE BEST ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

MONTREAL

- **Visit the Biodôme de Montréal:** This is perhaps the city's most engaging attraction for children of any age. The Biodôme houses replications of four ecosystems: a Laurentian forest, the St. Lawrence marine system, a polar environment, and, most appealingly, a tropical rainforest. See p. 114.
- **Explore the Jardin Botanique and Insectarium:** Montréal's Botanical Garden features Chinese and Japanese gardens and greenhouses, while the Insectarium next door is home to praying mantises, tarantulas, a Butterfly House, and a gift shop that sells lollipops with scorpions inside. See p. 115.

QUEBEC CITY

- **Watch the Changing of the Guard:** La Citadelle is the fortress built by the British to repel an American invasion that never came. It's still an active military post, and the ceremonial changing of the guard and beating the retreat are colorful and don't take too much time. See p. 238.
- **Thrill to the Canyon Ste-Anne:** The massive canyon and its thundering Ste-Anne waterfalls feature footbridges that go directly across the water. This attraction is about a 45-minute drive from the city. See chapter 20.

8 THE BEST OF MONTREAL & QUÉBEC CITY ONLINE

There's lots of information on Montréal and Québec City on the Internet. Here are a few of our favorite resources:

- **Bonjour Québec** (www.tourisme.gouv.qc.ca): The official site of Québec province's government is a comprehensive

information bank about all things Québec. You'll find information about upcoming events and ongoing attractions, and you can search for hotels and reserve online.

- **Midnight Poutine** (www.midnightpoutine.ca): This terrific blog—with more than a dozen contributors—describes itself as “a personal ongoing account of the city’s happenings” and “a delicious high-fat source of rants, raves,

and musings. It provides the insight you never find in newspapers and the details and tangents that would never fit in a weekly.”

- **Hour** (www.hour.ca): *Hour* is a Montréal culture magazine that highlights local happenings. It's available in print and online, and includes entertainingly grumpy and often profane takes on current events. Restaurant and arts reviews are regularly updated.