

Things to do in Montreal

Underground City

Montreal's Underground City (French: La ville souterraine) is the set of underground city complexes in and around downtown. It is also known as the indoor city (ville intérieure), and is the largest underground complex in the world. The largest and best-known segment is located in the centre of downtown, delimited by the Peel and Place-des-Arts metro stations on the Green Line and the Lucien-L'Allier and Place-d'Armes stations on the Orange Line. With over 32 km of tunnels spread over an area of twelve square kilometers, the 60 residential and commercial complexes comprise 3.6 square kilometers of floor space, including 80% of all office space and 35% of all commercial space in downtown Montreal. Services include shopping malls, hotels, banks, offices, museums, universities, seven metro stations, two commuter train stations, a bus terminal and the Bell Centre hockey arena. There are more than 120 exterior access points to the underground city. Some 500,000 people use the underground city every day, especially to escape the traffic and/or Montreal's harsh winter or hot summer. Maps of the underground city and the metro can be obtained free of charge from all metro stations, and the network of buildings is usually indicated on maps of the downtown core. The Hyatt (connected to the Complex Des Jardins) is part of this system.

Vieux Montréal (Old Montreal)

Walkable from Hyatt or take Metro to Place d' Armes or Champ de Mars and walk towards the river. You can't miss it.

<http://vieux.montreal.qc.ca>

This is the original part of the city of Montreal which includes the Vieux-Port, its original trade port. This section of the city is quite walkable and contains many of its most historic buildings. Some of the houses there date back over 300 years and are among the oldest in North America. Walking around Old Montreal's cobblestone streets is truly a pleasure. You really can lose yourself and spend an entire day, or a romantic evening, looking in all the art galleries and shops; there seems to be a new one around every corner. While there, make sure to see:

Vieux Port (Old Port)

333 Rue de la Commune

Metro: Square Victoria, on the Orange Line, or the 55 bus

During all seasons, there is always something to do or see in the old-port! Restaurants galleries', shops, museums. This REALLY is a must for any visitors!

Fleuve St. Laurent:

One of the world's greatest rivers, the St. Lawrence gushes freshwater from the Great Lakes for 1247 kilometers (775 miles) to the Atlantic. It has been used for centuries for shipping into mainland North America. However, its usefulness fails to outshine its beauty. Near Kingston, the river is littered with many islands, aptly called the Thousand Islands. Affection for this region stretches back for thousands of years to Native Canadians who named it 'The Garden of the Great Spirit'.

The Basilique de Notre Dame:

116 rue Notre-Dame Ouest

In Vieux-Montreal, a few blocks south of Place-d'Armes metro station

Notre-Dame Basilica was opened in 1829, making it the largest religious edifice in North America at the time. The Sulpicians chose a Neo-Gothic style, and assigned the task to a Protestant architect from New York, James O'Donnell. He later converted to Roman Catholicism so that he could be buried beneath "his" church! The Basilica is without a doubt some of Montreal's most impressive architecture. If you must visit only one church in Montreal this is the one.

Chapelle de Notre Dame de Bon-Secours:

400 rue St-Paul est
Métro: Champ-de-Mars

Built as a shrine and place of prayer for the city's sailors and their families. The devotion of mariners to the church is manifest in the several ship models hanging from the ceiling inside. In addition to the ship models, a revered 16th-century 6-inch-high carving of the Madonna is once again on display. There's an excellent view of the harbor and the old quarter from the church's tower.

Marché Bonsecours:

350 rue St-Paul Est (St. Paul Street East)
(514) 872-7730

<http://www.marchebonsecours.qc.ca/>

Located near the foot of rue Gosford (Gosford St.) near the river quay

The Bonsecours Market is one Old Town's largest and most prominent buildings. Built in the 1840s, this building served as Montreal's main market. Yet when space was needed, this building has temporarily served as Montreal's City Hall and even the Parliament of Lower Canada. Today however, the Bonsecours Market is now home to trendy boutique stores and art galleries for Quebecois, First Nations, and other Canadian artists.

Pointe-à-Callière Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire (Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History)

350 rue Royale (At rue de la Commune)

Métro: Place d'Armes

www.pacmuseum.qc.ca

History buffs will enjoy this museum. Its exhibits include contents of unearched graves and other archeological goodies, complete with a section of Montreal's original fortification wall. Part of the building is even located on what was once Place Royale, a former market and the exact founding point of the city in 1642.

Place Jacques Cartier:

Bordered by rues Notre-Dame Est and de la Commune

The large public square at the heart of the old city. The square is lined with restaurants and cafes where you can sip wine and watch the passersby, or catch the show of a street performer or two.

Place D'Armes:

A few blocks south of Place d'Armes metro station

A square commemorating Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve's defense of the French settlement against the Iroquois in 1644. Today it is a rather peaceful square with lots of bus tourists taking photos of the Notre Dame across the street. North of the square is the Bank of Montreal Museum. Built in 1847, the building has an ancient Roman touch with a central dome and marble columns. The building houses a museum on the history of banking in Canada. Admission is free to the museum.

Hôtel de Ville (City Hall)
275 rue Notre-Dame (At the corner of rue Gosford)
514/872-3355
Métro: Champ-de-Mars

City Hall, finished in 1878, is relatively young by Vieux-Montréal standards. The French Second Empire design makes it look as though it was imported stone by stone from the mother country. Fifteen-minute guided tours are given throughout the day on weekdays from May through October.

Rue St. Paul:

The cobblestone street with the business heartbeat of Old Montreal is St. Paul Street. Lots and lots of shops (some very interesting art and cultural, and many souvenir places too,) restaurants and bakeries, a few hotels and B&B's and the magnificent Bonsecour Market. This view is from Place Jacques Cartier, which intersects St. Paul at the busiest part of the area, looking east with the dome of Bonsecour Market looming over the street scene.

Chateau Ramezay:
280 Notre-Dame street East
(514) 861-3708
<http://www.chateauramezay.qc.ca/eng/indexENG.htm>

Claude de Ramezay (1657-1724), originally from Champagne in France, and named Governor of Montreal had this house built in 1705. On the slight incline that leads to Notre Dame street, it was a venue for his official functions and home for his family of 16 children. The Governor's Gardens in the back are gorgeous!

Centre de Commerce Mondial (World Trade Center)
Corner of rues McGill and St-Jaques (Metro station : Square-Victoria)

The Centre de Commerce Mondial is a beautiful commercial building just inside Vieux-Montreal. It has a nice fountain, frequent art exhibits and a chunk of the Berlin wall, complete with colorful graffiti. It was given to Montreal for its 350th birthday.

Calèche (horse-drawn carriage)

Very touristy but still lots of fun! You can take a calèche tour of the Old Port of Montreal for either half an hour, or for a whole hour. The drivers will narrate the tour the entire time, giving background history of the neighborhood and the architecture.

Le Centre des Sciences de Montréal (Montreal Science Center)
King Edward Pier, Vieux-Port
514/496-4724
www.montrealsciencecentre.com
Métro: Square Victoria, Place d'Armes, or Champ-de-Mars

Focusing on science and technology, it employs a variety of interactive displays and a cinema, as well as a popular IMAX theater, to enlighten visitors about the life sciences, energy conservation, and 21st-century communications. With its extensive use of computers and electronic visual displays, it is no surprise that youngsters usually take to the exhibits more readily than their elders.

Other Venues

Oratoire St. Joseph (Saint Joseph's Oratory):
3800 chemin Queen Mary
<http://www.saint-joseph.org>

This huge basilica with a giant copper dome was built by Québec's Catholics to honor St. Joseph, patron saint of Canada. It came into being through the efforts of Brother André, a lay brother in the Holy Cross order who enjoyed a reputation as a healer. By the time he had built a small wooden chapel in 1904 near the site of the basilica, he was said to have performed hundreds of cures. His powers attracted supplicants from great distances, and Brother André performed his work until his death in 1937. Brother André's wooden chapel, with his tiny bedroom, is on the grounds and open to the public. Pilgrims, some ill, come to seek intercession from St. Joseph and Brother André and often climb the middle set of 100 steps on their knees. At 263m (863 ft.), the shrine is the highest point in Montréal.

Cathédrale-Basilique Marie-Reine-du-Monde (Mary Queen of the World Cathedral-Basilica)
Bd. René-Lévesque corner of rue Mansfield
514/866-1661
Métro: Bonaventure
Walkable from Hyatt

This Cathedral is a scaled-down homage to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Construction lasted from 1875 to 1894, its start delayed by the church's desire to place it not in Francophone east Montréal but in the heart of the Protestant Anglophone west. The resulting structure covers less than a quarter of the area of its Roman inspiration. Most impressive is the 76m-high (249-ft.) dome, about a third of the size of the original. The statues standing on the roofline represent patron saints of the region, providing a local touch.

Christ Church Cathedral
635 rue Ste-Catherine (at rue University)
Métro: McGill
www.montreal.anglican.org/cathedral

This Anglican cathedral, which is reflected in the shiny exterior of the postmodernist Tour de Cathedral office tower, stands in glorious Gothic contrast to the city's glassy downtown skyscrapers. Sometimes called the "floating cathedral" because of the many tiers of malls and corridors in the underground city beneath it, the building was completed in 1859.

Mont Royale (Mount Royal)

Mont Royal, or the Mountain as Montrealers call it, is the city's pleasure zone. Laid out in the 1870s on the hill that overlooks the city by the designer of Central Park in New York, offers the best views of the entire city. From its Chalet Lookout (where our Friday night dinner dance is happening), you can see up and down downtown and the surrounding area. Mont Royal has tons of trails for hikers and cyclists. The forests here are especially thick at times, and makes you wonder if you're actually near a city of a million people at all.

Parc Lafontaine (Lafontaine Park)
Rue Sherbrooke and av. Parc Lafontaine
Métro: Sherbrooke

The European-style park in Plateau Mont-Royal is one of the city's oldest. Illustrating the dual identities of the city's populace, half the park is landscaped in the formal French manner, the other in the more casual English style. Among its several bodies of water is a lake used for paddle boating in summer and ice-skating in winter. Snowshoe and cross-country trails wind through the trees and there are tennis courts on the premises.

Jardin Botanique (Botanical Gardens)

4101 rue Sherbrooke est (Opposite Olympic Stadium)

Métro: Pie-IX, then walk up the hill to the gardens; or take the free shuttle bus from Olympic Park (Métro: Viau)

www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin

The Botanical Garden is spread across 75 hectares (185 acres) and has grown to include 22,000 varieties of plants in 31 specialized segments, ensuring something beautiful and fragrant for visitors year-round. Ten large conservatory greenhouses shelter tropical and desert plants, plus bonsai and penjing (Chinese bonsai), from the Canadian winter. Inaugurated in summer 1991, the 2.5-hectare (6 1/4-acre) Chinese Garden, a joint project of Montréal and Shanghai, is the largest Chinese garden ever built outside Asia. Meant to evoke the 14th- to 17th-century era of the Ming Dynasty, it incorporates pavilions, inner courtyards, ponds, and myriad plants indigenous to China. The serene Japanese Garden fills 6 hectares (15 acres) and contains a cultural pavilion with an art gallery, a tearoom where ancient tea ceremonies are performed, a stunning bonsai collection, and a Zen garden. The grounds are also home to the Insectarium, displaying some of the world's most beautiful insects, not to mention some of its sinister ones. A small train runs regularly through the gardens and is worth the small fee charged to ride it.

Stade Olympique (Olympic Stadium)

4141 av. Pierre-de-Coubertin (bd. Pie IX)

Métro: Pie-IX or Viau (choose the Viau station to meet up with the guided tour)

514/252-4737

www.rio.gouv.qc.ca

Centerpiece of the 1976 Olympic Games, Montréal's controversial Olympic Stadium and its associated facilities provide considerable opportunities for both active and passive diversion. The stadium seats 60,000 to 80,000 spectators, who come here to see rock concerts and trade shows. Until recently, the stadium was home to the Montréal Expos, but in 2005, the team relocated to Washington, D.C. The roof doesn't retract anymore, and never did perform that action well. That's only one reason that what was first known as "The Big O" was scorned as "The Big Owe" after cost overruns led to heavy increases in taxes. Plans for its future have run from total demolition to adding thousands of seats. The 188m (617-ft.) inclined tower, which leans at a 45-degree angle, also does duty as an observation deck, with a funicular that whisks 90 passengers to the top in 95 seconds. On a clear day, the deck bestows a 56km (35-mile) view over Montréal and into the neighboring Laurentides. A free shuttle bus links the Olympic Park and the Botanical Garden.

Museums:

Musée McCord d'Histoire Canadienne (The McCord museum of Canadian history)

690 Sherbrooke Street West,

tel: (514) 398-7100

<http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/>

Located in downtown Montreal, it's a short walk from the Hyatt. Associated with McGill University, the McCord Museum of Canadian History showcases the eclectic -- and not infrequently eccentric -- collections of scores of 19th- and 20th-century benefactors. More than 29,000 costumes, numerous artifacts, and 750,000 historical photographs are rotated in and out of storage to be displayed. In general, expect to view furniture, clothing, china, silver, paintings, photographs, and folk art that reveal rural and urban life as it was lived by English-speaking immigrants of the past 3 centuries. The First Nations room displays portions of the museum's extensive collection of objects from Canada's Native population, including jewelry and meticulous beadwork.

Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (Montréal's Museum of Contemporary Art)
85 rue Ste-Catherine ouest
514/847-6226
Métro: Place des Arts
www.macm.org

Montréal's Museum of Contemporary Art, the only museum in Canada devoted exclusively to contemporary art. About 60% of the permanent collection of some 6,000 works is composed of the work of Quebecois artists, but it also includes examples of such international painters as Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst, Jean Arp, Larry Poons, and Antoni Tàpies, as well as photographers Robert Mapplethorpe and Ansel Adams. No single style prevails, so expect to see installations, video displays, and examples of Pop, Op, and Abstract Expressionism.

Musée des Beaux-Arts (Museum of Fine Arts)
1379-1380 rue Sherbrooke Ouest
514/285-2000
Métro: Peel or Guy-Corcordia. Bus: 24
www.mmfa.qc.ca

Montréal's Museum of Fine Arts is the city's most prominent museum, opened in 1912 in Canada's first building designed specifically for the visual arts. The original neoclassical pavilion is on the north side of Sherbrooke. Years ago, museum administrators recognized that the collection, now totaling more than 30,000 works, had outgrown the building. That problem was solved in late 1991 with the completion of the striking new annex, the Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion, directly across the street from the original building. Designed by Montréal architect Moshe Safdie, the new pavilion tripled exhibition space, adding two sub-street-level floors and underground galleries that connect the new building with the old. Throughout the museum, works are nearly always dramatically mounted, carefully lit, and diligently explained in both French and English.

For Kids

IMAX Theatre
(see Le Centre des Sciences de Montréal above)

Insectarium de Montréal (Insectarium of Montreal)
at Botanical Garden
4581 rue Sherbrooke est
514/872-1400
Métro: Pie-IX or Viau
www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/insectarium

More than 3,000 mounted butterflies, scarabs, maggots, locusts, beetles, tarantulas, and giraffe weevils are displayed, and live exhibits feature scorpions, tarantulas, crickets, cockroaches, and praying mantises.

Planétarium de Montréal (Planetarium of Montreal)
1000 rue St-Jacques (at Peel)
514/872-4530
Métro: Bonaventure (Cathédrale exit)
www.planetarium.montreal.qc.ca

Montréal's planetarium is right downtown, walking distance from the Hyatt. Shows under the 20m (66-ft.) dome dazzle and inform kids at the same time. Multimedia presentations change with the seasons, exploring time and space travel and collisions of celestial bodies. Evenings bring representations of the night sky. Shows in English alternate with those in French so make sure to call ahead for schedules.

Biodôme de Montréal (Montreal Biodome)
4777 av. Pierre-de-Coubertin (near Olympic Stadium)
514/868-3000
Métro: Viau
www.biodome.qc.ca

Originally built as the velodrome for the 1976 Olympics, the building has been refitted to house replications of four distinct ecosystems -- a Laurentian forest, the St. Lawrence marine system, a tropical rainforest, and a polar environment -- that visitors can walk through and explore. All the ecosystems are complete with appropriate temperatures, flora, fauna, and changing seasons, and all four re-creations are allowed a measure of freedom to grow and shift, so the exhibits are never static (for example, fall in the Laurentian forest sees the changing colors of the foliage). With more than 6,000 creatures of 210 species and 4,000 trees and plants, the Biodôme incorporates exhibits gathered from the old aquarium and the modest zoos at the Angrignon and LaFontaine parks. Among the fauna are specimens of certain threatened and endangered species, including macaws, marmosets, and tamarins. The Polar World contains puffins and four kinds of penguins, from both Poles.

Shopping

Montreal is known for its shopping. Most of the good shopping is walking distance from the Hyatt -- in fact the Hyatt is connected to a large indoor mall (Complex Des Jardins). Good shopping can be found on:

Rue St. Catherine:

In downtown Montreal the place to go is famous Rue St. Catherine (Street). Though it runs a great distance east & west, the most popular stretch is between Atwater on the west and St. Laurent on the east. You should also be aware that underneath much of the central area of this strip (between Stanley and Aylmer) are a series of interconnected underground shopping malls. St. Catherine's has an enormous variety of stores of every kind imaginable, from four very large department stores (Ogilvies -- Don't forget to drop by Collange Lingerie on the 2nd floor to say hello to Stephanie's mom! - The Bay, Simons and Les Ailes de la Mode), to hundreds of other shops and shopping centers.

Rue Sherbrooke

A major shopping street, with international and domestic designers, luxury items such as furs and jewelry, art galleries, and the Holts department store.

Rue Crescent

Upscale boutiques scattered along its length, plus numerous cafes for a break from shopping.

Rue St-Denis

The section north of Sherbrooke has strings of shops filled with fun, funky items. Rue St-Denis is traditionally the French-speaking part of Montreal, and it's here where you'll find unique Montreal shops and restaurants, catering to Montrealers themselves, not tourists. Note that many of the buildings on St-Denis have the wrought-iron staircases leading up to the main doors. It's an architectural style unique to Montreal.

Boulevard St-Laurent

Find everything from budget practicalities to off-the-wall handmade fashions. Boulevard St-Laurent, also called "The Main" is the central road that divides the traditionally English-speaking part of Montreal in the west from the traditionally French-speaking part of Montreal in the east. It's here on St-Laurent where you'll find a lot of great shopping and dining opportunities. Like St-Denis, the shops and restaurants on St-Laurent exist for the sake of Montrealers more than the tourists, which gives it a genuine and authentic Montreal experience. At the southern end of St-Laurent is the Old Port of Montreal - the old historic neighborhood. Up from the Old Port, you'll find that a lot of the city's trendy clubs, lounges and bars are located here, or at least not far from it. The famous Schwartz Deli (for smoked meat) is located on St-Laurent.

avenue Laurier

Between St-Laurent and de l'Épée is the place for French boutiques, home furniture and accessories shops, and young Quebecois designers.

Rue St-Paul

In Vieux-Montréal this street has a growing number of art galleries, a few jewelry shops, some souvenir stands, and a shop that sells kites.

Avenue Greene

In Anglophone Westmount this street has some decidedly English stores.

Antiques can be found along rue Sherbrooke near the Musée des Beaux-Arts and on the little side streets near the museum. More antiques and collectibles, in more than 50 tempting shops one after another, can be found along the lengthening "Antiques Alley" of rue Notre-Dame, especially concentrated between Guy and Atwater.

rue Chabanel

Those who delight in the hunt for bargains -- and possess the tenacity to plunge into barely managed chaos to find them -- won't want to miss. A long trek north from downtown (nearest Métro station: Crémazie), rue Chabanel is a street that runs west of boulevard St-Laurent and is lined with factory buildings and warehouses. On Saturday mornings from 8:30am to 1pm -- very roughly -- the clothing manufacturers and importers use ground- and mezzanine-level showrooms and suites to display and sell all manner of men's, women's, and children's clothing at a discount. For those few hours a week, coats, leather goods, sportswear, suits, and sweaters are all on offer at deeply discounted prices, and diligence and a willingness to bargain are rewarded. Prowl the 8 blocks with buildings numbered 99 to 555; the higher the number, the better the quality, or at least so goes the commonly held conviction.