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How to Visit Montreal Like a Local— Just in Time for Canadian Thanksgiving

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Montreal in the fall

Photo: Alamy





Finding a city similar to the Canadian francophone metropolis of Montreal is no easy task. There's a dash of old-world Parisian charm in the Beaux Arts cityscape, a Manhattan-like dedication to bagels, and a San Franciscan embrace of nature. Add in a contentious linguistic debate (a language betwixt and between English and French is spoken), and you'll find the task at hand that much trickier. The consensus: It's best to discover the idiosyncratic city firsthand, and fall is the best time to experience Montreal before the chill sets in. For added festivity, head north this weekend to partake in the Canadian celebration of Thanksgiving on Monday. Here, we provide a guide to help round out the perfect Quebecois weekend.

Where to Stay



A King Luxe Suite at Auberge du Vieux-Port Hotel

Photo: Courtesy of Auberge du Vieux-Port



Auberge du Vieux-Port

Travelers looking for cozy accommodations will enjoy the antique stonewalled rooms at the riverside hotel Auberge du Vieux-Port. The late-19th-century hotel offers views of the St. Lawrence River, which can be enjoyed from the rooftop restaurant Tavernes Gaspar in the summer months. Come fall, the gastropub's Montreal classics (think duck confit poutine) are served in the inn's romantic cellar.

Hotel Gault

Nestled in the city's historic Old Montreal district, Hotel Gault's 19th-century facade belies the high contemporary design within. It once functioned as a cotton factory in the 1800s but a renovation of the five-story boutique hotel brought in minimal concrete floors, bright mid-century furnishings, and loft-style rooms. Guests unable to completely disconnect may find answering emails more comfortable in the hotel's pristine library, paneled with blond wood for added warmth.

Hotel Le St-James

For the toniest of accommodations, check into Hotel Le St-James, also located in Old Montreal. Old World charm abounds at the expansive hotel that maintains a boutique intimacy with individually designed rooms. The storied property, once a Merchants' Bank, has played host to royalty (of both Rock and aristocratic natures) throughout the years. Fully indulge yourself at the lux hotel's Le Spa, located in the bank's former vault; its stone walls belong to the city's original fortification wall of 1870.

Where to Eat



Paquebot Café's cold-brewed coffee served on tap

Photo: Courtesy of Paquebot Café



Paquebot Café

In the city's La Petite Patrie district, a small café is raising the eyebrows of local coffee connoisseurs with a cold brew served on tap à la beer. Paquebot was the first to bring the foamy and effervescent coffee aka nitro coffee to Montreal. Head over if you've yet to try out this trend and pick up a bagel from St-Viateur for an authentic Montreal breakfast.

Hvor

The journey from farm to table is brief at this Griffintown boîte: An on-site potager and beehives help to create a seasonal menu where local ingredients reign supreme. Fall brings turnips and squashes to the tasting menu that rotates by the week at the restaurant dressed in minimalist furnishings and a sleek marble top bar.

Joe Beef

Cooler months call for comfort food and no place in the city offers up gastronomic gluttony quite like Joe Beef. Carnivores will delight at the daily menu, rich with côte de boeuf and foie gras-accented dishes. The buzzy restaurant has had its fair share of attention but lives up to the hype, beloved and frequented by locals and tourists alike.

Big in Japan Bar

Aesthetes should look no further than Big in Japan Bar for a beguiling cocktail bar flickering with a labyrinth of candlelight atop its mazelike bar that zigzags throughout the space. With a focus on Japanese whiskeys and sakes, the enchanting speakeasy is tucked behind a nondescript red door on Saint-Laurent Blvd.

What to Do



The Bota Bota spa, docked along the St. Lawrence River

Photo: Courtesy of Bota Bota



Bota Bota

After a tour of the Notre-Dame Basilica, an art crawl through the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and a walk through the quaint cobblestone streets of Old Montreal, head to the Old Port of Montreal (where you can take in a glimpse of the mesmerizing apartment complex and architectural marvel Habitat 67) for some respite at the floating spa Bota Bota. Docked along the St. Lawrence River and fashioned from an historic ferry, the Scandinavian-style spa boasts a full treatment menu in a high design, low stress environment.

Ballet

The sprawling performing arts center Place des Arts (Montreal's answer to Lincoln Center) is worth checking out in and of itself but double your dose of culture and head inside one of the theatres for a show. Fall marks the beginning of the season at Les Grands Ballets, the esteemed ballet company performing at the Place des Art's Théâtre Maisonneuve.

Domaine Pinnacle

No trip to Montreal is complete without ample time spent enjoying the park on the city's namesake Mount Royal. But if you've come to Montreal by car, a perfect autumnal outdoor excursion is just over an hour from the city near the border of Vermont. Domaine Pinnacle (makers of sparkling and ice apple ciders) welcomes visitors for tours and tastings at their picturesque apple orchard and cider mill.