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 Montréal Offers Motivation For Work Or Play

Montréal Offers Motivation For Work Or Play

Feel the buzz of business and development in Montréal

by [Kim Mackinnon](#) | August 2015



Photo: Downtown Montréal with a cruise ship in the port on the St. Lawrence River © Gvictoria | Dreamstime.com

Cosmopolitan [Montréal](#), where most residents speak both French and English — and can easily switch back and forth between the two — always seems to have a current of excitement just beneath the surface.

The city, the most bilingual metropolis in North America and second only to Paris as the largest French-speaking city in the world, is actually an island located in the middle of the St. Lawrence River and home to about 1.7 million residents. Named after the mountain at the center of its outdoor life, Mount Royal, Montréal is compact and easily accessible.

Visitors can get from Montréal-Trudeau International Airport, which serves more than 70 international and 25 domestic cities and sees more than 200 U.S. and international flights daily, to downtown in less than 20 minutes. Getting around the city without a car is a breeze via its excellent public transportation, or on foot or bike.

Because of its ideal location on the St. Lawrence River, making it the closest international port to North America's industrial heartland, Montréal possesses the busiest container port on the Eastern Seaboard. It also welcomes thousands of cruise ship passengers at its Iberville marine terminal each year. Several cruise lines stop at the terminal, including Holland America Line, Oceania, Seabourn and Crystal Cruises.

Montréal is also the civil aviation capital of Canada, with head offices of three international organizations: the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Air Transport Association and the Société Internationale des Télécommunications Aéronautiques.

The high-tech world loves Montréal, as does the movie industry. On average, Montréal secures between 30 and 50 special effects contracts for big-budget movies per year, each worth millions of dollars. There are 50 cutting-edge film studios in Montréal, including one of the largest in North

America, Studio H at Mel's Cité du Cinéma, located five minutes from downtown.

Old Montréal's cobblestone streets, historic squares and buildings have been used as location shots in several major films such as *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, *300* and *Life of Pi*. Along the same lines, Montréal is increasingly becoming known for its video game sector and visual effects expertise. About 80 percent of the visual effects and animation software programs used throughout the world were developed in Montréal.

Two years ago, in May 2013, the École de technologie supérieure and McGill University officially launched the [Quartier de l'innovation](#) (or the Innovation District). Nicknamed the "QI," the neighborhood was designed as a living laboratory to foster collaboration among researchers, companies, citizens and social and cultural organizations.



Route 27 food truck outside the Olympic Stadium © Martial Genest | Dreamstime.com

Griffintown is the next big thing according to many in the city. Located in the long-neglected industrial area on Lachine Canal, the neighborhood is undergoing non-stop new construction and refurbishing of old warehouses. Hip new restaurants like Le Richmond and [Grinder](#) draw crowds with local brews and artisanal fare, while boutique shops and art galleries are opening up as fast as they can. Another relatively new advent in the city is the introduction of food trucks. For more than 60 years, selling street food was banned, but in 2013 Montréal finally relented and made it legal. A street food pilot program, conducted in 2014, became a huge success, with 29 trucks out on the road. More are added all the time.

Of course, tourism is big business in this charming city, and in Canada Montréal is second only to Toronto for the number of visitors every year. Out of a total of 27.4 million visitors to Canada in 2014, Montréal welcomed 9.2 million tourists, an increase of 2.2 percent over 2013, according to Tourisme Montréal. Tourism spending came in at \$2.7 billion over the year, a growth of 4.6 percent compared to 2013. Accordingly, the

hotel occupancy rate on the island of Montréal rose by 3.39 percent in 2014.

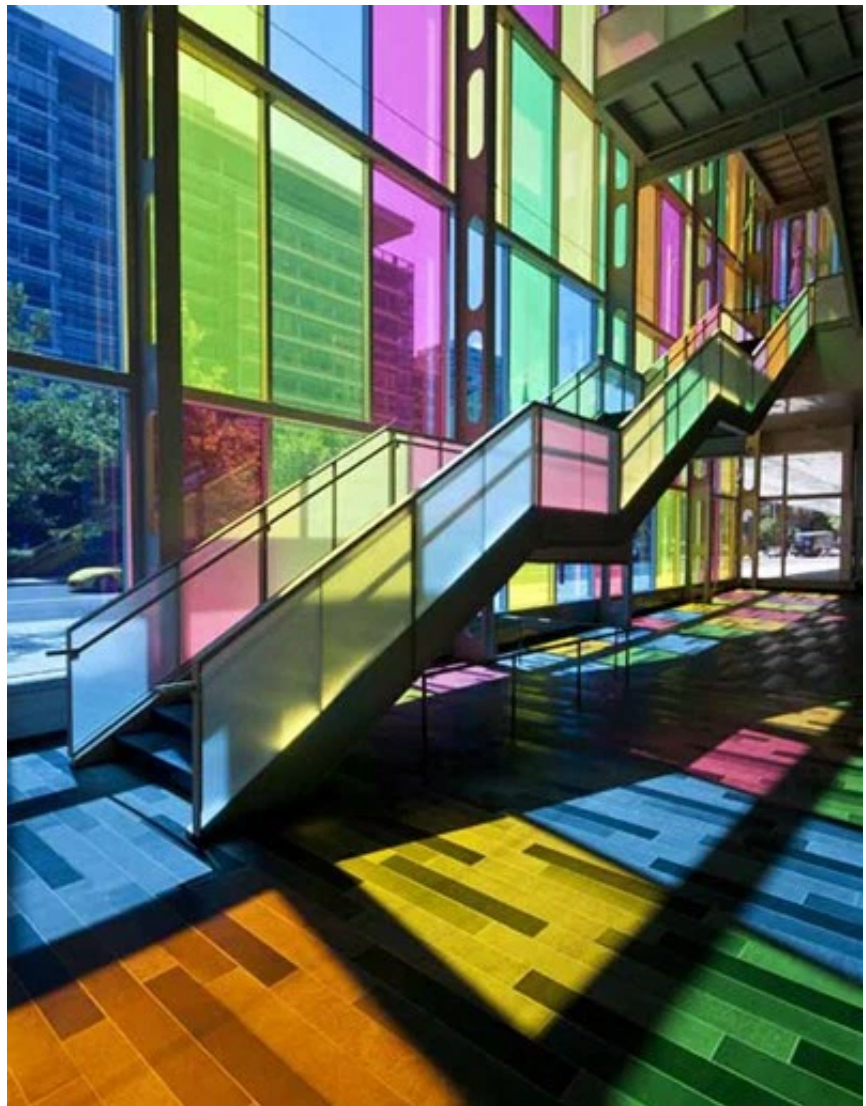
Many of those visitors come to the city for conferences. For the third consecutive year, Montréal ranked as the top city for hosting international events in America, according to the Union of International Associations' International Meeting Statistics for the Year 2013. The [Palais des congrès](#), Montréal's convention center, alone will have welcomed 127,000 conventioners in 2014–2015, and it anticipates another big year for 2015–2016, with 210,300 room nights booked for business tourism purposes. In sum, those two years will generate close to half a billion dollars for the economy.

This city also likes to play and celebrate. More than 100 festivals a year draw in locals and visitors alike. In summer, major events include the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, Just for Laughs Comedy Festival, FrancoFolies and the Grand Prix du Canada (Formula 1 Grand Prix). In the winter, the MONTRÉAL EN LUMIÈRE festival, a celebration of lights, food, arts and music, brings a joyous party despite the cold weather.

Things to Do in Montréal

Montréal is a city of distinct *quartiers*, or neighborhoods, ranging from Old Montréal with its historic buildings, cobblestone streets and the Notre-Dame Basilica to the hipster Plateau Mont-Royal, where a bohemian vibe manifests in its casual cafés and trendy shops. There's no better way to explore the city than by foot, unless it's by bike, and [Bixi](#), the city's bike rental service, offers convenient stations located around town, making it easy to borrow one for a couple of hours or the day.

If you'd like a quick overview of the city to get your bearings without getting lost, Montréal, like most major cities, has a hop-on, hop-off tourist bus. [Gray Line](#) operates a double-decker bus with 10 stops, including the Latin Quarter, the Festival Quarter, two in Old Montréal (at the Notre-Dame Basilica and



Colorful interior of Le Palais des congrès de Montréal © Pierre Leclerc | Dreamstime.com

the Pointe-à-Callière Museum) and two stops at Mont Royal (Kondiaronk Lookout and Camillien Houde Lookout). The ticket is good for two days.

Montréal's true heart is Mont Royal, a stunning urban park and nature reserve designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the same urban architect of New York's Central Park. Ask any Montréaler about what to do, and probably the first thing he'll mention is "the mountain." Here many go to hike, bike, walk, picnic and simply unwind.



Notre-Dame Basilica of Montréal exterior © Brianglobal | Dreamstime.com

Architecture in Montréal truly presents a juxtaposition of old and new. The first city in North America to be designated a UNESCO City of Design and third internationally after Buenos Aires and Berlin, it's also home to sites like the [Notre-Dame Basilica of Montréal](#), built between 1824 and 1829. Just like everything else, even the Basilica witnesses a quirky blend of traditional and modern cultures: Pope John Paul II visited the Basilica in 1984, and Celine Dion was married here in 1994.

With bars open until 3 a.m., Montréal, not surprisingly, boasts a lively nightlife. And as soon as the weather warms up, the city's ubiquitous terraces overflow with people. If you have only one night here and want to find the pulse of the city, head to [Saint-Laurent Boulevard](#), where more than 60 bars, lounges and discos line the street between Sherbrooke Street and Mont-Royal Avenue.

CHECKING IN WITH ERIC FORNIER

Partner in the [Moment Factory](#)

WHY SHOULD BUSINESS TRAVELERS COME TO MONTRÉAL? WHAT MAKES THE CITY UNIQUE?

Montréal is not a city that rests on its laurels. Innovation is in its DNA. It's constantly reinventing itself. Today, we rely on global links. There's a constant renewal of people, there's the universities, there's lots of research and development, lots of inter-industry cooperation, all of it creating a hub of innovation. The economy is in good shape. And there's a mountain, the city is an island, there's

always new stuff going on. With both French and English spoken, it's cosmopolitan. It makes this city different.

WHAT IS THE MOST EXCITING THING GOING ON IN MONTRÉAL RIGHT NOW?

Folks here have grown up with the pride of the Expo in 1967 and the Olympics in 1976, but that was more than 40 years ago. For Montréal's 375th anniversary in 2017, lots of cool stuff will be happening, but I'm not ready to announce what Moment Factory will be doing for it yet.

WHAT'S THE NEXT HOT NEIGHBORHOOD?

Griffintown is one of the most interesting areas; it's burgeoning. More and more people are deciding to live there. They're coming back to city life.

WHAT PLACES DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR VISITORS IN THEIR FREE TIME?

It depends on the season! Eating on a terrace in May, walking on the mountain in fall to see the colors, partying in Old Montréal in February at the winter festivals, biking through the city.



Montréal lights up the night during the annual winter festival. © Mario Beaugard | Dreamstime.com

Montréal Info to Go

Montréal-Trudeau International Airport (YUL) is located just 20 minutes by car from downtown. Ground transportation options include the easy and inexpensive 747 Express bus (\$7), which makes nine downtown stops; taxis, which charge a flat rate of \$38; various shuttles (some hotels offer free rides); and rental cars.

Montréal: Just the Facts

Time Zone: GMT -4 (EDT)

Phone Code: Country code: 1 City code: 438 or 514

Currency: Canadian dollar

Entry/Exit Requirements: U.S. citizens must have a valid passport.

Official Language: French, English

Key Industries: Aerospace, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, research and medical technology, information and communications technology

Where to Stay in Montréal

[Loews Hôtel Vogue](#) Located in the heart of downtown, this luxury nine-story hotel boasts a European vibe (check out the Parisian La Société Bistro), top-notch service and amenities galore. *1425 rue de la Montagne* \$\$\$\$

[Ritz-Carlton Montréal](#) For more than 100 years, this elegant hotel has set the bar for luxury. From a Daniel Boulud restaurant to the rooftop terrace with an indoor saltwater pool, everything is first-class. *1228 Sherbrooke St. W.* \$\$\$\$\$

[Sofitel Montréal Golden Mile](#) Decorated with Victorian accents, this hotel on the Golden Mile next to McGill University and the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts offers a classy and stylish place to rest your head. *1155 Sherbrooke St. W.* \$\$\$

Restaurants in Montréal

[Balsam Inn](#) This cozy restaurant is a downtown hot spot with creative cocktails and small plates to share. The open kitchen and a chef rolling out dough for the brick oven offer entertainment. *1237 rue Metcalfe* \$\$

[Restaurant Europea](#) Enjoy a glorious epicurean event as Chef Jérôme Ferrer prepares creative and delicious fare in a converted Victorian townhouse. The excellent staff know what you want before you do. *1227 rue de la Montagne* \$\$\$\$\$

[Le Richmond](#) Tucked away in the up-and-coming Griffintown neighborhood, Le Richmond is a delightful surprise, serving up cuisine inspired by northern Italy with ingredients imported from the Old Country. *377 Richmond St.* \$\$\$\$