



Northern Exposure

Could a cosmopolitan Canadian city really be the new Paris?

One arts lover canvasses the scene.

Montréal, a leading force in international art? *Hmm.* As an art history buff who has toured most of the major museums in the United States and more than a few abroad, I was skeptical. Recent buzz has christened this Canadian jewel the “new Paris” among art aficionados, but I wondered how its museums would compare to those truly revered institutions across the pond, such as the renowned Uffizi in Florence or, yes, the Louvre in the City of Light. I decided to find out for myself.

My companion and I started our quickie visit to this northern city by heading downtown, where skyscrapers stand adjacent to 300-year-old Gothic cathedrals, and young urbanites pound sidewalks lined with high-end boutiques and department stores.

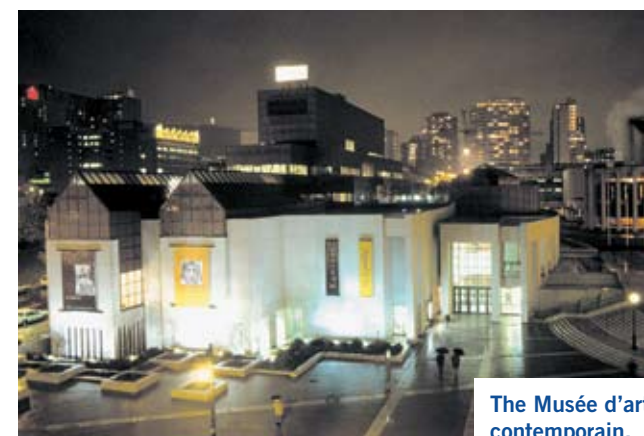
Our art crawl began—as one might expect—in the **Museum Quarter**. Here, museums and galleries radiate out in every direction, extending from Rue Sherbrooke to Rue St. Catherine. At the center of this artistic hub is the **Montréal Museum of Fine Arts** (1379–1380 Rue Sherbrooke, West; www.mmfa.qc.ca). The repository features two buildings connected by an underground walkway, where collections of ancient Roman and Egyptian wares

are displayed next to rococo French furniture. Art fans also will delight in famous works from Pablo Picasso, surrealist Joan Miró and designer Gerrit Rietveld.

But this enclave is merely a precursor to the **Place des Arts** (175 Rue St. Catherine; www.pda.qc.ca), the center of Montréal's performance and fine arts scene. The massive complex is home to five exhibition halls, the Grand Ballet, the Montréal Symphony Orchestra and L'Opéra de Montréal. (This fall, visitors can catch performances of *Il Tabarro & Suor Angelica* and *La Traviata*.) Connected to the Place des Arts (through another underground walkway) is the **Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal** (185 Rue St. Catherine; www.macm.org), which houses nearly 7,000 works of contemporary art from Canadian and international artists.

For something less highbrow and more offbeat, head to the **Pointe-à-Callière Museum**, about a 20-minute walk away in the Old Port and worth the effort. Built on the very first European settlement in the city, the museum is part exhibition space, part archeological dig. It stands on the remains of original historical buildings, with parts of the old fortification walls, a paved street from the late 18th century and old Place Royale square on display.

A sneak peek of what awaits you.



The museum-esque **Ritz-Carlton Montréal** (1228 Rue Sherbrooke, West; 514/842-4212; www.ritzcarlton.com; standard doubles, \$325) is the perfect place to stay when exploring the arts scene downtown. Its lobby is gilded in engraved mirrors and objets d'art, and its suites are reminiscent of old-world France with antique furnishings and canvassed wallpaper. Enjoy a flute of champagne in **Le Jardin du Ritz**, complete with a duck pond and French café tables.

Or try the **Fairmont, The Queen Elizabeth** (900 Rene Levesque Blvd.; 514/861-3511; www.fairmont.com/queenelizabeth; standard doubles, \$255–\$299), a massive luxury hotel just one block from Rue St. Catherine, and nearby to Crescent Street with its packed bars and clubs. Stay in the hotel and head to the well-known

Beaver Club restaurant for five-star beef and an impressive selection of exotic cheeses that changes almost every week, or explore an underground shopping mall with direct access from the hotel's lobby.

Don't spend *all* your time in downtown, though. **Vieux Montréal**, also known as the Old Port, is lined with terraces, cafés, art galleries and quaint artisan's shops. The wide thoroughfare of **Place Jacques-Cartier** is

the center of activity in Old Montréal, bustling with tourists, lively restaurants, street vendors, musicians and performers. With views downhill of the **St. Lawrence River** and uphill of the historic **City Hall** (275 Notre Dame St., East), the public square is a must-see. Wander the side streets off of the square, especially Rue St. Amable, and you'll find a hidden treasure trove of local artists' shops, often built in between and behind buildings forming an outdoor courtyard market.

As for dinner, swanky spots such as **Versus Restaurant** (100 Rue St.-Paul, West) and **Auberge Le Saint Gabriel** (426 Rue St.-Gabriel) are well known, but with entrées approaching \$40 and a bank account that doesn't support such steep prices, we continued heading down the street and ultimately stumbled upon a neighborhood hideout, **Le Petit Moulinart** (139 Rue St.-Paul, West). Beautiful Old Port brick walls surround the terrace at the

GETTING THERE

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back of the restaurant, which served nearly 20 different types of *moules*, or mussels, a Montréal specialty.

Dozens of hotels dot the Old Port, too. We chose to stay in the **Hotel Place d'Armes** (55 Rue St. Jacques, West; 514/842-1887; www.hotelplacedarmes.com; standard doubles, \$275-\$330), which prides itself on being Old Montréal's first boutique hotel. While touches of the "historic" are still there—exposed brick walls and an antique façade—the hotel is anything but. The lobby is a sleek, white-and-black-marble entrance, and the hotel's posh bar and club, **Suite 701**, is packed on weekend nights with arty types sipping colorful martinis.

—MEREDITH STANTON



WHEN IN ROME

In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, travelers to other planets could use the Babel fish, a small creature slipped into the ear, to understand the local dialect. Science fiction, sure, but www.mytravelbabble.com might be the next best thing: a site (with accompanying CD and downloads for your digital device of choice) that gives you a quick tutorial in a growing number of languages.

With around 165 key words and phrases, and a price of around \$15 per language (plus \$5 for shipping and handling, if you order the CD), you can learn enough to get by in French, Spanish, Italian, Russian and German. "We designed this first as a way for travelers to communicate with the locals on a short trip," says Bob Brill, founder of the site and CEO of Brill Productions. "And second as a refresher for someone who has traveled previously to another country."

With even more languages due by the end of the year—including Greek, Korean, Japanese, Cantonese and Mandarin—you'll have even more ways to ask that most vital of traveling questions: Where's the bathroom?

—NICK KOLAKOWSKI



Constable's Great Landscapes The Six-Foot Paintings

October 1–December 31

Landmark six-foot paintings, sketches, and more from one of England's greatest landscapists

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Tate Britain, London, and the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, California

Made possible by General Dynamics and General Dynamics United Kingdom, Ltd

Supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities

Alexandre-Louis-Marie Charpentier (1856-1909)

August 6, 2006–January 28, 2007

Selected medals and sculptures by this key figure in the French Art Nouveau movement

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington

Prayers and Portraits Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych

November 12, 2006–February 4, 2007

Splendid religious paintings, many reunited for the first time

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, together with the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge

Made possible by the Homeland Foundation, Inc.

Supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities

The Streets of New York American Photographs from the Collection 1938-1958

September 17, 2006–January 15, 2007

The vitality of urban life by many of America's finest photographers

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington Supported by the Trellis Fund and The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation



Left: John Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham* (detail), 1822, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, California

From top: Alexandre Charpentier and Tony Selmersheim, *The Flight of Time* (detail), c. 1899, Private Collection; Hans Memling, *Saint John the Baptist* (detail), c. 1470-1475, Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich; David Vestal, *From 21st Street and Broadway*, New York, 1959, The Diana and Mallory Walker Fund, National Gallery of Art, Washington

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