





# THE BIG THRILL

MONTREAL CELEBRATES WINTER WITH FESTIVALS,  
ART AND PERENNIAL FRENCH FLAIR

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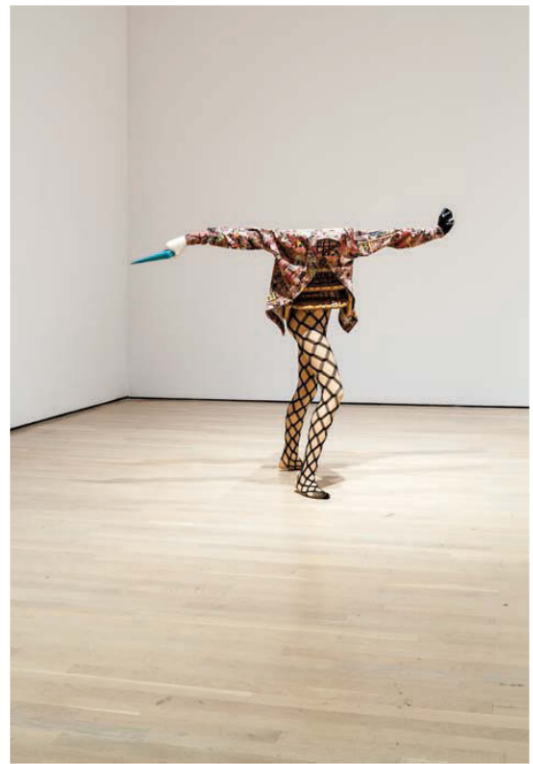
#### THE PLEASURE DOME

The Biosphere, housing a museum about the environment and designed for Montreal's Expo 1967, is one of the many diversions and attractions of the city's Parc Jean-Drapeau.

Montreal cannot be described as chilly in winter — or bracing, fresh or brisk. It is, for the most part, spectacularly, bone-numbingly frigid. If this seems like weather to avoid, the city has a solution: more than 20 miles of connected, subterranean tunnels — a minimetropolis below ground — allow you to explore, shop and eat without need of earmuffs. Resilience, however, is a defining ingredient of the Québécois character — witness the endurance of French as Montreal’s first language — and the way the city comes to life in winter is an act of will so stubborn and joyful that it can make the cold season seem like a celebration not to be missed.

The key to enjoying this is dressing warmly — really warmly — and either walking or hopping in the Metro to circumnavigate the city. Start with a stroll along the quaint cobblestones of Montreal’s Old Port. This area, skirting the St. Lawrence River, was redesigned in the 1980s, when Montrealers fended off condo developers and fought for an open, accessible public site. The result is one of the city’s best urban design projects, where broad promenades encourage meandering along the port among horse-drawn calèches. Stop, if you will, at the Montréal Science Centre, or wander into the many shops and boutiques in the adjacent avenues. But the most popular destination is the Bonsecours Basin skating rink (open Dec. 1 to March 1). Its pleasures are more scenic than athletic: Gliding along

**OLD AND NOUVEAU**  
*Clockwise from top: Valérie Blass’ “Femme Panier,” or “Basket Woman,” at Montreal’s Museum of Contemporary Art; the streets of Old Montreal; and a man in period garb.*



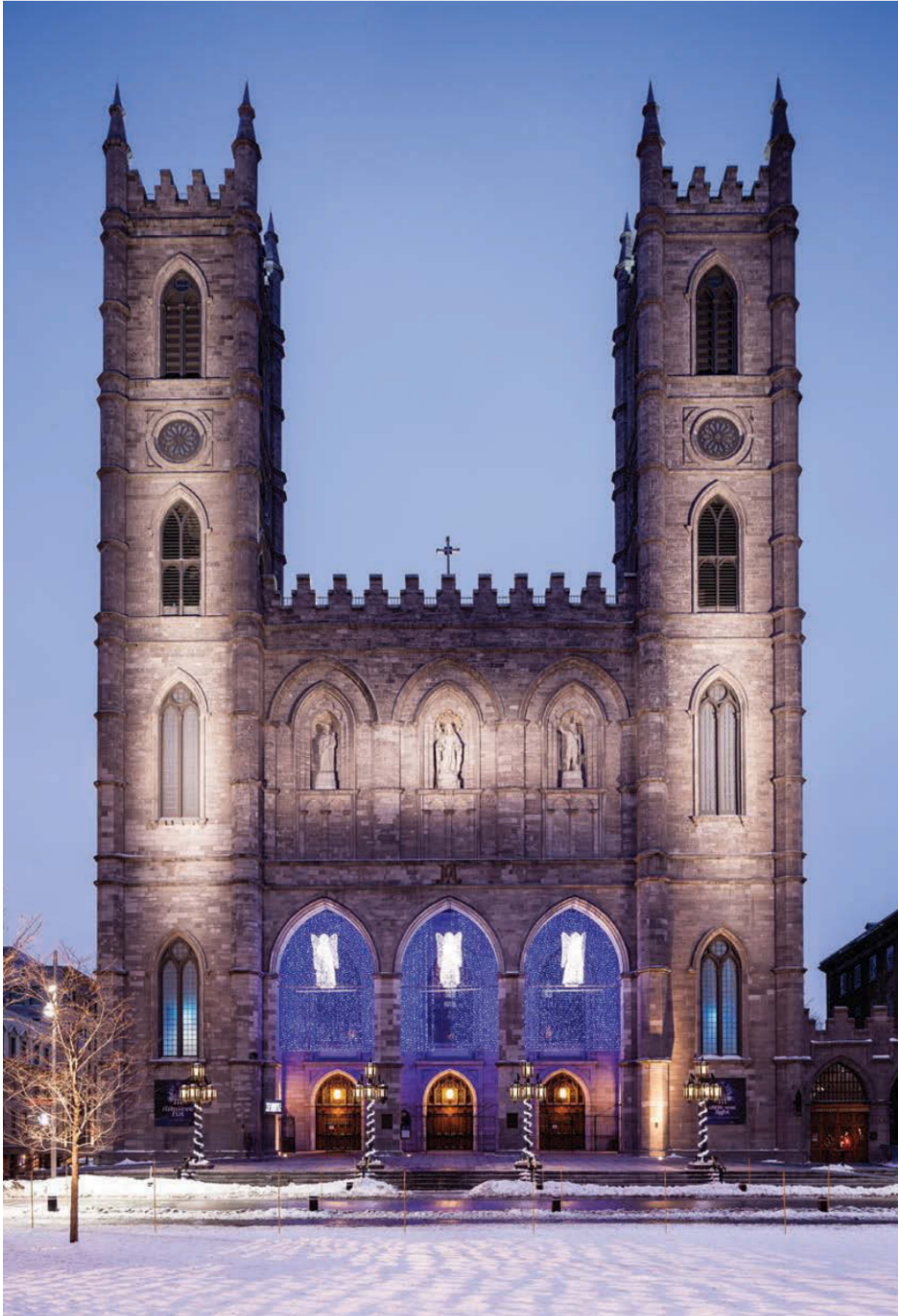
the ice beneath the sweeping cityscape of Old Montreal can be sweetly romantic.

Up rue de la Commune, the Pointe-à-Callière history and archaeology museum is a six-building complex, built to look like a ship, that reflects 10 years of archaeological digs. It holds the heritage of the city — built on the very spot where its first Mass was held. In nearby St. Paul Street, Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel is one of oldest religious sites in North America. Its chapel, dating from 1675, displays the religious paintings of Quebec artist Ozias Leduc. It’s simultaneously cozy, bright and ornate (think arched windows lined with mosaics and gold trim).

But the heart of Old Montreal is surely the Notre-Dame Basilica. A wooden chapel built in 1642, it evolved architecturally during the 19th century, mixing English Gothic style and French inspiration. (It was modeled after Paris’ Sainte-Chappelle on Ile de la Cité.) Within the hushed interior, you’ll see flickering votives, pine statues, black walnut woodwork and celestially glowing stained-glass windows created by Quebec artist Jean-Baptiste Lagacé and made in Limoges, France — all surrounded by blue, gold and red walls and topped with a heavenly blue ceiling speckled with stars.

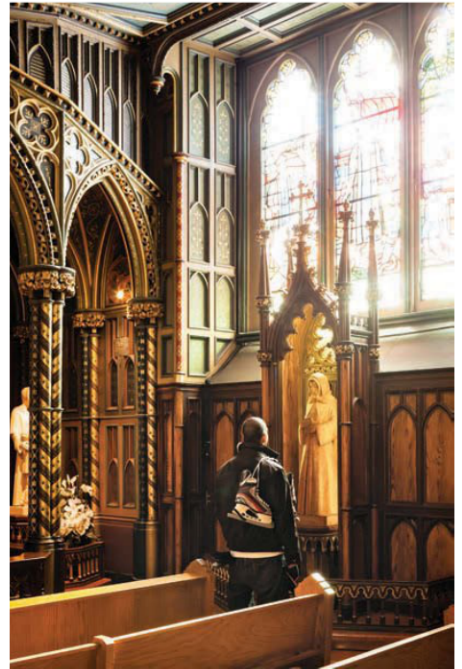
After this elegiac experience, one might be ready to behold the poetry of snow, of which there will be no shortage. Montreal’s 25-year-old *Fête des Neiges* is held Jan. 19 to Feb. 10 across the river from the Old City in Parc Jean-Drapeau. (The yellow metro line to Île Sainte-Hélène will drop you right in the midst of the action.) Quintessentially Nordic activities like skating, dog sledding, inner-tube





**CANADIAN GOTHIC**

*Clockwise from top right: The interior of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel in Old Montreal; inside the Notre-Dame Basilica, also in Old Montreal; and the exterior of Notre-Dame Basilica.*



THE HEART OF OLD MONTREAL IS SURELY THE NOTRE-DAME BASILICA, MODELED AFTER PARIS' SAINTE-CHAPPELLE ON ILE DE LA CITÉ.



PERHAPS NO CITY ADAPTS TO — INDEED, CELEBRATES — THE CHILLY SCENES OF WINTER BETTER THAN MONTREAL.



**NORTHERN EXPOSURE**

Clockwise from top: A skater at Parc Jean-Drapeau; a sled race in Parc Jean-Drapeau; and apple sellers at the Jean-Talon Market.

tobogganing and building ice sculptures are all part of this great white northern landscape. While the *Fête des Neiges* is family-oriented, its *Villages des Neiges* snow village is something of an exception, with its focus on more adult pastimes (drinking and fine dining). Here, you'll find everything quite literally on ice: an ice hotel, an ice restaurant, an ice bar — even an ice chapel. During the day, you can stroll through the village, then warm up with an *apéro* (before-dinner drink) or a *chocolat chaud* at the bar.

The last stretches of the waning winter are relieved annually here by the *Montréal en Lumière* (Feb. 21 to March 3) in Old Montreal — an indoor/outdoor festival with dance, circus and music shows, plus chefs' tastings all over the city. The last night of the festival, *Nuit Blanche*, starts at 6 p.m. and carries on until dawn. Every year it offers a different theme. This year? Wallonia-Brussels. (Think plenty of mussels and frites.)

No matter when you're in Montreal, its two major museums can be found downtown, three stops from each other on the metro's green line. The Musée d'Art Contemporain (Museum of Contemporary Art) at the Place des Arts stop is the largest museum in Canada devoted to contemporary art. Don't be put off by the dark, slightly claustrophobic entrance: The floors are bright and spacious. On the museum's west side, you'll find Montreal's Place des Spectacles, where the two long boxes that look like fancy shipping containers are actually restaurants run by two of the city's top chefs: Normand Laprise's Brasserie T! and Portuguese chef Carlos Ferreira's F Bar.

Three stations west is the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Walk through the museum's tunnel under Sherbrooke

Street to the new Claire and Marc Bougie Pavilion, where you'll find some excellent examples of the work of the Group of Seven, the collective that revolutionized Canadian painting in the 1920s and '30s with stylized visions of the northern landscape.

Now head north to Parc du Mont Royal. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted just after he finished New York City's Central Park, the park has miles of tree-lined trails and mountain paths where locals stroll, bike, ski and run all year long. This is the true summit of the city and the nexus of half a dozen disparate neighborhoods. Everyone walks here — French or American, young or old, contemplative or athletic. Escape the cold in the soccer park-size chalet at the summit — or, for good food, follow the trail behind the







chalet to Beaver Lake, where a second chalet houses a gourmet cafeteria. You can also rent ice-skate snowshoes here to explore the park, or skate on the lake.

The east side of Parc du Mont Royal is Montreal's Plateau neighborhood — a stellar place for strolling and shopping. Its main drags are the hip avenue du Mont Royal and the more established, chicer rue St. Denis, with its upscale Quebec clothing designers' showrooms. Stop for lunch at the classic Montreal brasserie L'Express or wander the adjacent streets, where apartments are festooned with distinctive winding outdoor stairs (built to increase the space inside and avoid heating stairwells).

Farther north, the Mile End neighborhood claims the highest concentration of artists in Canada — though hard to substantiate, it's not difficult to believe. Montreal's historic Jewish neighborhood is now both intensely bohemian and cosmopolitan. On the main drag, rue St. Viateur, stop at Café Olimpico or the St. Viateur Bagel shop, which has been producing bagels since 1957.

Thanks to Quebec's lenient pollution laws, Montreal bagels are cooked in wood stoves, which explains how they get chewy on the inside and crunchy on the outside. (The fact that they're boiled in honey-sweetened water doesn't hurt, either.)

Your tour ends north of Mile End in Villeray, the traditional Italian neighborhood, with the Jean-Talon Market at its heart. Originally an outdoor farmers market, it has a new indoor complex (and underground parking) for cold-weather shopping. Any doubts that Montreal is a city built around food can be dispelled in the aisles of gleaming fresh produce and the abundant tasting stations that circle the perimeter. Not-to-miss classics: the Fromagerie Hamel (for cheese) and Chez Nino (for first-rate fruit and vegetables). Spend some time washing down duck sausage with Quebec's famous *cidre de glace* (ice cider) — made by freezing apples, which concentrates their juice. And finish it all off with some basil-and-green-lemon-filled chocolate and an espresso — to fortify, of course, your happily frigid foray homeward.

**FÊTE ACCOMPLI**  
*Clockwise from top:*  
 A "strong man" at  
 Parc Jean-Drapeau  
 during the Fête  
 des Neiges; beans,  
 eggs, ham and toast  
 from the iconic Le  
 Cartet restaurant  
 in Old Montreal;  
 and Le Cartet.



**ROYAL RUSH**  
Tube sledders  
at Parc du Mont  
Royal, designed  
by Frederick Law  
Olmsted, the genius  
behind New York  
City's Central Park.







## CANADIAN SPLENDOR

Also known as the Grande Dame of Sherbrooke Street, Ritz-Carlton Montréal has undergone a dramatic transformation that pays homage to its 100 years of history.

### Return to Grandeur

Reopening its doors after a \$200 million renovation, the property boasts a restored façade, lobby and garden, as well as redesigned guest rooms and public spaces. Some details, such as marble fireplaces in some of its suites, date back to its 1912 debut.

### A New Style

Ritz-Carlton Montréal is now home to the 4,700-square-foot Royal Suite, the largest hotel suite in the city, as well as an indoor salt-water pool and year-round greenhouse.

### French Canadian

Within walking distance to upscale dining and shopping options, the hotel also features Maison Boulud, where Chef Daniel Boulud builds upon the culinary talent that has earned him three Michelin stars. Diners can enjoy what the renowned chef calls “refined yet soulful contemporary French food.”



**THE GRANDE DAME**  
Clockwise from top: The restored façade of Ritz-Carlton Montréal; inside one of the hotel's suites; the elegant garden provides a peaceful retreat for guests.