



WORDS ELISABETH KING

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

MONTREAL is the definitive split personality town. On one hand it boasts patisseries as good as any in Paris yet glories in its own down-to-earth culinary inventions such as poutine, a million calorie combo of cheesy frites and gravy. The island city also plays host to Just For Laughs, the world's biggest comedy festival, and the nightlife is so full-on that locals feel a bit guilty if they stay home.

Most tourists rightfully pay homage to Old Montreal, the city's historic district centred by the 17th century Rue St-Paul and Notre Dame Basilica, the most spectacular Gothic Revival cathedral in North America. But those in search of what makes modern Montreal tick have a world of discoveries to choose from in the reinvented industrial districts on the edge of the city such as Mile End, Saint-Henri, Little Burgundy or new foodie hangouts such as Griffintown. At Le Fantome in Rue William, for example, you'll find food go-togethers that would rate a fail anywhere else, but which soar off the pleasure scale such as peanut butter and jam sandwiches with foie gras.

Montreal is ice hockey-mad, from local teams to the much-vaunted Canadiens. So it comes as no surprise that the craft beer wave gripping the world is well to the fore. The city is full of craft beer bars, led by Le Saint Bock. Offering one of the largest craft beer menus in Canada - up to 850 - some brews are made on site, but most listings in the aptly-named Bible of Beer are imported or produced locally.

But the venue most often dubbed the best beer bar in town is Dieu de Ciel, which is open seven days a week until the wee small hours. The brews are constantly changing with up to 20 different craft beers on tap. Or head for Le Cheval Blanc, one of the oldest micro-breweries in Montreal, with a

top line-up of blondes, IPAs and porters.

During Prohibition, many New Yorkers hopped on a train to Montreal, rather than slink off to clandestine speakeasies. Old Montreal is peppered with wine bars and the first port of call should be Accords. Located underground with historic stone cellars, you can sip your way through one of the largest natural and bio-dynamic wine selections in Canada. Mimi La Nuit is another must-visit, tricked out like a new-age speakeasy and specialising in expertly made cocktails, quality wines and refined share plates.

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Like every other major Western city, hipster and locally-patronised wine bars dot both gentrified and established areas of Montreal. The one not to miss is the Pullman, close to the Place des Arts in downtown. Sprawling over three stories, there's a large wineglass-shaped chandelier in the main bar and the telephone book-sized wine list details more than 450 bottlings. Another name to bookmark is Le Vin Papillon in Little Burgundy, which focuses on organic Old World wines, many from Eastern Europe.

Globalisation has made the world a far more homogenous place. Sometimes you have to really seek out the different

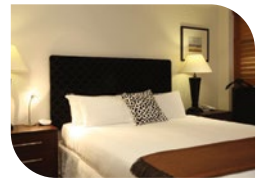
Two of the most irresistible attractions in Mile End can be found at the Espace Nomad spa - the Lumberjack Facial and the Field & Stream Package, featuring a Swedish massage and a cold, organic beer afterwards.

Mile End was once the heartland of Montreal's Italian and Jewish communities. Celebrity US chef Anthony Bourdain always heads to Beauty's Luncheonette when he's in town. Opened in 1942, tourists, revellers and budget-conscious families line up for the Mish-Mash Omelette - full of frankfurters and salami - the house made milk shakes and the Challah French toast with maple syrup. The original owner, 95-year-old Hymie Sckolnick, still runs the show and reinforces the authentic Jewish diner feel. True Montreal bagels - hand-crafted and wood-fire baked - are also one of the foodie magnets of Mile End. Name-check Le Viateur Bagel and Fairmont Bagel bakery.

Yearning for an authentic poutine? Chez Claudette, open 24/7, not only serves up the traditional version of frites, cottage cheese and peppery gravy, there's also Italian and Indian takes on the hefty, filling classic. Doctors warn that you shouldn't go swimming for a week. Just kidding.

One of the most atmospheric places to stay is Casa Bianca, a 10-minute stroll from Mile End in the neighbouring Plateau district. Registered as an architectural landmark, the French Renaissance Revival mansion dates back to 1912. The original owner enjoyed the plush interiors, detailed wainscoting and polished wood floors for only five years. From the 1920s to the 1980s, the majestic building, with its facade of white-glazed terracotta tiles, served as Montreal's first Jewish medical


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clinic. Once more a family residence and fully restored, the historic B&B has been reviewed by Travel & Leisure, Time Out and New York magazines. The Marie-Anne Suite, a two-room heritage haven, costs only \$CAD249 (\$A247) in the high season.

The location couldn't be better, either. Nestled between St-Laurent Boulevard, Montreal's cultural artery, Casa Bianca is in the heart of the action, a stone's throw from Mont Royal Park, Mile End, McGill University and the swanky suburb of Outremont. Also close by is the Biodome, a spectacular panorama of the four major ecosystems of the Americas from the frozen wastes of the north to the rainforests of the south.

Summer is obviously the best time to head for Montreal, unless you're into windburn and air so cold it crackles. But autumn is Quebec's wine season and with the harvests coming in, there's some great wine tourism trails just beyond the city limits. The Brome-Missisquoi wine region in the Eastern Townships is home to 20 vineyards on a 140-km route, stretching from Farnham to Pigeon Hill. It's Canada, so many of the vineyards run a brisk line in ciders.

Christian Barthomeuf and Louise Dupuis of Clos Saragnat in Frelighsburg not only offer certified organic wines, they are also the creators of the world's first ice cider. Dunham is home to a trio of vineyards worth a detour. Award-winning ciders and wines can be savoured at Union Libre Cidre & Vin. Join in the apple and grape picking at Val Caudalies. Enjoy a great meal before or after a wine tasting at extensive Vignoble de L'Orpailleur, where you can see the mountains of Vermont on a clear day. 

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