



# Francophone Montréal

It's the second-largest francophone city in the world after Paris; it's a slice of Europe in North America. It's Montréal!

The second-most populous city in Canada, Montréal is in the Québec province. Montréal, which means Mount Royal in English, is a city that bustles with tourists during the summer months.

Old Montréal, a historic neighbourhood, is a major tourist attraction, drawing crowds from all across the world. On our short, but unforgettable road trip to Montréal, we imbibed Old Montréal's sights and sounds that have a true European flavour to them.

From American state of Delaware to the Canadian province of Québec, it is a seven-hour drive. From the US-Canada border, Montréal is less than 50 miles. We journeyed through New Jersey, but most of our drive was through the scenic and mountainous Upstate New York along the eastern border of the

Adirondack Mountains.

As the border crossing draws near, road signs begin to appear in both English and French. Once you pass Champlain, New York — Saint Bernard de Lacolle, Québec Border Crossing, the first thing that catches your attention is the road signs, which are all written in French. It feels like a different world! But the more you see the signs, the more you get the hang of what they are trying to say.

After a few hours, even a non-French will begin to understand a bit of French. But only written French, I must say, because spoken French is a different ball game! For instance, the word Montréal in French sounds something like "mo-ghe-aal."

Quaint buildings, cobblestone streets, grand churches and basilicas of Old Montréal transport you to a time in the distant past. But with charming cafés and boutiques lining the streets,

Old Montréal is a juxtaposition of the old and the new.

Montréal boasts a third-wave coffee culture with chic cafés everywhere. People gather at these coffee shops to relax and chit-chat over espresso and patisserie. We sat in one such cute, little café called Le Petit Dep to enjoy frothy chai latte and swirls of strawberry sorbet. Plants, tasteful décor, intimate seating and exposed brick walls and pipes characterise many of these Montréal cafés. They exist side by side with chains like Starbucks and Tim Hortons, but serve better brews that come in porcelain cups and saucers; no paper cups or plastic lids.

One must not leave Montréal without trying their two specialties — sesame bagel and poutine. Poutine is French fries served with cheese curds and topped with a brown gravy. It may look like a gross mess at first but a forkful of poutine will make you crave more.

It just melts in your mouth! We ate ours from Montréal Poutine, a restaurant on St Paul Street, whose poutines have won hearts of the Montréalers.

Before we began our drive back to the US, we plunged into a hearty breakfast at B&M on Saint Viateur Street over sesame bagel sandwich and cappuccino. Prepared with smoked salmon, cream cheese, red onions, capers and tomatoes, the bagel sandwich is one of the best sandwiches I have ever had.

If you visit Montréal, you can get by without knowing French, because in the touristy areas, people speak both French and English. But it's nice to know some simple French words and phrases like bonjour, merci, au revoir, etc. to greet and thank the locals and be part of this amazing francophone city.

**By Wara Karim**  
Photo courtesy: Wara Karim