

# Travel Outdoors

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A view of Montreal's skyline

## Going underground

*Montreal is a heady mixture of European charm and North American energy – and when the snow falls, the city comes into its own*

CHRISTIAN SYLT

Imagine a holiday where snow is guaranteed but you don't have to trudge through it to see local shops and attractions if you don't want to. Now imagine that the destination has the energy of New York, the atmosphere of Paris and everyone speaks English. Welcome to Montreal.

Located in the province of Quebec in eastern Canada, Montreal is the biggest French-speaking city outside France and it shows.

Montreal is only a six and a half hour flight from the UK on Air Canada which this year celebrates its 75th anniversary and ran its first ever transatlantic flight in 1943 when Prestwick was its base. Nowadays it flies to Montreal from London and getting out of the plane on arrival is strangely surreal as it doesn't seem like you have gone very far. All the road signs, billboards and loudspeaker announcements are in French and you are greeted with a friendly "bonjour" on entering shops. However, even stranger is the fact that there is no language barrier

for anyone who failed Higher French. If you look the slightest bit bemused, the locals slip straight into English.

Montreal is a genuinely bilingual city and so much so that you often hear conversations starting in English and ending in French and vice versa. This isn't the only aspect that makes the city a multicultural melange. Thanks to Canada's status as a member of the Common-

### The tunnels are so wide they have shops on either side

wealth, coins have the Queen's head on them and that's just the start. Cadbury chocolates line the shelves next to British magazines and *Coronation Street* is one of the most popular shows on regional television. However, there are also US channels and the skyscrapers are certainly American-sized.

This diversity is due to Montreal's history which saw it founded by the

French in 1642 and conquered by the British in 1759. Its legacy of the Commonwealth isn't the only thing which makes visitors from the UK feel right at home. Montreal is at its prettiest in the spring but the weather will make you feel thankful for the UK's climate. Temperatures of minus 20 are usual and the weather reporters consider it "balmy" when the thermometer hits zero.

From December to the first days of summer

Montreal is cloaked in a permanent coat of white as snow falls and it is too cold to melt. It leaves streams frozen and rivers covered with so much snow that it is impossible to see the water. People even walk through the streets with skis taking them to the popular run down Mount Royal, the hill which towers over Montreal and gives the city its name.

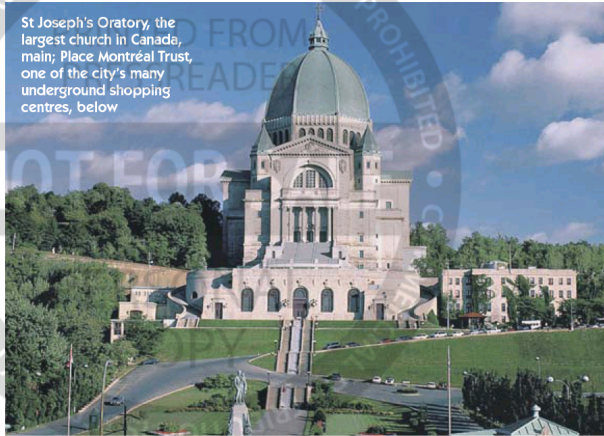
The real secret to Montreal is not vis-

ible on arrival in the city. Underneath Montreal is the world's biggest underground system – a network of 18 miles of pedestrian tunnels which connect everything from office blocks and banks to cinemas, museums and universities. They aren't tunnels of the dank and dingy kind as they are not only well lit, air conditioned and ornately tiled but some are carpeted and music is piped in from concealed speakers along the way.

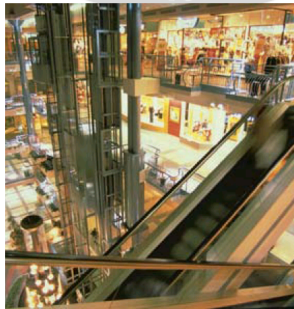
Most of the tunnels are so wide that they have shops on either side and they connect shopping mall after shopping mall. In total 1,700 shops are accessible on the underground network which would place Montreal in the top five biggest malls in the world if they were all under one single roof. It makes Montreal a shopaholic's paradise and you don't need to brave one flake of snow to see it.

Outdoors, the main shopping streets are St Catherine and Sherbrooke which is home to Ogilvy, a department store founded in 1866 by Scotsman James





St Joseph's Oratory, the largest church in Canada, main; Place Montréal Trust, one of the city's many underground shopping centres, below



Angus Ogilvy. Nearby is Holt Renfrew, owned by Selfridges of London and appointed supplier of furs to Queen Victoria in 1886. The Canadian dollar is around one for one with the US dollar and most things are around 25 per cent cheaper than the UK though prices are often bumped up by tips and taxes added on at the till.

At the heart of it all is the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth, a hotel which sits right in middle of the city centre and has direct access to the underground network. The hotel is the finest in Montreal and it has an exclusive French air. It has attracted some of the world's best-known celebrities including Bill Gates, Aretha Franklin, Jack Nicklaus and John Lennon who wrote the lyrics to 'Give Peace a Chance' there when he staged a bed-in with wife Yoko Ono in 1969.

Hotels off the underground city, such as the Holiday Inn Midtown, tend to be cheaper than those in the centre and are closer to the older sights in Montreal. They include St Joseph's Oratory, the largest church in Canada, as well as the theme park-style attractions in the facilities which were built for the 1967 World's Fair and the 1976 Olympic Games. The US pavilion from the Fair is now an interactive museum about the importance of water, the French pavilion is a casino and the Olympic velodrome has become the Biodome, a fascinating indoor wildlife exhibit themed to different regions of Canada.

In essence Montreal is like America minus the brash and gaudy elements of

some parts of the country and that is reason enough to visit.

Whilst much of Montreal is underground the same certainly cannot be said of its nearby neighbour Toronto which is just a few hours' drive away. Toronto is the largest city in Canada and it shows. Its skyline features almost as many skyscrapers as that of New York with its trademark attraction being the spire-like CN Tower which, until 2010 was the world's tallest free-standing structure. The revolving restaurant at the top often sits above mist and anyone made of stern stuff can walk over a glass walkway which looks 553 metres down.

Toronto has all the chain stores which are abundant in Montreal but it is also home to antique shops, art galleries, jewellers and designer boutiques in the smart Yorkville area. It is easy to get there from the city centre by walking straight down Yonge, which was once the world's longest street. On the way you will pass Chapters, the world's second-largest bookshop - set aside at least an hour to explore it.

Sport is unavoidable in Toronto and it is home to the hall of fame of Canada's national game, ice hockey. No visit would be complete without a trip to see the Toronto Maple Leafs ice hockey team play at the Air Canada Center. The best place to get your bearings is the 25-storey InterContinental Toronto. It is the closest hotel to the CN Tower and from the top floor you can plan where you are going to walk by looking at the toytown-like streets below.



**THE FACTS** Air Canada ([aircanada.com](http://aircanada.com)) flies daily from London Heathrow to Montreal with seasonal winter fares starting at £569. The Fairmont Queen Elizabeth (0800 0441 1414, [fairmont.com](http://fairmont.com)) offers a package including one night of accommodation and buffet breakfast for two from £127 per night. The same package at the Holiday Inn Midtown is from £95 and can be booked by calling 0800 40 50 60 or visit [holidayinn.com](http://holidayinn.com)

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# Lock smart

*A week puttering on the Leeds and Liverpool canal is slow and special*

JANET WATSON

**B**ingly five-rise locks are a daunting place to start your first narrowboat holiday in 20 years. As I really didn't want our first day on the Leeds and Liverpool canal to be a crash course for my teenage sons in how to plunge our 47-footer, Sam's Drum, to a murky lock floor, we decided to head west as we navigated our way out of Silsden Boats' yard, close to Keighley, West Yorkshire.

And, as Silsden's Richard Bradburn said - while imparting 30 years of narrowboat know-how such as "pushing the tiller to the left makes the boat go right", and "don't have a shower without turning the shower pump on first" - heading west towards Skipton and the Yorkshire Dales would give us "some of the best of what this 250-year-old canal has to offer". He wasn't wrong. On its 127-mile journey through beautiful Yorkshire scenery, and beyond, across the border with Lancashire and through the mile-long Foulridge tunnel, the canal takes holidaymakers into a beautiful new world of... slow.

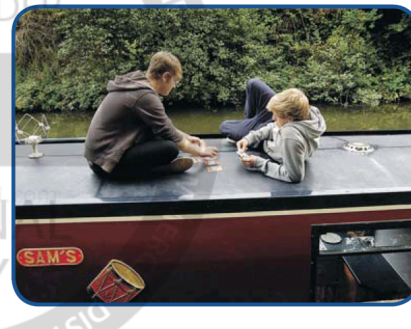
The thing I rediscovered as I steered our 4/5 berth boat - complete with

fully-appointed kitchen - was that it is impossible not to relax and let the world beyond the canal (for which the first sod was dug in 1770) slip away. Everyone is in such a rush; glimpses of "normal" life through gaps between canal-side houses, or queues of cars we caused as we opened and closed swing bridges, or people dashing around with trollies as we wandered aisles of food feeling like we had all the time in the world, had me sighing with relief as our engine kicked into life each mist-filled morning, and we pushed off from our overnight mooring into another day of fresh air and sunshine.

And yes, of course the sunshine helped. Particularly for the teens, who when not taking a turn at the tiller, or "windlassing" lock paddles and pushing open megalon gates, were often to be found lying on the boat's warm roof, beer by elbow, book in hand. I've wanted to take them on such a holiday since they were born, having had similar golden times as an 18-year-old on a school trip that took us underneath the infamous spaghetti junction (it's surprisingly peaceful). Later, it was

odysseys with friends around the Cheshire and Avon rings, Pearson's *Canal Companions* always to hand, as well as the ubiquitous beer.

Silsden Boats is a family business. Barbara and Richard Bradburn bought it in 1995, seeing an opportunity to share their experiences and enthusiasm with other people, like us, who are interested in



# 48 HOURS IN Corralejo

- **Friday, 2pm** Check into the Oasis Papagayo Resort (rooms from £50, [www.oasispapagayo.com](http://www.oasispapagayo.com)), a spacious retreat, boasting a massive pool and bikes to rent, on the fringes of this Fuerteventura resort town.
- **4pm** Descend into Corralejo and explore the old fishing village that forms the resort's core. Go local and enjoy a cortado largo, a large heart-starting milky coffee as you admire the views of Lanzarote and the smaller isle of Lobos across the water.
- **8pm** Savour dinner with a view at Anzuelo (tel: +34 928 536626). The owners of Corralejo's finest seafood restaurant have their own boat and it shows, with

