City hopping in happening Canada’s two major destinations

By Melissa Coleman GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 29, 2016
The upcoming warm months are an excellent time to visit Canada, what with the dollar so strong and the prime minister so hip. Its first- and second-largest cities, English-speaking Toronto and French-speaking Montreal, offer a refreshingly international flavor. And both are less than a two-hour flight from Boston.

MONTREAL
Montreal’s bilingual allure is evident the moment you hear the melodic transitions by locals from French to English. The same can be said for
the architecture, with French Second Empire buildings side-by-side with English Georgian. This unique heritage is referenced on the license plate, “Je me souviens,” the beginning fragment of the line, “I remember/That born under the lily/I grew under the rose,” a nod to both its French (lily) and English (rose) foundations.

**Friday**

**Lodging:** [The Hotel Omni Mont-Royal](#) provides a big-hotel base camp in the Golden Square Mile downtown historic district. The upper of the 299 rooms in the 31-story tower have wide views of the city toward the St. Lawrence River and Mount Royal, the two main geographic features of the island city. There’s also the EQlib spa for a facial or haircut, and an outdoor rooftop pool.

**Dinner:** Montreal’s vibrant dining scene is known for its fortifying Quebecois cuisine, which [Au Pied de Cochon](#) (pig’s foot) has elevated to fame with chef Martin Picard’s odes to foie gras, terrine, and even a namesake stuffed pig’s foot. International fare also abounds. For Mexican, try the creative tequila cocktails and ceviche at Escondite.

**Saturday**

**Old Port:** Take the Metro or walk (past numerous churches and landmarks) to the [Place Jacques-Cartier](#) (the explorer who first claimed the area for France in 1535). The popular summer gathering place offers street entertainers, terrace dining, and nearby landmarks including Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, where mariners have prayed for safe passage on the Saint Lawrence River since 1771. The backside of the Catholic chapel hosts a striking statue of Our Lady of Perpetual Help overlooking the activities along the river.

**Festivals:** The Jazz (June 29-July 9), Fireworks (July 2-30), and Comedy (July 16-31) festivals make up the backbone of summer with a
variety of events every month. And in anticipation of the city’s 375th anniversary next year, special events, including Cité Mémoire’s historic light projections on the sides of buildings and Au Sommet Place Ville Marie’s exhibitions about city features, begin in May.

Lunch: Head northwest to the Mile End neighborhood to find Montreal’s famous bagels, made the old fashioned way — hand rolled, poached in honey-infused water, and baked in a wood-fired oven. Fairmount Bagel and St-Viateur Bagel (on streets with the same names) are in eternal competition for the city’s best bagel — decide for yourself. Along the way, look for Schwartz’s Deli, home to the classic sandwich with the famous smoked meat on rye and yellow mustard. Craft beers are also a thing in Montreal, and Brasserie Harricana in Little Italy is a good place to sample a wide range of local brews over lunch. Afterward, head to nearby Jean-Talon Market to stock up on fresh local produce, maple products, cheese, bread, and bagels at O’Bagel (located just outside the main building), in preparation for tomorrow’s picnic.

Nightlife: Montreal knows how to have fun afterhours. Don clubbing clothes and do some bar hopping on the Old Port’s St. Paul Street, or just head directly to Mimi La Nuit and stay put. This swishy nightclub features a celebrated restaurant in front, with bar in back where the clientele knows how to party and shots flow until 2 a.m.

Sunday

Mount Royal: You can fly kites in public in Montreal, but not in Toronto. Random, but true. The place to do so (and bring that picnic lunch from Jean-Talon) is Mount Royal, the 692-acre park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted (of Manhattan’s Central Park) around the prominent 764-foot “mountain.” Another quirk about Montreal is that
you can drink in public as long as it’s with a meal, so pick up a bottle of wine at the nearest SAQ to go with your kiting picnic, and all will be well.

**Shop:** Last but not least, put your strong American dollar to use at the shopping megaplex of the Complexe Les Ailes, Hudson’s Bay, and the RÉSO Underground City, all located above and below ground near the downtown McGill Metro station on St. Catherine Street.