

DRINKING

top picks

- Blizzarts (p145)
- Reservoir (p147)
- La Buvette Chez Simone (p149)
- Bily Kun (p145)
- Burgundy Lion (p149)
- Bar Plan B (p145)
- Pub Ste-Élisabeth (p143)
- Bifteck (p145)
- Whiskey Café (p149)
- Bu (p149)

DRINKING

Montrealers love to drink. Maybe it's the European influence or that classic French *joie de vivre* but this is a town where it's perfectly acceptable, even expected, to begin cocktail hour after work and continue well into the night.

On a sunny Friday afternoon, the 5-à-7 festive tradition often becomes 5-à-last-call. (Legal closing time is 3am and most establishments stay open until then.) In warm weather, the bars, cafés, pubs and terraces that line Blvd St-Laurent and Rue St-Denis, for example, are all packed with friends enjoying each other's company and the city's charm over a glass of wine, beer or other festive libation. Come wintertime, Montrealers are undaunted by snowstorms and long, frigid nights. In fact, that's when there's not much else to do but find yourself a warm, cozy bar and drink and laugh the night away.

As for places to sip, the city is brimming with options, from grungy holes-in-the-wall to glamorous lounges. You'll find Irish pubs, artsy French watering holes, elegant wine bars, microbreweries, pool halls, student taverns, dancey bars, bohemian teahouses, European cafés and everything in between. Many hip restaurants unofficially become bars after about midnight, some even pushing aside tables to make room for the influx of revelers.

As in Europe, espresso coffee is big here, and most locals start the day with strong, espresso-based drinks at their neighborhood cafés. It's not uncommon for artists, students and self-employed types to spend days hanging out at their favorite cafés, laptops in tow. Many cafés roast their own beans, and fair trade and specialty blends to brew at home are sold in shops around town.

Ultimately, Montréal is a city of characters and personalities who interact over drinks day and night. French, English or other, there are as many choices of where to drink as there are drinkers. What better way to get to know them than by sharing some friendly libations?

WHERE TO DRINK

Just like its people, every Montréal neighborhood has its own unique personality and style. So, where you go usually depends on the vibe you're looking for on any given night (or day). Old Montréal, for example, has become quite a happening area. Its chichi boutique hotels and the new media industry boom centered around the Old Port have resulted in posh new lounges, wine bars and upscale restos where international celebrities canoodle with local scenesters and the fashion crowd.

Downtown's many bars, clubs and cafés tend to cater to tourists and students (Dawson College and McGill and Concordia Universities are all located downtown). In particular, the busy strip of Rue Crescent between Rue Ste-Catherine and Blvd de Maisonneuve is très touristy, especially weekend nights. However, hidden among these more mainstream establishments are some vibrant taverns and quirky little pubs that are part of the city's cultural energy.

Finally, the Plateau Mont-Royal and Mile End 'hoods house quite a variety of drinking spots, from snazzy to dive, though most do appeal to an arty, hip crowd of English and

French speakers. Both districts are loaded with pubs, bars and cafés within walking (or stumbling) distance, so are ideal for bar-hopping. The long strip of Blvd St-Laurent, known as 'the Main,' is lined with bars, pubs and restaurants (in the Plateau, the part of 'the Main' south of Ave des Pins tends to be fancier and pricier, with things mellowing out as you head north).

PRACTICALITIES

The legal drinking age in the province of Québec is 18. Bars must close at 3am, so last call is usually about 15 minutes prior. Generally, you're expected to tip your server or bartender the greater of 15% of your bill, or between \$1 and \$2 for each drink you order.

To buy alcohol to drink at home, Société des Alcools du Québec (SAQ) are government-run liquor stores all over town, selling wines from around the world and most brands of liquor and beer. Their opening hours vary, but *dépanneurs* (corner stores) sell a selection of wine and beer until 11pm, including popular locally produced microbrews like Boréale, St-Ambroise, Cheval Blanc and Belle Gueule. Cheers!