



Hotel Mount Stephen

# Montreal

## a culinary tour

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56

As a culinary writer and foodie, this was a dream assignment – a three-day culinary trip hosted by Tourism Montreal, to discover the city’s latest culinary trends. From yummy tacos served from a food truck at an outdoor event to five-star dining experiences, Montreal is a kaleidoscope of culinary delights from around the world, offered in a gorgeous city that melds old and new with European flair.

The theme for day one is ‘Restaurants in Hotels that are not Hotel Restaurants,’ and our first stop is *Etre Avec Toi*, or **EAT** as it is known. This combination of restaurant and art gallery is located in the posh *W Hotel* in Victoria Square (No...the hotel is NOT named after America’s 43rd president). It’s the same square that boasts a historic ironwork scrolled subway stop which was a gift from the city of Paris.

Guests enter **EAT** through an alley-like tunnel with graffiti street art plastering the walls while inside, the walls are filled

with the works of local artists. Each dish is perfectly presented by Executive Chef Gregory Faye. The chef wheels out a cart holding a charcuterie board to beat all charcuterie boards! He takes his knife and carves thick slices of his homemade Pate Croute, wrapped in a buttery pastry. Several other courses followed, including heirloom tomatoes, succulent cod wrapped in zucchini flowers, rosemary lamb - with most ingredients sourced from the local farmer’s market. “Food is art,” states Chef Faye with passion. *W Hotel* even features a “Bartini”, a chic scotch tasting bar that seats eight guests!

We then headed to the stunningly beautiful *Mount Stephen Hotel*’s **Bar George** for a night cap. This historic 1880 building was once the home of Sir George Stephen, a wealthy Montreal railroad tycoon. A newly opened luxury hotel adjoins the historic building. Guests are welcome to explore the mansion before settling in for dinner or enjoying a signature cocktail at **Bar George**.

The culinary theme for day two is 'Ethnic but Authentic Niche Food' and what better way to start than with a walking tour of the old and new Chinatown neighbourhoods. The original dates back to the 1860's. Ironically we eat tacos in Chinatown at **Capital Taco** before sampling Dragon's Nest candy and Chinese pastries, followed by dumplings in the newer Chinatown near *Concordia University*.

**Atwater Market** is close by and offers a colourful array of fruits, vegetables, fresh flowers, cheeses and great restaurants including **Satay Brothers** and **La Marmite Su'l Feu**. **La Fromagerie Atwater** has been a landmark shop at the market since the '70s, offering 850 varieties of cheese! "Cheese has become very popular especially over the past five to six years as chefs are incorporating cheese into every meal," explains owner, Gilles Jourdenais.

Montreal offers a multitude of world cuisines as we soon discovered while sampling delicious Philippine fare at **Junior Restaurant** on Notre-Dame West, followed by African cuisine at **Le Virunga** restaurant, where the mother and daughter team of Maria-Jose de Frias and Zoya de Frias Lakhany make the most incredibly rich and delicious goat dish called Ragout de Chevre, and as a sweet treat, beignets made from plantain.



LOV. Photo by Patricia Brochu

With four major outdoor farmer's markets open year round including Atwater and Jean-Talon Markets, it's no wonder that veggie artistry and vegan fare are hot trends in Montreal.

I am in love with **LOV**, a vegan and vegetarian restaurant serving "botanical food" expertly prepared by Executive Chef Stephanie Audet. We devour delicious vegetarian Mac and Cheese and other dishes while trying "Orange Wine" for the first time. The trendy decor features white and green botanical prints with bird houses on the wall, an open kitchen and even a few swing chairs for diners to enjoy.

For pre or post dinner cocktails head to **The Lab**, a swank cocktail bar on Sainte-Catherine Street East. Bartender Florian Boivin puts on quite a show as he juggles cocktail shakers and then impresses us by lighting a flame on the Jerky Lab Jack. Due to its popularity, this is the second Lab location in Montreal. "We created the first speakeasy type bar in a small space in the Plateau and which respects bartending as an art form," explains Lab Owner Fabien Maillard. "It's all about the unique experience."

**La Grande Tournée** is a renowned outdoor food festival which rotates to various parks throughout the summer and fall, attracting over 100,000 people to enjoy the festivities and food truck fare. We do just that, enjoying tasty tacos from the **Grumman 78 Restaurant** Food Truck, compliments of Gaele Cerf, owner and VP of the *Street Food Association of Quebec*.

You can't go to Montreal without visiting **Schwartz's Deli** for their smoked meat sandwiches, **St-Viateur Bagel** and **Fairmount Bagel Bakery** for their fresh bagels and **Chez Tousignant** for homemade poutine and hot dogs. Also take time to explore the trendy neighbourhoods of Griffintown and Little Burgundy, historic Old Montreal and the Plateau shopping area. Then head to the landmark *Queen Elizabeth Hotel* for a cocktail in the new **Nacarat Lounge**. This historic hotel recently underwent a \$140 million renovation and boasts luxurious accommodation with panoramic views of downtown Montreal and Mount Royal. The Queen E recently opened the John Lennon and Yoko Ono Suite. It's the same room where the famous couple stayed in bed for several days and wrote the song Give Peace a Chance.

This year Montreal celebrates their 375th anniversary. Three glorious days spent in this beautiful city seemed to the tip of the iceberg in discovering all that Montreal has to offer in terms of one-of-a-kind culinary and cultural experiences. But it was time to head home to Toronto via VIA business class. Why make the five or six hour drive from Toronto to Montreal when you can relax and ride the rails in luxury? Sipping complimentary wine and cocktails while enjoying a choice of meals, watching the world go by seems the perfect way to cap off a perfect weekend filled with memorable Montreal moments. 🍷



Cocktails at The LAB speakeasy-type cocktail lounge.



Schwartz's Deli