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# DAILY NEWS

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## A trip to Montreal should include vibrant neighborhoods like Westmount, Saint Henri and Hochelaga-Maisonneuve

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Sherbrooke St., the main artery of the Westmount area, has edible plants instead of ornamentals in the public planters.

At Le Smoking Vallee down the street, a raucous bring-your-own-wine spot, smartly dressed hordes dig into clean, classic French fare. There's mushroom-truffle tart with poached egg (\$12) and steak frites (\$24).

Storefronts here feel more artsy than those in Westmount. On nearby rue St-Jacques, BBAM! Gallery hosts local bands, boundary-pushing exhibits and even brunch. There's a small, warm cafe too. It's worth a stop for its Berlin-meets-Brooklyn-back-in-the-day vibe.

Way northeast, on the other side of the city, sits a funhouse-mirror image of tony Westmount. The Francophone stronghold of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve has for years been a low-key residential district. Factories here were the community's lifeblood.

Fast-forward to 2013: The neighborhood's been rechristened HoMa. Low rents and proximity to downtown have made the area a magnet for artists and creatives. And it's become one of Montreal's most cracklingly energetic quarters, with sexy establishments opening on every block of Ontario Street E., the main drag.



**Boasting a hipster Brooklyn vibe, BBAM! Gallery, in Saint Henri, hosts local bands and edgy art exhibits.**

The two-year-old HoMa pioneer is Hoche Cafe (4299 rue Ontario E.), a high-ceilinged, perpetually packed spot that feels at once hip and homey. Along with kickass coffee from hard-to-find Chicago roaster Metropolis, owner Dominic Roy-Blanchette features a soul-warming lunch special daily, like a recent grilled-cheese sandwich and tomato soup combo (\$10.95).

What looks like a typical corner store across the street turns out to be Le Bierologue, a six-month-old hot spot dedicated to “100% Quebec” products. That translates as lusty Kruhnen beer (22 ounces, \$6.49) from a tiny local microbrewery founded by a Romanian immigrant, or irresistible maple-infused barbecue sauce from Montreal outfit Printemps (7.49).

The strip’s newest addition is also its most tempting. Les Gourmandises de Marie Antoinette offers exquisite, refined pastries like picture-perfect macarons (\$4) and summery coconut-mango tarts (\$6). Top-quality ingredients like Valrhona chocolate and Quebec dairy products help set this place apart. Be warned, it’s closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

Montreal’s not huge, but it is deep. Layers and nuances await discovery, but it takes a little work. The reward of digging in these just-off-the-beaten-track neighborhoods is the discovery of cities within a city. And maybe even a richer understanding of this complicated, captivating capital.



**WANT** Apothecary mixes clothing, tchotchkes and skincare products.

## IF YOU GO

**Fly:** Air Canada ([aircanada.com](http://aircanada.com)) offers nonstop service from La Guardia and Newark, starting around \$400 round trip.

**Stay:** Year-old Hotel Zero One (1 Boul. Rene-Levesque E., 514-871-9696, [zero1-mtl.com](http://zero1-mtl.com)), on downtown’s eastern edge, has clean, modern loft-style rooms. Suites offer sweeping views. From \$139.

Casa Bianca (4351 Ave. de L'Esplanade, 1-866-775-4431, [casabianca.ca](http://casabianca.ca)), just north of downtown, is an imposing old mansion. Minimalist, all-white rooms feel like nothing else in town.

**Drive:** Montreal's got a terrific mass-transit system, but visitors can also rent a car at the airport to save time. All major car-rental companies operate at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport; Enterprise (enterprise.com) generally offers the best service and rates, starting around \$40 a day.

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