



# Minneapolis & Tours Blog

*A friendship between the cities of Minneapolis & Tours*

## Exploring my French heritage in Montreal

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La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montreal in Quebec

Almost 400 years ago, my ancestors left a small village in Touques, France to relocate halfway across the world in what was then known as New France. Now known as Quebec, it was the starting point for their North American adventure that would eventually lead them to my home state of Minnesota. Recently, I had the chance to explore this region through a visit to the province's largest city, Montréal.

Located on the Island of Montréal about six hours north of New York City on the St. Lawrence River, this cosmopolitan center of commerce is the second largest French speaking city in the world. (The city itself is home to about 1.7 million but the entire metro area population is about four million.) As it is just a 2 ½ hour nonstop flight from Minneapolis, it provides an excellent opportunity for those who would like to experience a North American city with a European flair without the overseas airfare.



Rue de Saint Paul in Vieux Montreal (Old Montreal).

French is the official language of Quebec so you will have the chance to be immersed in a different language...with the comfort of knowing that you are in Canada and they all speak English as well if you need anything. (When I turned on my TV at the hotel, it said “Bienvenue Ms Johnson.” You can find TV channels and newspapers in both French and English.) I recommend starting with a visit to Vieux Montréal (Old Montreal), a section of downtown with preserved buildings, cobblestone streets and sidewalk cafes reminiscent of those in Paris or Tours. Although you definitely still have to watch where you are walking, one of the benefits to being in Canada is that places like this are more accessible than many in Europe to the elderly or handicapped.

As so often happens with historic districts, modern tourists owe a debt to those who stepped in and saved the area. In the early 1960's, there were plans to tear down and put a highway through the heart of Old Montreal until a couple of European architects who had recently visited convinced the city that it should be preserved. It was designated a historic district in 1964. At Pointe-à-Callière (Montreal Museum of Archaeology and History), located near Old Montreal on the riverfront, you can learn about the city's history and see old stone fortifications showcasing hundreds of years of human activity.

Rising on the corner of Saint Sulpice and facing Place d'Armes Square is La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal, a church designed in the Gothic Revival architectural style and modeled after La Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Built roughly between 1824 and 1829, the stained glass windows tell the story of the city's history and, as if to highlight the area's forestry industry, the interior is completely made of wood but amazingly has never had a fire. (A bit of divine intervention, perhaps.)



Salmon Fish Tail with Julienne Vegetables and Potatoes Rosti at Restaurant L'Original

Have I mentioned the food? Like in France, Québécois know a good meal. Minnesotans will feel right at home at Restaurant L'Original (original is French for moose) as the bistro features dark, Northwoods style décor and a menu consisting of venison tartare and salmon fish tail. One of the fun things about the food is the mix of French and Canadian traditions – at the YUL Eat Festival (Montreal's food truck festival, YUL is the city's airport code), I tried foie gras poutine. Yes, apparently there is no limit to the varieties of this ubiquitous Canadian dish. Also, at Les Délices de L'Érable on Rue de Saint Paul in Old Montreal, you can find endless options for maple flavored products, from taffy to lip balm.

Next stop: Quebec City? There is so much more to explore in this piece of France in North America. À bientôt, j'espère!