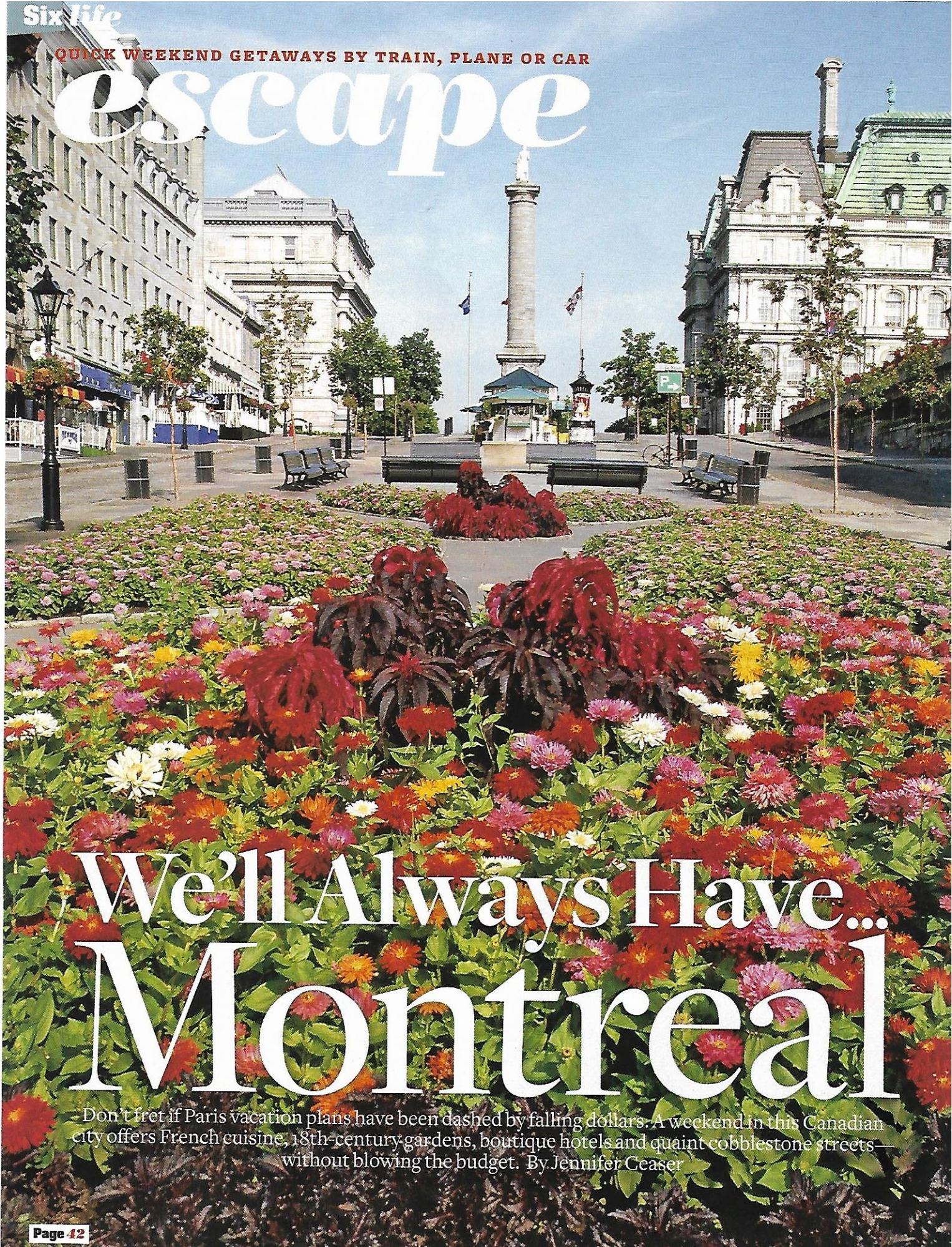


QUICK WEEKEND GETAWAYS BY TRAIN, PLANE OR CAR

escape

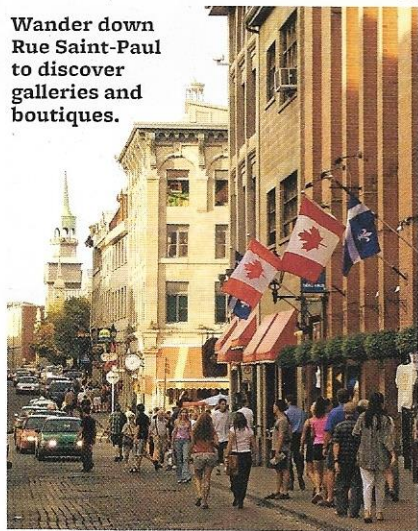


We'll Always Have... Montreal

Don't fret if Paris vacation plans have been dashed by falling dollars. A weekend in this Canadian city offers French cuisine, 18th-century gardens, boutique hotels and quaint cobblestone streets—without blowing the budget. By Jennifer Ceaser

Montreal, often referred to as the Paris of North America, is a mere 1½-hour flight from New York. And while the city isn't the bargain it once was—the U.S. dollar now trades about evenly with the Canadian—it still offers many of the charms of its European counterpart. Bistros and outdoor cafes hum with locals conversing in French (it's the official language of the city, though English is widely spoken, too), tourists gawk at the extravagant Gothic Revival-style Notre-Dame Basilica (the site of Celine Dion's 1994 wedding), and the Bonsecours Market is crowded with shoppers picking up chic frocks from local designers. So follow our guide to experiencing the sophistication of Paris without the hefty euro price tags.

Wander down Rue Saint-Paul to discover galleries and boutiques.



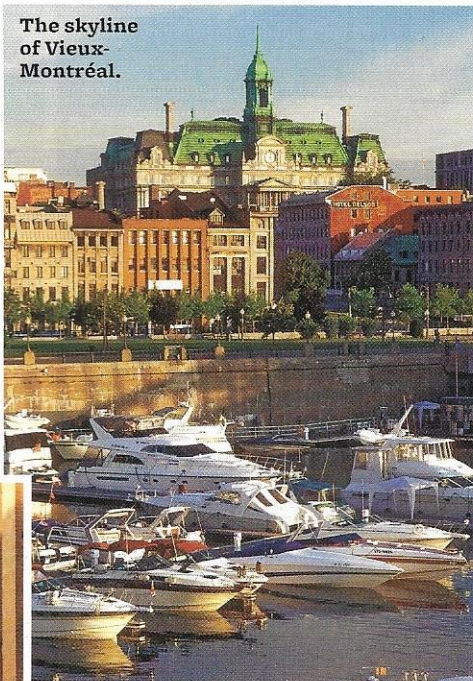
Instead of...Montmartre Try...Vieux-Montréal

For a dose of quintessential French flavor, walk through Vieux-Montréal (Old Montreal). This historic center, which lies between the St. Lawrence River and the skyscrapers of modern downtown, is a labyrinth of narrow, winding streets, where many stone buildings dating from the city's founding (in 1642) have been preserved. Rue Saint-Paul, its oldest street, is lined with galleries, boutiques and souvenir shops, while pedestrian-only Rue Saint-Amable, known as Artists' Row, is a haven for artists and craftspeople. Cobblestone plaza Place de Jacques-Cartier (pictured left) has market stalls stocked with flowers and food, and buskers and street artists entertain patrons at sidewalk cafes.

Instead of...Jardin des Tuileries Try...Jardin du Gouverneur

For a respite from the crowds, wander through the petite Jardin du Gouverneur, behind Montreal's heritage museum, Château Ramezay (280 rue Notre-Dame Est, chateauramezay.qc.ca). Spectacular peonies, daylilies and hostas pay homage to the private gardens of the nobility who settled this city in the 18th century.

The skyline of Vieux-Montréal.



Instead of...the Latin Quarter in Paris Try...the Latin Quarter in Montreal

Kick things off during *cinq à sept* (translation: 5 to 7 p.m.), Montreal's happy hour. Grab a seat at the orange-lit 30-foot-long marble bar at the sleek Suco Resto-Lounge (2108 Boulevard Saint Laurent, 514-380-3551), and take in the stunning indoor steel sculptures by Canadian artist Scott Eunson as you sip a tasty Vitamin V cocktail made with Grey Goose, red Alizé, passion fruit and cranberry juice (\$15). **Saving: \$14. A Long Island Iced Tea at the lounge at the Hôtel Costes in Paris will set you back about \$29.**

Instead of...Café de la Paix Try...Restaurant Garde-Manger

If you're lucky enough to score a dinner reservation at Restaurant Garde-Manger (408 St-François-Xavier, 514-678-5044), a bustling but cozy restaurant in Old Montreal, you'll be rewarded with some of the best seafood this side of the Great Lakes. The seafood "trough" (\$125) features a fresh assortment of clams, shrimp, crab legs and oysters so big, you'll need at least four people (or two extremely hungry ones) to polish it off. **Saving: \$83. The plateau "prestige," an assortment of seafood, at Café de la Paix in Paris is about \$208.**

Instead of...the Spa Valmont Try...the Valmont Beauty Lounge

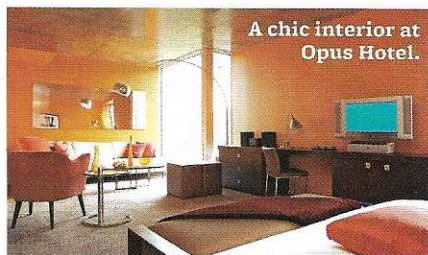
Set in Old Montreal, the Valmont Beauty Lounge (446 rue Sainte-Hélène, 514-510-6850) is housed in a beautiful Italian Renaissance-style building dating from the mid-1800s. It's the only North American outpost of this renowned Swiss spa, which uses natural plants and glacial water to create its antiaging products. Try the 1½-hour Glow Energizing Treatment, which at \$245, isn't cheap, but will make you look spectacular for a night on the town. **Saving: \$64. The same treatment at Hotel Le Meurice's Spa Valmont in Paris will set you back about \$309.**

Instead of...Le Lucernaire Try...Ex-Centris

Ex-Centris (3536 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, 514-847-2206), a paean to Canadian and foreign indie films, features luxuriously large seats with individual climate control systems (yes, your own AC!). Plus, as food and drink are verboten here, there are no sticky floors or nacho-munching neighbors. Tickets are \$10. **Saving: \$1.60. At the arty Le Lucernaire in Paris, tickets are about \$11.60.**

Instead of...Buddha-Bar Try...Koko

Koko (8 rue Sherbrooke Ouest, 514-657-5656) is a 9,000-square-foot palace of Pan-Asian food and drink, sparkling chandeliers, black velvet drapery and furnishings (by the likes of Philippe Starck) with an avant-garde vibe that perfectly complements architect Joseph-Arthur Godin's 1914 Art Nouveau structure. Find your spot on the large terrace and moon over Asian-influenced cocktails like the Aya containing vodka, sake, ginger and lychees (\$12), or classics like the Negroni (\$12). **Saving: \$16. A martini at Buddha-Bar in Paris is about \$28.**



Instead of...L'Hôtel Try...Opus Hotel

Head upstairs from Koko to the newly renovated Opus Hotel (10 rue Sherbrooke Ouest, 514-843-6000). Try for a room on the historic side of the building, with its curved walls and sumptuous baths. Rates start at around \$250 per night. If you're looking for a more affordable option, try the Hotel Kutuma (3708 rue St-Denis, 514-844-0111). Rates from \$150. **Saving: \$214. At L'Hôtel in Paris, rooms cost about \$464 a night.**

GETTING THERE: American Airlines and Air Canada offer round-trip fares to Montreal from LaGuardia for \$428, whereas an Air France round-trip fare to Paris starts at \$1,194. **SAVING: \$766**