



Each month we'll bring you a guide to the greatest hockey cities in the world. First off is the place where you'll find hockey fans at their most passionate, the beautiful city of Montreal in Quebec, Canada.

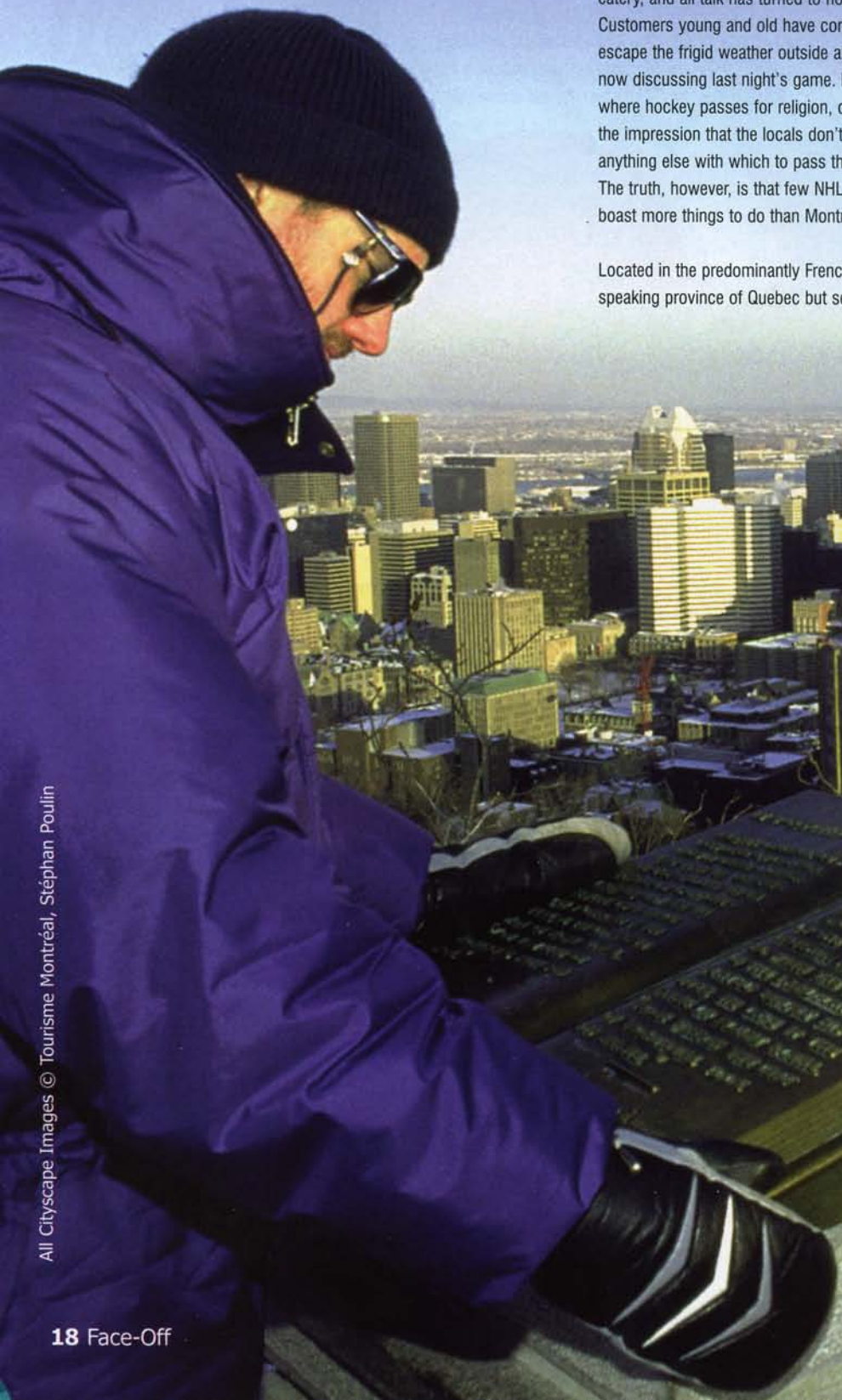
Despite fanatical supporters and a century of tradition, there is much more to this island metropolis than just hockey

It is a chill February afternoon in Schwartz's, Montreal's venerable smoked meat sandwich eatery, and all talk has turned to hockey. Customers young and old have come in to escape the frigid weather outside and are now discussing last night's game. In a city where hockey passes for religion, one gets the impression that the locals don't need anything else with which to pass the time. The truth, however, is that few NHL cities boast more things to do than Montreal.

Located in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec but settled by

both the English and the French, Montreal has evolved into a truly bilingual city. (The French settlers were called 'Habitants', hence the H on the Canadiens' jersey and the team nickname, the 'Habs'.) It is this combination of languages and cultures that gives Montreal the most European feel of any city on the continent. Theatre, art and fashion are all high priority for Montrealers. A passion for fine dining is just another of the holdovers from the city's French settlers. The cobblestoned Old Port that sits alongside the St. Lawrence River is redolent of small Italian coastal cities.

Not simply focused on culture, Montreal has a pulsating nightlife unparalleled throughout the rest of Canada. St. Laurent Street, the unofficial center of town, houses more than



50 bars in the space of four blocks. Whether you are searching for pleasant pubs, dingy dives or all-night clubbing, your choice of watering hole will never be far away. For the BMW-driving, leather-pant wearing set, west Montreal's Crescent Street is the place to go for cocktail bars and swank dance clubs. The city also boasts one of the highest ratios of strip clubs per capita in the entire continent (if you like that sort of thing of course.)

Nicknamed 'The City of Festivals', rarely a week goes by in summer without a major event of some sort or another occurring. The Montreal Film Festival gives way for the Just For Laughs Comedy Festival that, in turn, overlaps with the Jazz Festival, a week-long music extravaganza which sees hundreds of thousands of people flocking to the streets,

watching free concerts all day long and throughout the night. If music isn't your thing, there is always Montreal's Formula One Grand Prix or International Beer Festival with which to while away the hot summer days.

Severe winters put paid to most of the city's festivals but this does not mean people go into hibernation. In fact, Montreal has an underground city with more than 20 miles of stores for those who won't let metre-deep snowdrifts quell their bargain-hunting urge.

The Bell Centre is the place for hockey. The largest arena in the NHL has an intense atmosphere and when the team plays well you'll struggle to find a louder building. All the usual concessions are at hand but the

CityStats

City: Montreal
Population: 3,325,000 (approx.)
NHL Team: Montreal Canadiens
Arena: Bell Centre
Seating Capacity: 21,500
Tickets: www.admission.com/
(514) 799-1245
Prices: \$22-\$160 CDN
Hometown Heroes: Maurice Richard, Mario Lemieux, J.S. Giguere
Local Talent: Leonard Cohen (poet/singer), Jacques Villeneuve (F1 driver), William Shatner (actor) live long and prosper...
Top Shelf - Montreal's Must-Do: Visit the "Tarn-Tarns" on Mount Royal, a weekly affair on Sundays where around 100 bongo players perform before thousands of people dancing, playing Frisbee or just relaxing in the summer sun

Habs are a big draw so get your tickets early.

Away from the hockey, outdoor pursuits are also not forgotten. Despite the occasionally brutal cold, many Montrealers still set up rinks in their back yards come the winter freeze. Even on days with temperatures at 20 below zero, you can find children and adults alike playing hockey outside, faces flushed red from the cold and their steamy breath escaping from behind thick scarves and woolen hats (known as 'toques' in Canada).

And if the temperature ever gets simply too cold outside, there will always be smoked meat to eat and twenty-four Stanley Cups to gloat over. In your face, Bruins fans.

- Noah Wheelock

Montreal

ROADGAME

