

# Canada

Bienvenie a Montreal!

Upon arriving in Montreal at the beginning of January, I was met with a sub-zero cold spell. After the initial shock, and figuring out I would need to allot 15 minutes in the morning to even prepare to leave the house, I was able to enjoy all this wonderful city has to offer. Montreal is an amalgam of cultures who manage to preserve their own heritage and experience new ones. At first it was confusing for me to read signs and understand names of streets when they were all in French, then it became part of the adventure. From Place des Arts to Lucien l'Allier and a loonie to a toonie (money terms), I have begun to adjust and revel in the new sights and sounds waiting for me to explore. I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to come and study in such an amazing city as Montreal. When you arrive here you will begin to feel the welcoming and unique feel that Montreal possesses. Although you may be greeted by a Bonjour instead of hello you will soon learn to adjust. Hopefully these notes from my experiences will assist you in your adjustment.

## What to Bring:

If you are coming at the beginning of the school year it will be the end of the summer months here in Montreal. Although I was not here for a summer, the summer here is very hot and humid. The summer heat will continue until the beginning of September. In September fall will begin and soon the winter will be here. By November the winter months will begin. Be sure to have clothing to get you through the long winter. The heat will not be back until the end of May. You should have a warm coat that is lined, a long scarf, long underwear, warm hat and gloves, water proof shoes and warm socks. You may be better off purchasing your winter apparel in Montreal because the California gear often isn't made for the type of winter you will experience here. The most important thing is to dress so you can stay dry and warm during the many weeks of whiteness.

## Arrival Information:

After going through customs you will have to go to the immigration area and if you staying for less then six months you will need to bring your acceptance letter from the university and if you are staying longer then 6 months you will need to bring your CAQ and study permit. The immigration officer will check over your documents and then you

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need to go to the baggage carousel. Do not exit through the double doors without your luggage because they will not let you back in once you exit. If you exit without your luggage you will have to call the airlines on the “black phones” and wait for them to bring your luggage. I made this mistake and trust me the two hour wait was not pleasant.

#### On-Site Orientation:

Concordia University will send you an information packet upon your acceptance into the program. The packet will include information on the orientation sessions that will be held through the International Student’s Office. Be sure to attend one of these information sessions as they will give you instructions and deadlines about paperwork you fill out. They will also give you information about all the services that Concordia offers.

#### Language:

Quebec is officially bilingual; French and English. Although it is possible to know only one of these languages, knowing both will make it much easier to get around. I didn’t know any French when I came here and haven’t had much time to commit to learning it while here. I am able to get around in English but I often approached in French and when I say I don’t speak French they either switch to English or try to find someone to translate. Having a French dictionary with you is a good idea because you never know when you might go out to eat and the menu will be in all French. The College of Extended Learning, The College Platoon, and the YMCA all offer French classes for a good price. Make sure you register early because they fill up quickly.

#### Money and Banking:

There are many banks around Montreal. I choose to keep my account in California and opened an account at the Royal Bank of Canada. When you do use you account in California you may be charged a currency conversion fee which is dependent upon the amount of the purchase. I opened a US account and a Canadian account at the RBC. My parents would send me checks or money orders and I would put them in my US account and then transfer over as I needed to. Instead of debit cards with a Visa or MasterCard symbol on them they use Interac cards which are accepted everywhere. The banks here will hold checks from the US for a certain number of days depending on the amount. This is quite a hassle so if you can have your money transferred from the US or get cashier checks sent, it will save you a lot of hassle. The bank will exchange your money for you and give you the current rate. If possible though, try to have some Canadian money before you come or get it at the airport to hold you over for the first few days.

The banks here are not open on the weekends and only 10-4 during the week. Close to the downtown campus there is a Toronto Dominion Bank (TD) which I was told has a special deal for international students. That may be your best bet to avoid the hassle of having checks held.

#### Housing:

I was lucky enough to have place lined up before I came to Montreal but if you don't it is quite easy to find a good place that is close to campus. The housing costs in Montreal are relatively low especially in comparison to San Francisco. You can rent a three bedroom flat for the cost of a room in San Francisco. At the beginning of the semester the International Students Office at Concordia offers housing workshops and they have vacancy numbers and contacts for people who are looking for roommates. Many international students I have talked to got their housing this way. When you first arrive you can either stay at a hostel or the YMCA in Montreal. Concordia also offers dorms and if you are quick on your feet you may be able to get into those. The best thing to do is make sure that you are renting a place that is relatively close to school because an hour bus ride each way everyday is a hassle.

#### Health Insurance:

It is mandatory for all international students at Concordia to get the compulsory health plan coverage. When you see an advisor in the International Students Office they will give you the health plan card and your student account will be billed. I paid \$399 CAD for coverage from January-August. You have no choice about the health plan even if you already have coverage in California so plan on having the money to pay for it. You do not have to pay the money all at once but you can make payments on your student account when you do have the money. Luckily, I never had to use the health plan, but if you do have to use it you have to front the money and then you fill out forms in the International Students Office to be reimbursed.

#### Registering for Classes:

Students at Concordia register the spring before the semester begins for their classes for the next two semesters. Although many classes fill quickly international students are given some benefit and you can generally get into all the classes that you need to. Once you have been accepted and receive you information packet be sure to email the advisor listed to have your courses approved. They will then register you for the courses. Do not panic if it takes them a while, it will be done before you leave. Make sure that you stay

in contact with the advisor and the International Students Office to make sure that you have been registered.

#### Laundry:

Although many apartments in Montreal are provided with washers and dryers there are Laundromats available. The Laundromats are all over the city and are essentially the same as the ones in the States.

#### Health, Diet, and Exercise:

Montreal is known for its St. Viateur bagels, Schwartz's smoked meat and poutine, (a deadly mix of French fries, rich brown gravy and cheese curds.), all heart stopping foods. Be sure to enjoy all the wonderful mix of food that the city has to offer. There are also many healthy alternatives and even though it is bitter cold here, there is wonderful produce in all the stores year round. As far as exercise goes, the Recreation Department at Concordia offers recreation classes which you can take for a small fee. Also, the YMCA's around Montréal have a great reduced rate for students and there is one right down the street from the downtown campus. The YMCA's have indoor pools, weight rooms, and aerobic classes. There are also many other gyms around the city. Even though it is well below zero outside make sure you don't let it turn you into a couch potato or a couch poutine.

#### Transportation in the City:

The bus and metro systems are very efficient and reliable in Montreal. When the streets are snowed over they are the best way to get from point A to point B. At the orientation session the ISO will give you the STM (subway) map telling you which lines go where. The STM also has a web site where you can view which buses stop where. The busses generally run according to schedule. If you get to the stop and don't see the bus coming you can call the number on the sign and it will tell you how many minutes until the bus will be at your stop. University students are offered discounted monthly passes only, not discounted tickets or discounted weekly passes. To get a discounted monthly pass you have to get a special card identifying you as a student. To get this card you must go to the registrar's office and fill out an STM form and have them validate it for you. Then, you must take the form to Berri-Uqam station and have your picture taken and for \$10 you will receive the card that will get you 50% off your bus pass each month. It is really worth it, especially if you are planning to take the metro everyday.

#### Travel on Breaks and for Field Trips:

Montréal has many wonderful landmarks that you should try to see. The Notre Dame Cathedral, Old Port, the Insectarium, Olympic Stadium, St. Anne de Bellevue, Downtown area, St Joseph's Oratory, and the Biodome are among them. I would recommend all these sights as they are very historically interesting to the city itself. Aside from the tourist sights Montreal and the surrounding area offers many winter activities that we do not have access to in sunny California. Ice Skating, Winter Carnaval, ice fishing, sledding, and cabane a sucre are among them. It is possible to do these activities on your own or through a student organization. During the spring and summer months Montreal is known for all these festivals it has, including The Just for Laughs Comedy festival, the Jazz festival, the St. Patrick's Day annual parade, the World Film Festival, and the International Fireworks Competition. After the long winter months the city opens up and everyone is out on the streets enjoying the exciting festivities.

Although Montreal is a great city it is nice to get out of the city and into the country on long weekends and breaks. Limocar bus service offers student discounts for their service to the Western and Eastern townships. I went to Magog for the weekend and stayed at a bed and breakfast. The website, [www.goskica.ca](http://www.goskica.ca) has great information about possible destinations outside of Montréal. You can also take VIArail to places that are a bit farther like Toronto and Quebec City. The Concordia International Student Organization, CISA, organizes many low-cost field trips to place like Quebec City. CISA also organizes a trip to New York City toward the end of the school year. The CISA trip to New York is very rushed so if you would like to spend more time there Greyhound has service from Montreal to New York for only \$100 USD. If you go to Berri-Uqam (Centrale Station) they have a complete list of the bus companies and their destinations. Since you are in Canada you should try to see as much of this beautiful country as you can.

#### Telephone and Mail:

Cell phones are just as popular here as they are in California and many people get a cell phone with US calls included in the plan, and rely solely on that. There are many different carriers in Montreal: Telus, Fido, Sprint, and Microcell, among others. I would suggest shopping around for the one with the best rates to the US so you can call home. I didn't get a cell phone but instead relied on calling cards and a land line. I have sprint phone service in my apartment and they have very good rates to the US. I also used calling cards, they sell these in all the deppanuers (corner stores) and grocery stores around Montreal.

The mail service in Canada is not the best. A letter takes about 5 business days to get to California and packages often don't get there. Every package I sent got returned

and each package sent to me took at least 2 ½ weeks. In the winter the snow and ice slow down the postal service so it may take even longer. If you are looking to send a package I would suggest going through UPS or some other private company.

#### Employment:

If are 6 months or less you will only be able to work if you get a CAQ, a study permit and a work permit. These all cost money and I found that I would not make as money as I spent on these if I got a job. If you are staying for more then 6 months you will have to get a CAQ and a study permit anyway so the only additional thing you will need is the work permit. The study permit allows you to work on campus and in some cases off campus too. The International Student's Office has the information and the forms necessary to get a work permit. Concordia has many student jobs and international students are often given priority.

#### Class Structure and Studying:

The academics here have been more challenging to me with less teacher student interaction and more independent work. The grading scale here is different where most departments consider the A range to be all the way down to an 84%. I know that sounds easier, but getting into that A range is much more difficult then at San Francisco State University. Since there is more independent work you have to be very strict with yourself and not fall behind. If you allow yourself to just glide through then you be scrambling during mid-term and final time. My best advice is to set a schedule for yourself and make sure that you attend classes because many teachers here don't just follow the textbook.

#### Computer Access

The library at Concordia has many internet accessible areas. At the downtown library on the first floor there are two internet labs. Any Concordia student can use these as long as you have your my Concordia net name and password. Some of the computers are for a half of an hour and the others are for quick 10 minute sessions. These computers only have the internet and no other applications but you may print off of them. You may also borrow lap tops from the 4th floor; these have the wireless internet and all other applications (word, excel, etc.). You can borrow the laptops for 2 hours but there is often a very long wait. If you have your own laptop you can go to the 9th floor of the Hall building downtown to the ITS office and sign up to have wireless on your laptop. You get an account number and you then have the internet all the time when you are on campus. Many people bring there laptops to class at Concordia and they may be

seen on the internet during class. Each major has their own computer lab and you will have to contact your department to see where these are located. The computers in these labs can often be used for a much longer time.

#### Interaction with Local Students:

The best way to get involved with local students is through the CISA (Concordia International Student's Association). CISA is a great way to meet new people and go on adventures. Although most of these students are international, many of them have been at Concordia for 2 or 3 years and know the city very well. Taking advantage of the great activities offered by student organizations is a great way to have access to all the cultural activities in Quebec and other social activities. There are also many other organizations on campus that you can be involved with; at your orientation they will give you a booklet that lists all the active clubs on campus. Many of your major classes at Concordia will be quite small and this will allow you to become acquainted with local students who are in your same department.

I hope that this information will help you to prepare for your time in Montreal. I wish you the best of luck and hope that you will enjoy the experience as much as I did.

***This is an additional report. Last updated Fall 2002.***

## **Concordia University** *Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

**Fall 2002**

### **Things to do before you leave:**

-Apply for a student visa if you go for one year.  
You may visit this website to find out more about Canadian immigration policies and locations of visa offices.

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/index.html>

If you go for less than 6 months, you don't need a student visa.

-Talk to your advisor to see what courses you can take, and what you cannot take.

-Purchase an international student ID at 530 Bush Street.

-Sign up for a room in dorm because you need a place to stay once you arrive there. You can move out later if you don't like to live in dorm.

-Bring some travelers' checks with you (about \$200/month, depends on your spending habit).

Note: If you are accepted by Concordia University, you'll receive all this information in a package by mail in June or the beginning of July.



### **Things to do after you arrived in Montreal**

-Go to attend all the orientations because the information is very useful.

-Sign up as a member at Concordia International Student Association because they would send you email whenever they have activities (trip to New York, parties, etc.).

-Get a student ID at Library 185.

-Go to see your advisor in downtown campus (the building near Concordia Metro station) to sign up/change/withdraw your courses.

-Open a student bank account either at "TD" bank or "Bank of Loyale" because they are very close to the campus. "TD" bank is located between Saint Catherine and Guy Street. "Bank of Loyale" is on Guy and between De Maisonneuve and Shearbrook st. (another main street in downtown). You may use your ATM card (they called it debit card) to pay for whatever you buy in Canada. It's just like a credit card. The difference is that they'd debit from your banking account automatically. Make sure you go to close your bank account before you come back here!!

-Go to Library 185 to get a form to apply for a student metro ticket. You can bring this form, \$8 and a proof of residency to go to "Berri Uqam" metro station to apply for a privilege card. You will need to show this card when you buy your discount monthly fare. The original price for a pass is \$50CND, but the student pass is \$25CND/month.

-Go to the 9th floor in Hall Building to apply for an Internet or email account. If you have your own email account or access to the Internet, you don't need to apply.

-Make sure you fill out the form for "permanent code". If you go to attend the orientation, you will be asked to fill one out there. Otherwise, you should go to the International Student Office to ask for a

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form and fill it out the month before the semester ends. It's very important that you fill it out. If you don't fill it out, they may charge you about \$4000 CND at the end of the semester (not sure how much they'd charge, you can check it up at the International student office).

You can check your own information online if you go to "www.concordia.ca" and click on student information. Just make sure that your "permanent code" (a series of numbers) shows up on your record one month before the semester ends.

### **Off/On-Campus Housing?**

#### *Dorm*

You have several options in choosing accommodation. You may choose to live in dorm, host family or rent an apartment outside. I'd recommend you live in dorm because you can make a lot of friends there; the rent is reasonable. Also, you can ask the assistant there for help whenever you need. Her name is Laura, and she's very nice. If you talk to Laura that you want to move in 2 weeks before the semester starts, she might arrange a room for you. The rent for a double room is about \$292CND per month and for a private room is about \$350CND per month.

Note: If you go there for the fall semester, make sure you start to sign up the housing application online in May. They called it "resident" instead of "dorm".

#### *Host Family*

If you choose to live in a host family, make sure you pick the right plan. One of the plans is that you pay about \$390CND per month for a private room, but this plan doesn't include any meal. Another plan is that you plan about \$760CND per month; this plan includes a private room and 3 meals/day. They have more options for you to pick, you may go to check it up at <http://www.minervahomestay.com>

Note: Make sure you choose a host family that no one is on diet. Also, you better read the email or letters from the Homestay Agency carefully.

#### *Apartment*

The average price to rent a room in downtown is \$350CND. If you didn't sign any contract with your landlord, you might still be able to move into dorm whenever you changed your mind. If you want to move into dorm, you can go to talk to Laura. If there's any empty room, she'd let you move in. As I've mentioned, she's nice.

#### *Temporary accommodation*

You may stay in YWCA for a short period of time. It'd cost you about \$300CND per month.

### **Meal Plan**

If you choose to live in dorm, they would require you to take the meal plan. However, you'll have an option to opt out this meal plan during the first month of the semester. I'd recommend you don't take the food plan because the food at the cafeteria at Loyola campus is not good. It's better to cook the food yourself using the microwave provided by the resident. There's one kitchen on each floor. For each kitchen, there are two microwaves and one bread toaster.

Note: The kitchen is also the TV room.

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**Where to shop for grocery?**

You can go to "Provigo", "IGA" to shop for grocery. "Zeller" is like Wal Mart. Both IGA and Zeller are located at the "Atwater" metro station. You can take the metro (similar to Bart or muni M,K here) to go there and get off at "Atwater" metro station. Zeller is on the ground floor; and IGA is on the second floor; there you can also find Pharmacy and Aldo. You will see "Provigo" when you take the school bus to Loyola campus. When the school bus turns to the left on Sherbrook st, you will see "Provigo" on the right corner. "Super C" is another food retailer where you can find some food at low prices; it's on Saint Jacque st., near Loyola Campus. It'd take you about 20 minutes to walk there from Loyola Campus. There's one small grocery store in downtown that offers low prices; it's called "M" something. It's between Saint Catherine st. and Guy; near "TD" bank. There's a market called "little Italy", just like the farmers' market we have on Market Street. You can find some fruits or vegetables at very low prices there. You need to get off at "Jean Talon" metro station and walk for about 3 blocks from that station.

**Transportation**

There are school buses from the downtown campus to Loyola campus, it's free of charge for Concordia students. The whole trip would take you about 15-20 minutes. The interarrival time for each bus is about 10-15 minutes, you can check the shuttle bus schedule outside the Hall building. This building is the main building in downtown. You can buy snacks there too.

Another way to get to downtown campus from Loyola campus is to take the bus #105 and get off on "Vendom" metro station, from there you can take the metro to downtown. It'd take you about 30 minutes to go to downtown from Loyola campus. The ticket for each trip is about \$2.25 CND, but you may purchase a student monthly ticket that will cost only \$25CND.

**Where to use the computer?**

The library in downtown opens 24 hours a day, and the library at Loyola campus opens until 10pm. You can get online in these libraries.

You can use Microsoft word or excel (Window 95) on 5th floor of Hall building, or go to room 203 at the CC building (at Loyola campus) to use the newer version. There's a scanner in the CC building that you can use too.

Note: Remember to bring your Concordia student ID!!

**Student health insurance**

Concordia will charge you about \$270 Canadian dollars for student health insurance. Don't buy any health insurance here because Concordia will not accept the health insurance that we bought here. You'll need to pay \$11CND for a student ID. If you want email or Internet accounts, you'll have to pay an additional yearly fee of about \$10CND. That's basically what you need to pay to Concordia University.

**Courses**

About the courses, in general I feel that the course materials there are more difficult than the course materials at SFSU, but the grading system there is less tight. If you have any difficult course here that you can take at Concordia, I'd recommend you take it there. You might find it busy through out the semester because I feel that teachers there give out more homework than teachers do at SFSU. Also,

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you don't need to worry about getting bad grade on your presentation if you have any English accent because some students and teaches there have accents too. In general I feel people are more kind there, so don't hesitate to ask for help. Don't take more than 4 courses because you need to spare some time for fun there. :)

### **Other Advice and Information**

Make some good friends and go to more places! It's cheap to travel to the east of US. or Canada if you go to join the tour groups at the travel agencies in Chinatown. Chinatown is on Saint Laura st, you can walk there because it's very close to downtown. Saint Catherine st is the main street in Downtown.

There you can find a lot of underground shopping malls, you have to go into a shopping mall on Saint Catherine street and go to the basement of that mall. For example, La Baie, Eaton Center, Montreal Trust. For clothes and shoes, you can shop on Saint Catherine street or the underground malls.

Actually you don't need a long waterproof jacket, all you need is a long, thick/warm jacket. I feel that the jackets and boots there are cheaper than the ones here. Before you buy anything, it's better to shop around and see what's on sale.

For boots, you can try "Transit", "Aldo", there you might be able to find some good shoes with a more reasonable price. For clothes, maybe you can try "Simons"; sometimes they have some jackets on sale. If you get off at "Peel" or "McGill" metro station, you can enter those nice malls directly. Those malls usually close at 5pm.

Also, you can go out to eat different kind of food with your new friends. If you get off at Atwater metro station and walk to the direction to Guy Street on Saint Catherine Street, you would find a lot of restaurants. The ones near "TD" bank and the "M" grocery store are not bad. If you walk into the FG building on Saint Catherine Street, there are some small restaurants too. On the first floor, there's a grocery store, you may find some Asian fruits.

### **Nice places you can visit**

- Quebec City (two hours from Montreal)
- Ottawa (two hours from Montreal)
- Toronto (six hours from Montreal, CISA will organize a trip to this city in October)
- Old Montreal (just two blocks from Chinatown)
- Biodome and Insectorium (40 minutes by metro)
- New York (6 hours; CISA will organize a trip to there probably on March)
- Saint Jacque Church (about 30 minutes by bus)

Note: If you plan to buy tickets at CISA, make sure you go there 15 minutes before they start selling the tickets. During the summer, you can go to other cities in the east of Canada.