

LP

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CANADA

17 - Winter

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"Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver..." (Gilles Vigneault)

My country isn't a country, it's Winter

You shouldn't be afraid of winter, you should embrace it. Most Quebecers love winter, cold and snow.

Meteorology of the Quebec Winter

The classic winter starts early December and lasts until late March.

In between, Montreal practically becomes a winter sports resort. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing on the Mount Royal; indoor ice-skating rinks where children play hockey; outdoor skating rinks in the parks and on the Saint Lawrence. It isn't rare to see people carrying skis in city-bus number 11, the one that goes up "the Mountain", the Mount Royal.



*Skiing along
Lachine Canal*

Sunlight or Polar night ?

Montreal is on the latitude of Bordeaux. **Daylight duration** is thus the same as in Aquitaine and not quite like the long winter nights of Norway.

The fact that it is cold is due to three phenomena: the continental position of the city; the influence of the (cold) sea current from Labrador and polar air descending south without any mountain range to stop it.



Maisonneuve Boulevard during a snowstorm.

NO, the people of Montreal do not live underground!

There is indeed an Underground City, but it is limited to the center of town (see chapter about Shopping). The economic and cultural life is **normal** in winter.

This being said, you have to respect the winter without fearing it. You must look at the weather forecast a couple of times per day to be prepared (for how to dress, driving, snow-removal...)

Temperature

From December to March, **temperatures** remain below the freezing point with very big variations. Generally speaking, temperature ranges between -5 and -10 °C.

But there are mild spells at times (0°C, rarely above), cold spells (around -15°C) and ice-cold spells (-25 to -30°C). These episodes may last two to three days.

In March, when the temperature goes up to 0°C, you will often see people in T-shirts...

The temperature can vary by 10 or 15 ° (up or down) within a few hours.

Besides the real temperature (the one measured by the thermometer), one must consider the *Real Feel* temperature. In winter, you must add the wind chill factor (a temperature of -15°C can be perceived as -25°), in summer you must consider the humidity (+25°C perceived as +35° if humidity is high)

Snow and ice

The first serious **snow** often falls early December. The snow then stays until the final thaw, end of March. *Montreal is white all winter.*

A snowfall of less than 5 cm leaves Montrealers cold ...so to speak. A good snowfall is called “*une bordée*” and more than thirty centimeters of snow is called a *snowstorm*.

During the winter, the average accumulated quantity of snow is 2.15 meters.

In 2008, 4 meters fell (!), but only 90 cm in 2010. In 2008, the Town of Montreal loaded and ferried over 3 million tons of snow !

Municipal **snow-removal** procedures are perfectly smooth and very efficient:

- * **Less than 5 cm** - spreading of ice-melting and abrasive products on streets and side-walks
- * * **Between 2.5 and 15 cm** - clearing of streets and side-walks
- * * * **More than 15 cm** – loading. Very substantial mechanical means are put to use. Very spectacular, especially at night!

The **duration** of loading and clearing depends on the quantity of snow that fell:

15 to 20 cm	4 days
20 to 25 cm	5 days
25 to 30 cm	6 days
30 to 35 cm	7 days
35 to 40 cm	8 days



Main roads; security services, hospitals, bus lanes, subway accesses, schools, street with a steep incline, etc. are cleared first. The clearing time also depends also on the snow's density.

When the City of Montreal takes away the snow on the streets (one side at a time), they place **orange “No Parking” panels**. These are usually placed at about noon, with snow removal starting at 7 pm. Once snow removal starts, any parked cars are immediately towed away. The tow trucks will give warnings by way of a continuous siren, a very original sounding siren and totally annoying !



Accordingly, it is easy to drive in winter, except during heavy snowfall. The real challenge is parking : less places, more difficult to access and it is sometimes hard to get out...

If you travel in winter, don't leave your car in the street : in case of a snowstorm, it would be mercilessly removed by the City. Solutions (if you have no private parking) : leave it at a friend's place, at your office or at the airport.

In conclusion, the only thing to really dread is **ice** and **black ice** after a mild spell. Beware also of falling icicles...



*Ice skating on the Saint-Laurent River...
Magical!*

Some figures...

Here are some statistics about winter in Montreal (°Celsius). *Source Meteomedia*

	December	January	February	March
Average maximum temperature	-2,2	-5,7	-3,9	+2,2
Average minimum temperature	-10,4	-14,7	-12,9	-6,7
Highest temperature record (year)	+18 (2001)	+13,9 (1981)	+15 (1945)	+25,6 (1990)
Lowest temperature record (year)	-32,4 (1980)	-37,8 (1957)	-33,9 (1943)	-29,4 (1950)
Average snowfall (cm)	48	52	43	36
Record of snow in 1 day (cm) (year)	46 (2012)	36 (1999)	39 (1954)	43 (1971)



All Canadians carry around a **mug** filled with a hot beverage. You will find that this is a good idea...

As it is difficult to push a stroller through snow, Quebecer moms pull their children in a **sled!**

A national past-time is **listening to the weather** as it is important to know what conditions you face before walking out the door. All radio stations, television (the Weather Channel) or <http://meteomedia.com> are good sources. The weather could change radically during the day and in no time at all. Snowstorms are usually foreseen with accuracy.

The House in Winter

In winter, always **leave the heating on** (+12°C) even if you are leaving for two weeks to the Bahamas...

And when you leave the house, even for a couple of hours, **do not leave any windows open**. The temperature could decrease sharply during the day, freezing the radiators.

Shovelling snow from your walk-way or drive-way is an important, time-consuming winter activity. The snow is not taken away from the garden, but it may be a good idea to have it taken off from your roof from time to time. This is better left to specialists.

❖ You must remove the snow and de-ice the access to your home (walkway and stairs). You are liable if someone (say, the postman...) falls down and is injured.



If you are renting, your landlord will take care of snow removal. You may have to pay a corresponding fee.

Otherwise, you could hire a snow-removal company (usually gardeners during the summer) that will come after each snow fall. They charge approximately \$80 to \$100 per month, or charge on a seasonal basis.

You could also buy a **snow blower** (sharing it with your neighbor is a solution). They are either electric or gas motors, and are found at large hardware stores or department stores. The cost may run from \$500 to \$2,000 according to the model.

In any case it is necessary to always have the following items on hand:

- One or two snow shovels
- An ice spade to break up the ice
- Ice-melting products

❖ It is prohibited to shovel “your” snow onto the street. Nevertheless you can ask for a permit from City Hall. *The rules vary according to your neighbourhood.* If you hire a snow-removal company, this company will hold the permit.

Winter Clothing

As you may have caught on, winter in Canada is, well, cold !

European winter clothes (even ski equipment) are not adapted to the Canadian winter.

We advise you to buy your clothes *here*. All is bearable if, and only if, you are dressed adequately :

- ❖ A good-quality **coat** (not necessarily heavy, but made from quality material). Some well-known brands are *North Face, Columbia, Kanuk and Pajar* (these 2 brands are manufactured right in the heart of Montreal, Le Plateau, and absolutely top quality. They can repair your coat in case of tear). The 2 trendy brands (also high quality) are *Canada Goose* and *Mackage*. A must ! A good coat may cost from \$500 to \$1,000, but is definitely worth it. It is an investment which will come to be very handy.
- ❖ Winter **boots** are a necessity ! Adequate boots protect you from the cold, keep you from slipping on ice and keep your feet dry from the “slush” (melting snow usually somewhat dirty). When you are invited to a friend’s house in winter, boots are always taken off at the entrance. Women often bring their shoes in a “shoe bag”, or in a more casual setting such as visiting a friend, the hostess may lend you slippers or you remain in sock feet. Medical clinics are the same, however sometimes paper slippers are supplied.
- ❖ **Gloves** (or mitts) : usually gloves have an exterior (often leather) and include a good-quality lining. Ski mitts and gloves are often worn by children and by adults in extreme cold temperatures. As well, ski glove manufacturers often have a line of well-made, stylish, every-day gloves. Never touch metal with bare hands when temperatures are below -15°C , or your hands may actually stay glued !
- ❖ **Hats** (*tuque* in Quebec) : absolutely everybody wears a hat or even ear-muffs. Join the crowd, your ears will appreciate it ! The hat should cover your ears and a very popular one is the double layer, chapka style.
- ❖ **Scarves** : scarves are used for not only making a fashion statement, they protect lower face, neck and chest for added warmth, especially in -10°C temperatures and below.
- ❖ **Ice Cleats / Crampons** : removable covers for the bottom of shoes or boots, which are made in plastic or metal, for added safety in icy conditions.



Don't cover up too much; as soon as the days get cooler in November, when the thermometer drops to zero. In particular don't over-cover young children. Save your warm clothes for when it gets to be -25°C !

The paradox in winter is that it is more difficult to protect oneself from *heat* than from cold ! When you wear super warm winter coats, the heat inside shops or in the Metro is unbearable...

The Car

Driving during the winter in Montreal may at first seem terrifying! However, it really isn't as bad as it seems. Streets are cleaned usually quite quickly and efficiently.

You can have updated information about traffic conditions on the website <http://www.quebec511.gouv.qc.ca/fr/index.asp> or call **511**.

Driving in winter is a question of common sense : drive slower, maintain a longer distance, brake sooner and very progressively, do not accelerate roughly.



As to leaving your car **on the street or parking it in a garage** during winter, there are two schools of thought. Some people feel that leaving your car outside avoids an abrupt change of temperature to the car. On the other hand, one must face brushing of the car or scraping off the ice every morning (or almost every morning...).

A practical hint : install a **remote-control starter** for your ignition. You start your car and 15 minutes later, you sit in a warm, de-iced car ready to run.

It is highly recommended to run your car at least 30 minutes daily to charge the battery.

Locks may occasionally ice up. Keep a small bottle of lock **de-icing fluid** on hand – and not inside your car !

❖ **Winter tires are obligatory from December 15 to March 15.**

But we recommend to have them installed about November 15th.

Don't leave making an appointment with your garage to the very last minute ! Many garages offer the service of off-season tire storage should you not have the space at home.

In winter, the tires must be inflated at a slightly **lower pressure** than in summer.



Basic winter equipment to be kept inside the car

- **Snow removal brush** : It is against the law to drive with snow on the roof of your car, as the snow can blow off and hinder the view of the driver in back of you.
- **An ice scraper**
- **A shovel**
- **Anti-skid pads** to put under the motor wheels (2 or 4) to give you traction should you get stuck on icy patches. Some people use their interior **mats** of their cars or even cat litter..
- A **survival kit** especially wise for out-of-city driving. Include drinking water, a blanket, candles and matches and a cell phone.

Check the level of **windshield washer** fluid and always have an extra refill on hand. Winter driving can be quite dirty, and clean windows are a must in order to drive safely.

De-icing products spread on the streets are very corrosive and can damage your car. It is a good idea to have your car washed from time to time.

**Be prudent !**

In case of heavy snowstorm, or "poudrerie" (blizzard, when the wind blows the snow) or ice rain, even Quebecers refrain from driving...