

I rented a bicycle from one of the more than 100 BIXIs (bicycle-meets-taxi stands, [bixi.com](http://bixi.com)) and took a picturesque ride along the Lachine Canal, a historic waterway opened in 1825 to circumvent the Lachine rapids on the St. Lawrence River. I joined hundreds of bikers and rollerbladers riding by revitalized industrial buildings turned into upscale condominiums and down to the Place Jacques Cartier in the Old Port of Montreal, where tons of people were enjoying the restaurants, performers and LaCour ([lacourmontreal.com](http://lacourmontreal.com)), a cute jewelry market.

Or you can take Guidatour's 45-minute power walk in downtown and Old Montreal for \$20. The group even offers a hip-hop walking tour in La Fontaine Park that highlights public art and the origins of the city's hip-hop culture ([guidatour.qc.ca/en](http://guidatour.qc.ca/en)).

My tour included historical locations tied to jazz and people of African descent in Montreal. In the Little Burgundy neighborhood, Roy showed me the birthplace of Grammy-winning pianist Oscar Peterson, Montreal's most famous jazz musician, which is attached to the city's oldest black congregation, Union United Church ([unionunitedchurchmtl.ca](http://unionunitedchurchmtl.ca)). The church is where in 1982, Trevor Payne and Daisy Peterson Sweeney (Oscar Peterson's sister) founded the world renowned Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir ([jubilationchoir.com](http://jubilationchoir.com)) that has performed for and with everyone from Nelson Mandela and the Queen of England to Celine Dion and Ray Charles.

To say Montreal supports a healthy lifestyle is an understatement. Every park has free ice skating rinks, some even indoor. There are also numerous free swimming pools and beach volleyball courts. I decided to act like a native while I was there and walked to every concert. In the evenings I saw the signature performances that required tickets, like Al Jarreau, who blew me away with his improvisational scatting on classics like "Take Five."

Throughout the day, there were 370 free outdoor shows on 10 stages. I particularly enjoyed The People Project, a Canadian-Mexican group that sang in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese

## London on a Budget

**A**lways dreamed of vacationing in London but don't want to go broke financing the trip? Believe it or not, you can find great hotel deals while visiting this 24-hour European city and still have enough to eat, shop, visit historic landmarks or catch a play. Here are three affordable yet quality options to consider while planning your trip.

**1** Travelers desiring a quiet stay should check out the quaint **Hyde Park Premier London Paddington** in central London's West End neighborhood. This boutique hotel's rooms are cozy and clean with a contemporary flair, and it offers unlimited access to free broadband. Staying here puts you close to the London Underground tube stations, the Oxford Street shopping district, pubs and a two-block stroll to the city's 350-acre green space, Hyde Park. Single occupancies at the Hyde Park Premier start at \$101 while double occupancies start at \$108.

Choosing a hotel in central London is ideal because "you're much closer to the action and you can enjoy walking around London," says Visit Britain spokesman Elliott Frisby.

**2** **Base2Stay Hotel Kensington** is an affordable lodging choice with Wi-Fi-equipped rooms and mini-kitchens, allowing guests to whip up meals between sightseeing excursions at nearby museums and shopping at Harrods. With double-bedroom rates starting at \$139 per night, this hotel is ideal for friends looking to split the bill.

**3** Part of the Millennium Hotel chain, **Copthorne Tara Hotel in London Kensington** is another option close to the Natural History Museum, Science Museum and the Royal Albert Hall,



stylish boutiques and tube stations. The Copthorne Tara offers fitness rooms, a business center, beauty and well-being room, theater desk (to book tickets to musicals and plays) and a currency exchange. Double-bedroom rates start at \$137 per night; visitors staying three nights or longer can save 20 percent through the "Leisure for Longer" special. Discount bookings must be made 14 days in advance.

"Gone are the days of getting good deals if you book at the last minute," Frisby says, adding to keep in mind that rates increase during major events or on Saturdays. He also advises to prepare ahead of time by exchanging U.S. dollars for the British pound before your trip, grabbing a copy of the London Planner and purchasing an Oyster card for public transportation. For more trip-planning information, go to [visitbritain.us](http://visitbritain.us).

—Aisha I. Jefferson

over a cool mix of funk, hip-hop, reggae and folk, deeply rooted heavy Afro-Brazilian rhythms.

I could even see the throngs of international attendees enjoying performances from the window of my well-placed room in the Hyatt Regency Montreal ([montreal.hyatt.com](http://montreal.hyatt.com)).

One day, I took off on an adventuresome



For a taste of Montreal, go to [heartandsoul.com](http://heartandsoul.com).

walk up Rue Sainte-Catherine, the longest commercial shopping thoroughfare in the country. I stopped into everything from The Gap to The Bay, Canada's oldest department store, where designer labels are plentiful. The writer in me loved the bookstores Chapters and Indigo and the International magazine store. I turned off af-

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