THE FIRST SIGN OF CHRISTIANITY IN MONTRÉAL WAS THE CROSS PLANTED IN 1643 ATOP MOUNT ROYAL. IT HAS SINCE EVOLVED INTO THE HIGHEST MONUMENT IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE. MONTRÉAL’S LEGACY OF RELIGIOUS ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND MUSIC MAKES IT ONE OF THE MOST ENCHANTING CITIES ON THE CONTINENT.

DAY 1 – OLD MONTRÉAL

The cobblestone streets of Old Montréal have witnessed the passage of time for more than 360 years. Today, art galleries, artisans' boutiques, terraces, and cafes conduct business within the walls of these gracious century-old structures.

First stop is Place d’Armes, where you can admire Notre-Dame Basilica of Montréal, built between 1824 and 1829. The paintings, sculptures, and stained-glass windows that adorn the structure illustrate biblical passages as well as 350 years of parish history. Catch the Notre-Dame Basilica in the evening, when a sound and light show presents the founding of the city and its basilica.

Just beside Notre-Dame Basilica is the Saint-Sulpice Seminary, the oldest building in Montréal, erected between 1684 and 1687, and later extended by the Messrs of Saint-Sulpice. The exterior clock dates back to 1701, and is possibly the oldest of its kind in North America.

For an archaeological perspective, the Pointe-à-Callière Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History, a national historic site built above the actual remains of the city’s birthplace, provides an authentic showcase covering 600 years of Montréal history, beginning in the 14th century. Here, you will be able to explore the city’s first Catholic cemetery, its first marketplace, First Nations artefacts, and much more.

At the Maison de Mère d’Youville, the exhibition In her Footsteps brings you back to the life and residence of Saint Marguerite d’Youville (1701-1771), who founded the Order of Sisters of Charity of Montréal. The house was built in 1694 by the Charon brothers and entrusted to Saint Marguerite d’Youville in 1747.

No less enthralling is the Marguerite-Bourgeoys Museum and Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, where you can cover more than 2,000 years of religious and colonial history. The tomb of Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys, the tower lookout, and the archaeological site are especially interesting attractions.

Grabbing a bite is no problem in Old Montréal. At Place Jacques-Cartier, a major gathering place and entertainment site, you will come across an array of restaurants and cafes to quench the needs of every palate.
DAY 2 – SAINT JOSEPH’S ORATORY AND MOUNT ROYAL

Spend your second day in Montréal in a part of the city that is, at once, sacred and spectacular. Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal is one of the world’s most visited centres of pilgrimage and underlines the significance that religion has played in the establishment of Montréal. Its founder, Saint Brother André, started its construction in 1904. The massive complex includes a stately building whose dome reaches 97 metres (second only in height to Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome), a small original chapel, a votive chapel, a crypt church, a basilica that can accommodate over 2,200 people, and well-tended, colourful, diverse gardens. Its magnificent organs and its carillon comprising 56 bells ring out music from the world’s greatest composers. The site also houses two gift shops that offer a wide variety of religious goods and sacred art.

Affectionately referred to by locals as “The Mountain”, Mount Royal Park was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect behind New York City’s Central Park. The Mountain is not only one of the city’s playgrounds for admiring nature and outdoor activities, but it is also home to a wealth of religious heritage. On the slopes of Mount Royal are two of the city’s oldest cemeteries: Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery (Catholic), and Mount Royal Cemetery (non-denominational but primarily Protestant, and including several small Jewish cemeteries).

For trivia buffs, here is one little-known historical fact. Outside of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Montréal is home to the greatest number of graves related to the sinking of the Titanic in the world. Six of them are in Mount Royal Cemetery, five lie in Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery, and one is in Baron de Hirsch Cemetery (in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood of the city).

DAY 3 – DOWNTOWN

Montréal’s downtown scene is a bustling study in contrasts where the latest architectural marvels soar beside stately Victorian-era residential, civic, and religious buildings. The Musée des Hospitalières de l’Hôpital-Dieu de Montréal traces the intertwining histories of health, medicine, and religion in Montréal, of which the Hospitallers of St. Joseph, whose mission was to care for the sick, played a seminal role.

Inspired by Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, Mary Queen of the World Cathedral was built in the 19th century in the heart of what was then the city’s Anglo-Protestant sector. This Catholic cathedral contains a superb gilded neo-Baroque baldachin which overlooks the altar. In the transept, paintings by Georges Delfosse illustrate the historic beginnings of Montréal.

Also known as “the Irish Church”, St. Patrick’s Basilica, constructed between 1843 and 1847, evokes the Gothic style of the 14th and 15th centuries. Large pine columns, an oak carving in the nave, and a carved pulpit and choir loft embellish the interior.

The Église du Gésù takes its name from the Roman church in which Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, is buried. Built in 1655 by Irish architect Patrick C. Keeley, it is one of the oldest Baroque style churches in the city.

Built in 1889, St. James United Church has a Gothic style exterior reminiscent of a medieval French cathedral. Originally a Methodist establishment, the interior is designed in “the Akron style” popular with North American Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists in the late 19th century, but unique in Montréal.

Another fine example of neo-Gothic architecture is the Anglican Christ Church Cathedral, built between 1857 and 1859. Just underneath the church at the Promenades Cathédrale is the Maison de la Bible, a bookstore specializing in religious publications, and just behind the church is a square dedicated to Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish humanitarian who saved thousands of Jews from concentration camps during World War II.

As you have seen, downtown is well-punctuated with religious architecture. Now is a good time to take a break and digest what you have seen, along with a nice meal. For supper, try one of the many high quality restaurants in Montréal that have made the city an international hub of gourmet cooking and eating. Bon appétit!

DAY 4 – AROUND THE LACHINE CANAL (POLE DES RAPIDES)

Taking a religious tour of Montréal is not only about the attractions in the older parts of the city or downtown. Around the Lachine Canal, there are significant religious monuments that also merit discovery. Alongside over 100 kilometres of safe multi-use trails, perfect for biking, inline skating, and walking, are the many faces of a region that boasts cultural, historic, and religious sites.

Purchased by Marguerite Bourgeoys in 1662, the Maison Saint-Gabriel, Museum and Historic Site is a magnificent 300-year-old house embodying a shining example of traditional Québec architecture. Converted into a museum in 1966, the complex showcases various aspects of 17th century rural life and the extraordinary experience of the King’sWARDS. Both the 19th century stone barn and garden were recreated in the spirit of New France.

At the Sisters of Saint Anne Historic Centre, the history of the Sisters of Saint Anne and their foundress, Esther Blondin, is highlighted. During the summer, guides in period costumes will lead you through this impressive heritage site.

The Promenade Père-Marquette and Parc René-Lévesque are beautiful spaces on the shores of Lake Saint-Louis that welcome hikers, cyclists, skaters, and pedestrians, and feature the remarkable sculptures of the Lachine Outdoor Sculpture Museum. The area is a wonderful place to reflect upon your visit to Montréal and to begin planning your return!
OTHER ITINERARY OPTIONS

CITY TOURS
The City of One Hundred Church Steeples (bus tour)
The Jewish Heritage Tour (bus tour)

RELIGIOUS ITEMS

Desmarais & Robitaille
Specializing in liturgical arts since its founding in 1909, Desmarais & Robitaille is a family-owned business that designs and creates fine liturgical vestments and original stained-glass art. The firm's prestigious Gilles Beaugrand Silver Studio is internationally renowned for the exquisite design and crafting of sacred and secular vessels. In addition, the company provides specialized liturgical design and consultation services for communities involved in church building or renovation and operate a religious art, book, and gift boutique. Desmarais & Robitaille’s exclusive church goods are supplied to clients throughout North America.