

MONTREAL 101: TIPS FOR NEWCOMERS TO MCGILL AND THE CITY OF MONTREAL

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Starting your first year at university can be quite challenging, especially if you are moving to an entirely new city. It might become even more stressful under the conditions of the current pandemic as we adjust to the new normal of social distancing and online classes. As someone who experienced moving to a new city and a new lifestyle last year, I have compiled a list of tips to help ease the process!

SURVIVING MONTREAL'S INFAMOUS WINTER

1. Get a good down-filled winter jacket or parka. It might be helpful to go shopping with someone who knows their stuff because some expensive jackets are not that warm! There are many places where you can find a good winter jacket on a budget.
2. Layer up! Wear shirts under hoodies, knee length wool or fleece socks, and leggings or thermal wear under jeans when it gets really cold.
3. Get snow shoes that are waterproof. Pick the length you like - longer length if you are planning on trekking through a lot of snow, otherwise normal boot length is more comfortable and works best for university life.
4. Hand warmers are a lifesaver, especially if you plan on staying out for longer periods of time in the cold for festivals or other events. You can even put them in your shoes since feet and hands tend to get colder faster. Also make sure to cover your head - heat escapes through the head, after all!
5. The temperature is usually warmer when it's snowing and is at its coldest on sunny days and on windy days. Definitely check the weather app on your phone before deciding what to wear outside instead of looking out the window. Overdressing/underdressing are common issues that students in Montreal face!

RESIDENCE AND SOCIAL LIFE

1. While moving into residences may be different this year given the social distancing rules, move-in weekend is a great time to meet new people and make friends. Attend residence events if and when you can. You will have at least one person from residence in each of your classes which will also make it easier to find study buddies. With the semester being online, participating in residence life is definitely the easiest way to connect with other McGill students.
2. Try out as many activities and join as many extra-curriculars as you can- it will help you get to know people and discover new interests! However if you are more focused on studies or adjusting to a new city, don't stress about not being able to do extracurricular stuff as there will be plenty of opportunities for that in the next 4-5 years of your university career. At the same time, make sure to not take on too many extracurriculars to the point where your grades or mental health become affected. Your mental health comes first!
3. Make a conscious effort to make friends and hang out with them outside of classes and simply keep in touch with them outside of academic contexts. It's hard to keep up with people when they are not in all the same classes as you or are in different faculties
4. Join relevant facebook groups either related to the McGill or local Montreal communities. They can be a huge help for getting used/second-hand stuff for cheap, finding roommates or apartments to live with if you are not staying in residence.

STUDYING AND EXPLORING IN MONTREAL

View of Montreal City from McGill's La Citadelle residence

1. Get an umbrella as soon as you can! It rains a lot without warning in Montreal and it's not very fun to get caught in the rain. An umbrella can also be helpful in light snow.

2. There are no major assignments before the add/drop deadline so you can use these couple of weeks to go out and explore the city.

3. If you keep up with class work, the semester can be pretty chill. However if work starts to pile up, university life can get very stressful, very fast! Find a good study schedule that works for you so that you can keep up with your work. You'll thank yourself for that once midterm season rolls around.

4. Definitely research your professors beforehand (Rate My Professor and the McGill reddit page are a huge help) especially when picking electives or you will learn your lesson the hard way (such as when I took a 300 level course in my first semester at McGill).

5. Explore different study methods early on, the things that worked in high school might not necessarily work now! As I mentioned earlier, the sooner you find the method that works for you, the better.

6. Don't buy textbooks before classes start; more often than not, you don't even need them or can get them from somewhere else for much cheaper than the McGill bookstore. There is also a global McGill eng textbook drive*.

7. Explore the city! Now that classes are on-line, being cooped up inside can take its toll on your mental health. Take breaks, make a list of places you want to go or stuff you want to do and go outside (following social distancing guidelines of course). Montreal is a beautiful city with lots of different things happening at any given time, even during the winter.

8. There are many free food opportunities in Montreal and at McGill if you want to save some money. For example, every time the Montreal Canadiens hockey team scores first, McDonalds gives away one free medium fries.

9. Don't stress about not knowing French. Everyone in Montreal, especially downtown, speaks English. At the same time, living in Montreal is the perfect opportunity to pick up a new language and practice!

While your first year at McGill can be an amazing experience, it might not turn out the way you imagined. It's alright if it takes you more time to adjust to your new environment than anticipated or if your GPA isn't as high as you would like it to be. You have 3-4 more years to do all the things you dreamed about and things do get better. Don't hesitate to reach out to people if you need help! ♦

* <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19QQUS-4bHgG-efZ3osjiRCcaxfR-3eStt?usp=sharing>