

CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

Strange Creatures Promote Montreal's Festivals



A promotion for the new Montreal tourism campaign was held in New York.

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There's a scene in the musical "Bells Are Ringing" in which a character gets so excited about meeting a "fabulous creature" that he joyously breaks into song. Imagine what he would have done if he had come across a new campaign with a menagerie of marvelous beasts.





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The fabulous creatures featured in the campaign are mash-ups of actual animals. They include a "bullguin," a bulldog-slash-penguin; a "deerus," a deer mingled with a walrus; a "foxutan," a fox plus an orangutan; and a "squirrog," a squirrel crossed with a frog.


The fanciful fauna are encouraging tourists to visit Montreal for what the campaign bills as the "106 eclectic festivals" that take place there, which include the Montreal International Jazz Festival, or Festival International de Jazz de Montreal; the Just For Laughs comedy festival; and Les FrancoFolies de Montreal, a festival of Francophone music.


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The attractions the campaign touts also include exhibitions and events like Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology, at the Montreal Science Center; the Grand Prix du Canada; and “Totem,” a Cirque du Soleil show.

The dozen or so creatures are meant to bring to life the theme of the campaign, which is “Montreal: A new breed of culture. Where 106 eclectic festivals coexist.”

Or, in other words, when it comes to travel destinations, Montreal is a different kind of animal.

The light-hearted campaign is now under way and is to continue through the end of the year. There are print advertisements, in magazines and newspapers; online ads; content on the official Montreal [tourism Web site](#), including blogs “written” by the beasts; and social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

There is also an event-marketing component of the campaign, which took place last week in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The stars were full-sized cutouts of the creatures, which also appear in [video clips](#) on YouTube.

There is a contest to win a trip to Montreal, which is being offered on an [eponymous Web site](#). And there is merchandise, including figurines and T-shirts.

The campaign is being aimed at residents of American cities that are near or relatively close to Montreal, among them Boston, Chicago and New York.

The tongue-in-cheek campaign is being created by Sid Lee, an agency in Montreal that has worked for Tourisme Montreal for the last five years.

The budget for the campaign is being estimated at \$6 million, a figure that includes, in addition to media costs, expenses like production, contest prizes and a public relations campaign by Laura Davidson Public Relations in New York.

According to the Kantar Media unit of WPP, Tourisme Montreal spent \$868,000 to advertise in major media last year, \$752,000 in 2009, \$1.96 million in 2008 and \$2.3 million in 2007.

The primary reason for the larger budget is that the current campaign marks a return to traditional media like print ads for Tourisme Montreal after a strategy that had mostly been Web-focused.

“We were trying to target the consumer already in the process of selecting a short-getaway vacation,” says Emmanuelle Legault, director for communications and international relations at Tourisme Montreal, a nonprofit organization.

But it has since become apparent that the organization also needs to “create a desire or interest in the destination,” she adds, which is easier to do through traditional media.

(Digital media continue to play an important role in the campaign because, Ms. Legault says, “more than 70 percent of travelers are planning trips online.”)

The goal of the magazine and newspaper ads is to elicit a more “spontaneous” kind of response, Ms. Legault says, along of the lines of, “Oh, wow, I wouldn’t have thought of going up to Montreal.”

According to the organization’s research, Montreal has “pretty high awareness” as a travel destination, she adds, and “people pretty much know what to expect” — a North American city with “a French flair” and “a European vibe.”







But “one of our challenges” was providing more information to potential visitors about what they could do “once they get to Montreal,” Ms. Legault says.

That could “make them feel more secure” about their trip, she adds, in that they would conclude, “There’s a lot to do and to see in Montreal.’ ”

That led to the decision to “go that extra mile,” Ms. Legault says, and concentrate the campaign “on our events and festivals.”

And the decision to have the unusual creatures be the stars of the campaign stems from a philosophy at Tourisme Montreal that “we’re always trying to go further and beyond what would be done by a tourism organization,” she adds.

“There’s so much advertising noise right now” from travel destinations, Ms. Legault says, that “we want to step out of the ordinary.”

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“Montreal is not just any destination; we pride ourselves on not taking ourselves too seriously, on being a creative city,” she adds. “We want to surprise the reader by not showing the traditional destination shot” in the ads.

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The surprising nature of the animals in the ads is meant to symbolize the French flavor of Montreal, Ms. Legault says, while their familiar aspects represent the North American location of the city.

In one print ad, the half-squirrel, half-frog asks, “Do you know Montreal has the biggest jazz festival in the world?”

The reply, from a creature that is half-llama, half-cheetah, is also a question: “Bigger than my neck?”

The squirrog answers, “Way bigger.”

In a video clip on tourisme-montreal.org, the foxutan, in honor of the Just for Laughs Festival, tries telling some jokes. Because the jokes are lame, there is no response from the other animals other than chirping.

“Who invited the crickets?” the half-fox, half-orangutan asks grumpily.

In another print ad, the half-deer, half-walrus, promoting the Indiana Jones exhibit, declares, “I’m Indiana Jones!”

A creature that seems to be half-owl, half-frog, replies, “No, you’re not.”

The deerus, wearing a Jones-style chapeau, retorts, “I have his hat!”

The other animal declares, “It’s from the gift shop.”

The creature campaign was one of three that Sid Lee submitted to Ms. Legault and the other executives at Tourisme Montreal.

The three ideas were very different from each other, recalls Jo-Ann Munro, co-creative director at Sid Lee Montreal.

“I always like to present an apple, an orange and a banana,” Ms. Munro says, “and this one was the banana.”

“Kudos to a really great client who didn’t let sweaty palms get in the way,” she adds, and for having the gumption “to say, ‘That’s cool, and I see how that’ll stand out’ ” amid the clutter of travel and tourism ads.

The category is not only crowded, Ms. Munro says, but “all the destinations are marketed in the same way,” using photographs of “pretty people in a restaurant or skyline shots.”

“The language in the tourism industry is ‘a hardware city’ versus ‘a software city,’ ” she adds, explaining that destinations like Paris and New York, with well-known buildings and attractions, are “hardware cities” while Montreal, which is sold on “more of a vibe,” is a “software city.”

For a place like Montreal, “you go for the people, you go for the energy,” Ms. Munro says, “and festivals are a huge part of what drives that.”

“So focusing on festivals is a unique selling point for us,” she adds, because “there are not a lot of times of the year when we don’t have something going on.”

Offering “a new breed of culture” — a potpourri of festivals and other events — tells visitors “you don’t have to pick one,” Ms. Munro says.

And it also tells them that Montreal’s attractions are “not necessarily” mainstay museums like the Museum of Modern Art, she adds, but rather “a different kind of culture.”

There were discussions during the development of the campaign as to whether the creatures might be too oddball or offbeat, Ms. Munro acknowledges.

In the end, it was decided that the colorful animals “are devices” to deliver the campaign’s message, and they serve as “the spokespeople bringing you the stories” about all there is to do in Montreal.

“At the end of the day, we want this to be a success,” Ms. Munro says, and not “a creative boondoggle.”

The print ads are appearing in publications like The Chicago Tribune, Condé Nast Traveler, GQ, The New York Times and The New Yorker.

The online ads are running on the Web sites of those publications as well as on sites like blackbookmag.com, gridskipper.com, grubstreet.com and nymag.com.

Many destinations have been stepping up marketing activities as the economy has recovered, but rising gasoline prices have led to some second-guessing about trips being put off in favor of staycations.

“We’re actually very optimistic about 2011,” Ms. Legault says.

Although “consumers are a little bit more careful where they go and what they do,” she adds, they still believe that “getting away from the day-to-day routine is important.”

“For consumers from the Northeast, Montreal is a weekend getaway,” Ms. Legault says, a chance to “have fun in a close-by city.”