

Plane Spotting at YUL Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport

A practical guide

Revision: Summer 2009



Background Info on Pierre Elliot Trudeau International Airport

Before going airplane spotting, it will make things easier for you if you know a little about Pierre-Elliot Trudeau International Airport.

Montreal - YUL

All airports in the world are identified by a three-letter code that is determined by the IATA (International Air Transport Association). The first letter in the code represents the country an airport is situated in. All airports in Canada start with the letter "Y". The IATA code for Pierre-Elliot Trudeau airport is YUL. You may have noticed this code on your luggage if you have ever traveled by plane from/to Montreal. Often, to save time, aviation enthusiasts will name airports by their IATA code instead of by their actual name. For example, a flight going from Montreal to Toronto can be referred to as "leaving YUL and arriving in YYZ".

Another organization, ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization), also has its own airport code system. The main difference is that ICAO uses a four-letter identification system as opposed to the IATA's three. The ICAO code for any airport in Canada has a 'C' as its first letter. The 'C' means the airport is located in Canada. Montreal's Pierre Elliot Trudeau International Airport's ICAO code is the letter 'C' followed by the IATA code resulting in CYUL.

Though airplane spotters tend to use the IATA code when identifying airports, it's important to mention that the IATA will eventually switch its airport code system over to the ICAO standard.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Airport Layout

Please see satellite photo below for basic airport layout. Major features have been labeled. Spotting locations will be discussed in detail later.

Satellite photo of Pierre-Elliot Trudeau Airport with runways and buildings



Plane Spotting at YUL

The Runways

Montreal's Pierre-Elliot Trudeau International Airport has 3 runways. Two of the runways are parallel to each other and one that is perpendicular to those runways. All airport runways are numbered. Those numbers come from the compass heading that a runway points towards. If there are more than two parallel runways such as in the case of Pierre-Elliot Trudeau, numbers such as 'R' for right and 'L' for left will be added to the number.

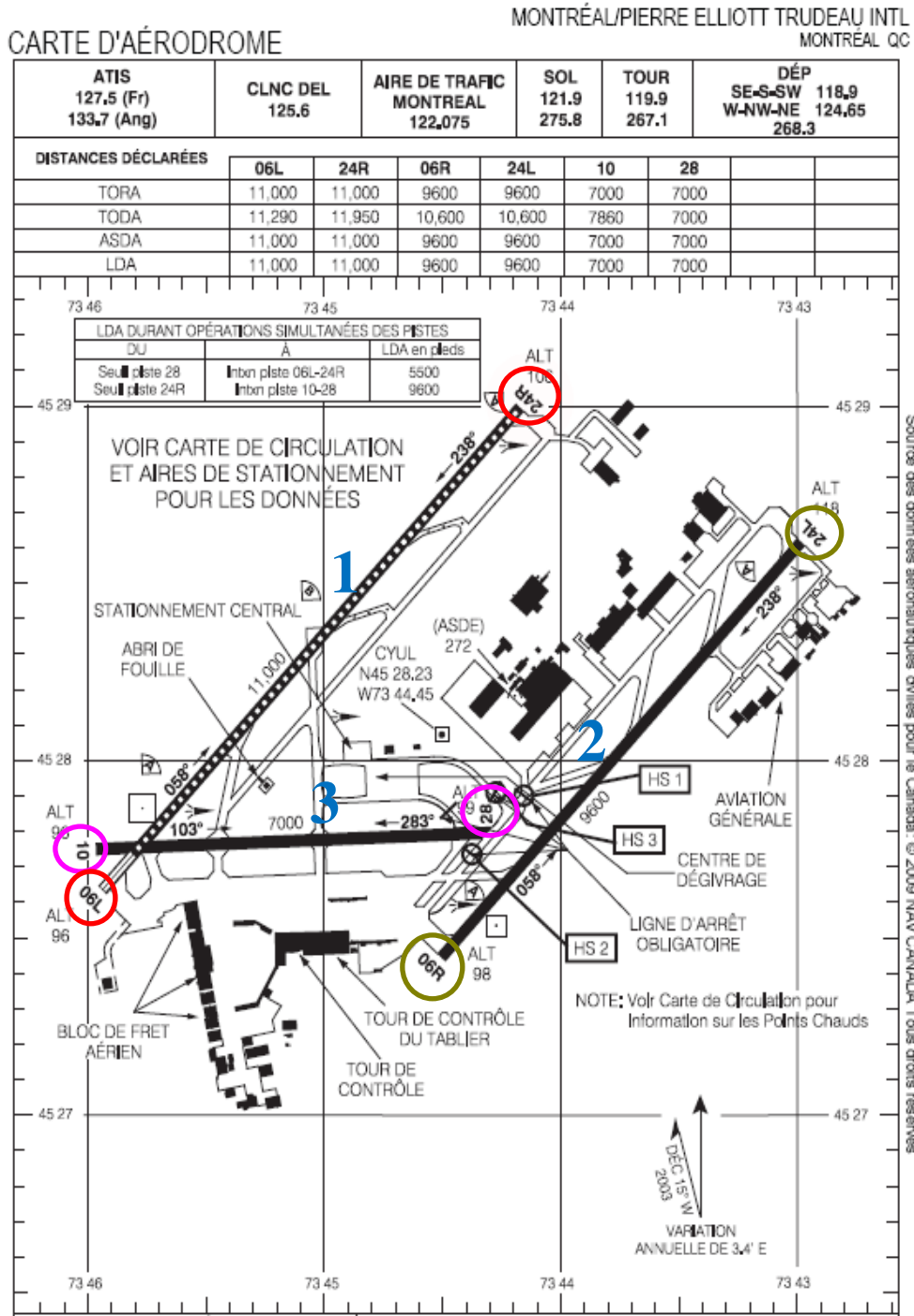
Information on Pierre Elliot Trudeau's runways can be found below. An overview map of the runways follows on the next page.

Runway Number: **24R** on the runway's northern end.
 06L on the runway's southern end.
 See **red** circles on the map.
 Pronounced "two-four right" & "zero-six left".
 This is the longest runway.
 It is used primarily for landings of larger aircraft.
 It is identified with the number "**1**" on the map on the next page.

Runway Number: **24L** on the runway's northern end.
 06R on the runway's southern end.
 See **green** circles on the map.
 Pronounced "two-four left" & "zero-six right".
 This is the second longest runway.
 It is used primarily for departures of aircraft and landings of smaller aircraft.
 It is identified with the number "**2**" on the map on the next page.

Runway Number: **28** on the runway's western end.
 10 on the runway's eastern end.
 See **pink** circles on the map.
 Pronounced "two-eight" or "ten" sometimes also "one-zero".
 This is the shortest runway.
 It is used for departures and landings when winds are directly from the east or west.
 It is also used for departures & landings of smaller aircraft when there is very little wind.
 It is identified with the number "**3**" on the map on the next page.

Pierre-Elliott Trudeau Airport Layout



You may be wondering why each runway has two numbers, one at each end. Depending on the direction of the winds, aircraft may land or take-off in either runway direction. Wind direction is important as aircraft must always take-off and land against the wind. The reason for this is safety. If an aircraft were to land in the same direction as the wind, the wind could push the plane and cause it to overshoot the runway. If an aircraft were to take off with the wind, the aircraft may run out of runway before it gets enough lift under its wings to become airborne.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Runway Configurations

Before going airplane spotting, it is important to know the current runway configuration. Runway configuration refers to the runway numbers that are currently being used. As stated earlier, the direction of the wind is very important as it determines the runway configuration.

Determining the current runway configuration is easy. First, check the direction the wind is blowing on the T.V., the radio or a weather website. Next, use the chart below to determine which runways are being used.

WIND DIRECTION	RUNWAY TYPICALLY USED	PLANE ORIENTATION
South Southeast Southwest	24R for landings 24L for take-offs	Landing aircraft pass over highway 13. Departing aircraft pass over highway 20.
North Northeast Northwest	06R for landings 06L for take-offs	Landing aircraft pass over highway 20. Departing aircraft pass over highway 13.
East	10 for landings & take-offs	Landing aircraft pass over Blvd. Des Sources. Departing Aircraft pass over the Cote-De-Liesse (highway 520).
West	28 for landings & take-offs	Landing aircraft pass over the Cote-De-Liesse (highway 520). Departing aircraft pass over Blvd. Des Sources.
Calm Winds	24R for landings 24L or 28 for take-offs	Landing aircraft pass over highway 13. Departing aircraft pass over highway 20. Departing aircraft on runway 28 pass over Blvd. Des Sources.

Please note that the table above covers a majority of situations. There will occasionally be aircraft that take-off from a runway that is normally being used for landings or vice versa. This is because there are other factors that influence what runway an aircraft is going to use besides the wind. These could include amount of air traffic wanting to use a runway, airport vehicles on the runway, debris on the runway and weight of the aircraft (heavier aircraft tend to use runway 24R/06L as it is the longest).

What to Bring

When going airplane spotting, it's better to be prepared. It will make the experience that much more enjoyable. Of course, you don't have to bring any of the items that will be listed to have a good time. All you really need is your curiosity. However, you may arrive on site and see other airplane spotters and say, "I wish I would have thought of bringing that!"

Airplane Spotter Tools

There are several tools an airplane spotter will have with them when going to spot aircraft at the airport.

Some of these may include:

- Binoculars
- Daily schedule of aircraft departures and arrivals (for Pierre-Elliott Trudeau airport, the arrivals & departures schedule can be found on the web at the following URL: www.admtl.com)
- Radio frequency scanner to listen in on airport/pilot conversations (discussed in section titled "Radio Communications")
- Aircraft spotters guide to help identify aircraft
- Camera (some spotters upload their pictures of aircraft to the web at the following website: www.airliners.net)
- Video camera (some spotters upload their video of aircraft to the web at the following website www.flightlevel350.com)
- Folding chair
- Stool or ladder to see over obstacles such as airport fences
- Food & drink (having water is important on hot sunny days in the summer)
- Sunscreen (again for those sunny days)
- Umbrella (in case of rain or for protection against the sun)

How to dress

What type of clothes to wear will depend greatly on the time of year. Most spotters take the winter months off and do their spotting in the summer due to the cold and the fact that the airport is not as busy in the winter as it is in the summer. Therefore, the clothing suggestions that follow are for summertime spotting.

Any comfortable clothing will do but you should also consider the following items:

- A baseball cap & sunglasses (the sun can be strong in the summer)
- A sweater/jacket and long pants (it can get cool when the sun goes down)
- Comfortable shoes as you may be standing for long periods of time

Where to Spot

There are many places around Pierre-Elliott Trudeau airport to spot aircraft but there are four in particular that are the most popular. They are discussed below.

Bldv Pitfield

This dead-end street off Blvd. Cote Vertu is one the most the most popular, especially amongst amateur spotters such as parents and their children.

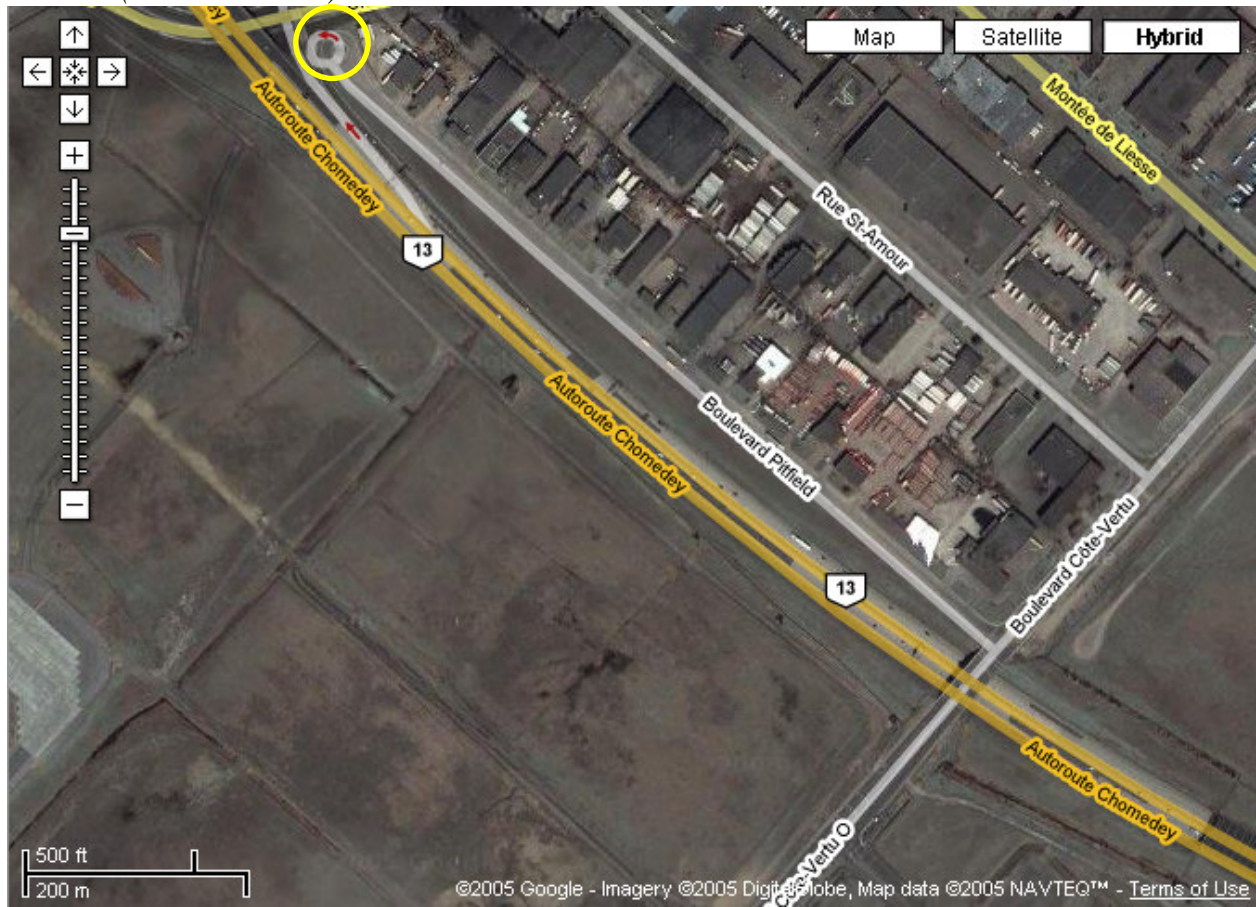
The reason for its popularity is primarily due to the fact that aircraft landing on runway 24R pass very low and directly over your head. It's about as close as you can get to an airplane in flight. Also, the sound from the engines is sometimes so loud that you can't hear anything else. One of the unique features of this location is that it offers you the opportunity to stand directly in a landing aircraft's flight path. They come right at you and pass low overhead. You tend to wonder if it's going to fly right into you. It can be a little scary and intense but that's part of the fun.

Another reason for its popularity is due to the fact that it is a dead-end street. This means that there is very little traffic and there is plenty of room to park. Be careful though. There are no stopping signs throughout the entire roundabout on this street (see yellow circle on the map on the next page). People often ignore the no stopping signs but you should consider parking in another area just in case. There is still plenty of room to park specially during weekends.

Due to its popularity, it is not uncommon on late Sunday afternoons to see 30 or more people watching planes from this venue. However, it's important to note that this spot is only good when runway 24R is being used for landings. As per the chart seen earlier, this runway will be used when the winds are calm or are blowing from a southerly direction. If the winds are from any other direction, spotting from this location will be as exciting as watching paint dry.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Below is a satellite photo of the Pitfield location. The yellow circle indicates the actual spotting location (the roundabout).



Plane Spotting at YUL

55th Avenue Parking Lot

The parking lot just off of Chartier Avenue is another favorite spotting location. It's quite popular with the more serious airplane spotters. It offers one of the best overall views of airport activity. From this location you can see the airport terminal building, the domestic & international gates, the de-icing bay (used in winter) and Air Canada's maintenance hangers.

However, the best part of this spot is that you are right in front of runway 24L/06R, which is used mostly for take-offs. Whether the wind is blowing from a southerly or northerly direction, aircraft will use 24L/06R for take-offs and the airplane will rotate (get airborne) almost right in front of you. It's up close and really impressive. It's the best spot if you prefer watching aircraft take-off then watching them land.

On rare occasions when the winds are blowing directly from the east or west, this spot still offers good views. If the winds are blowing from the west, landing aircraft pass pretty close and almost directly overhead to land on runway 28. If the winds are blowing directly from the east, departing aircraft will fly almost directly overhead as well. If the winds are calm, you may be treated to the occasionally aircraft landing on runway 28. There is an aircraft landing on runway 28 in the satellite photo of the Chartier site on the next page. Can you spot it?

This is not a good spot if you want to see larger aircraft land. This is because these aircraft usually land on runway 24R/06L, which can't be seen, from this location. The next discussed location, Chemin St-Francois, is a better location for this.

Please note that the parking lot at this location is used for employees of the companies located in this area. Therefore, priority should always be given to the workers that use this parking lot. You should not block driveways or other parked vehicles during working hours. Ideally, it's best to go to this spot in the evenings on weekdays or during the weekends, as it is quite empty during these periods.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Below is a satellite photo of the 55th Avenue location. The yellow circle indicates the actual spotting location.



Plane Spotting at YUL

Chemin St-Francois

Chemin St-Francois is a dead-end street that runs parallel to runway 24R / 06L. This spot is popular with many of the advanced & professional spotters. Besides being parallel to the runway, from this location you can see Air Canada's & Air Transat's maintenance hangers, the terminal & cargo buildings, the de-icing bay (used in winter) and aircraft departing runway 28 (though this runway is relatively far from this location).

Like the Pitfield location, this spot has the advantage of being a dead end street, which means lots of place to park. The only traffic you're going to see here are other spotters showing up or departing. You will only be able to drive as far as the yellow circle on the satellite photo below due a fence blocking the road. You can't see the entire runway from the cement barrier as the top end (near highway 13) is blocked by buildings. However, you can walk past the barrier and further down the road until you reach a point where you can see the entire runway. You will also be closer to the terminal and cargo buildings if you want to see the activity going on there.

This is the best spot to see aircraft landing and departing on runway 24R/06L. However, this runway is mostly used for landings, as it is the longest. If you like seeing the larger aircraft, it's a good spot to be between 3:00pm to 8:00pm as a lot of them land on this runway during this period.

However, this is not a good spot for viewing landing and departing aircraft on runway 24L/06R as you can't see that runway from this location. If you prefer seeing aircraft taking-off, then the Chartier Avenue location is a better choice.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Below is a *Satellite photo of the Chemin St-Francois location. The yellow circle indicates the actual spotting location.*



Plane Spotting at YUL

Picard Place

Picard Place is probably one of the least used and least known of the spotting locations. Despite this, it is a good spot to be when runways 06L and 10 are being used, as these runways are both in direct line of sight from this location. It's also a quiet street with very little traffic and lots of parking.

If winds are blowing from the north and you want to see aircraft taking-off, then this is a very good choice. You'll be able to see aircraft taxi onto runway 06R right in front of you and will hear the engines spool up to take-off power.

It's also a good place for viewing take-offs and landings when the winds are blowing directly from the east. If this is the case, you'll be able to see aircraft land and take-off on runway 10. However, easterly winds do not occur often so this runway is not often used for take-offs and landings.

This is not a good spot if winds are blowing from a southerly direction or are calm. In such cases, runway 24R will be used for landings, which, though in direct line of sight, will occur too far away from you to be able to see aircraft up close. Also, runway 24L will usually be used for take-offs and you can't see that runway from this location. Additionally, you will see very little activity on runway 28 unless northerly winds are on the light side.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Below is a Satellite photo of the Picard Place location. The yellow circle indicates the actual spotting location.



A lot of information has been discussed in each location and you may find it difficult to remember which spot is good to use under which conditions. The chart on the next page summarizes which site is best to use for each activity based on wind direction.

Plane Spotting at YUL

Table summarizing the best views based on wind direction.

WIND DIRECTION	RUNWAY	ACTIVITY	PITFIELD	55 th AVENUE	ST. FRANCOIS	PICARD PLACE
Southerly	24R	Landings	Good*	Poor	Good	Fair
		Take-Offs	Good	Poor	Good*	Fair
	24L	Landings	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
		Take-Offs	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
Northerly	06L	Landings	Fair	Fair	Good	Good*
		Take-Offs	Fair	Poor	Good	Good*
	06R	Landings	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
		Take-Offs	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
East	10	Landings	Poor	Fair	Fair	Good
		Take-Offs	Poor	Good	Fair	Good*
West	28	Landings	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
		Take-Offs	Poor	Fair	Fair	Good
Calm	24R	Landings	Good*	Poor	Good	Fair
		Take-Offs	Good	Poor	Good*	Fair
	24L	Landings	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
		Take-Offs	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
	28	Landings	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor
		Take-Offs	Poor	Fair	Fair	Good

Table Legend: **Good** : close and unobstructed view

Fair : distant and/or semi-obstructed view

Poor : far and/or little to no view

* : indicates a site that has the best view when there is more than one good spot for viewing.

Radio Frequencies

If you have a radio frequency scanner and you wish to listen in on radio communications between pilots and Air Traffic Control at Pierre Elliot Trudeau International Airport, then you'll need to know which services use which frequency on the megahertz (MHz) band. The table below contains a list of the services and the frequencies that are used for each.

FREQUENCY (in MHz)	SERVICE
119.900	Tower
121.900	Ground
122.075	Apron
118.900	Arrivals/Departures (South & East) – Montreal Terminal
124.650	Arrivals/Departures (North & West) – Montreal Terminal
125.600	Clearance Delivery
126.900	Low Arrivals (Localizers)
133.700	ATIS ^o - English
127.500	ATIS - French
123.550	FSS ¹ - Quebec FIC ² RCO ³
126.700	FSS - Quebec FIC RCO
132.850	Montreal Terminal - Arrivals
134.150	Montreal Terminal – VFR [^] Advisory
122.525	De-icing traffic coordinator
123.125	De-icing coordinator

^oATIS – Automatic Terminal Information Service

¹FSS – Flight Service Station

²FIC – Flight Information Centre

³RCO – Radio Communication Outlet

[^]VFR – Visual Flight Rules

Conclusion

So there you have it. All the basics you need to know to enjoy your airplane spotting at Pierre Elliot International Airport. Happy spotting!

The End.