

Five things about the Montreal NomadFest rodeo



RENÉ BRUEMMER, MONTREAL GAZETTE

[More from René Bruemmer, Montreal Gazette](http://montrealgazette.com/author/rbruemmer/) (HTTP://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/RBRUEMMER)

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Workers level the dirt in the rodeo ring as they prepare the site for the NomadFest in the Old Port of Montreal.
JOHN MAHONEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE

The NomadFest Urban Rodeo: A little bit country

and quite a bit controversial, (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/law-students-back-off-urban-rodeo-sign-agreement-with-montreal-and-organizers>) the rodeo is coming to the Old Port of Montreal starting Thursday and running through the weekend, with bull riding, country music concerts and vocal protest groups on the agenda.

Adult ticket prices are \$10 a day for entry to the festival site, and between \$39-\$75 a day to enter the site and watch rodeo events at the grandstand.

Why a rodeo? Organizers of Montreal's 375th anniversary celebrations said they decided to include a rodeo to infuse "a bit of country" into the celebration. There was a rodeo at Expo 67, Mayor Denis Coderre noted, and the city used to host a rodeo every 10 years.

The Quebec village of St-Tite, population 4,000, has been hosting its own rodeo for 50 years. It has grown into the second largest rodeo in Canada after the Calgary Stampede, drawing more than 600,000 spectators and indicating rodeos have a strong following in Quebec. The management of the Festival western de St-Tite is organizing Montreal's rodeo.

NomadFest (<https://www.nomadfest.ca/en/>) will allow Montrealers "to rediscover the land ... and to celebrate the link they have with Quebec's regions," event producer Maxime Lefebvre said.

What's planned: Organizers are setting up a country village at the Jacques Cartier Pier to host what's billed as a "contemporary rodeo festival ... to experience the daily lifestyle of cowboys down to the smallest detail ... ideal for families and kids."

Dancing to country music, a saloon hosting country, Celtic and blues artists, and a main stage featuring local country music stars and even actor Kiefer Sutherland Saturday night are planned.

The rodeo will have riding events each day, including bronco and bull riding, and speed events like a barrel race, rescue race and exchange race.

The [nomadfest.ca](http://www.nomadfest.ca/en/) (<http://www.nomadfest.ca/en/>) website has a section explaining the rules and judging. [RV parking](https://www.nomadfest.ca/en/rv-parking/) (<https://www.nomadfest.ca/en/rv-parking/>) has been organized for those staying long-term at a high school in Verdun five kilometres east of the event.

Protests: Animal rights groups including the SPCA, which launched a [petition](http://www.notorodeo.com/) (<http://www.notorodeo.com/>) against the event that garnered more than 26,000 online signatures, have called for the rodeo to be stopped, arguing rodeos subject animals to fear, stress and undue risk of injury all in the name of “entertainment.” The collapse of Grady, a 6-year-old horse that died at the rodeo in St-Tite last May, possibly due to a spinal cord injury, has spurred further backlash.

“Montreal is supposed to be a world class, progressive city,” Alanna Devine, director of the Montreal SPCA said in January. “This (rodeo) sort of seems to be way out of left field.”

Rodeo organizers counter that cowboys and those who attend rodeos are fundamentally opposed to cruelty to animals, and that veterinarians on-site ensure the safety of all animals. “An animal that’s worth \$200,000 to \$500,000 is not going to be mistreated. That’s out of the question,” Lefebvre said in January. (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreals-urban-rodeo-draws-ire-of-sPCA-opposition>)

Activists, including the Raging Grannies, will hold protests against the event and rodeos in general outside the NomadFest, on the first three nights from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and Sunday from 12 to 2 p.m.

Legal injunction quashed: A [legal attempt](http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/law-students-back-off-urban-rodeo-sign-agreement-with-montreal-and-organizers) (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/law-students-back-off-urban-rodeo-sign-agreement-with-montreal-and-organizers>) to have the rodeo stopped on the grounds that the activities constituted animal cruelty was cancelled in June after rodeo organizers threatened to hold the plaintiffs responsible for more than \$100,000 in losses if the event were scrubbed. But Université de Montréal professor law professor Alain Roy and his students said their attempt was ultimately a success because it led to the creation of a new animal welfare oversight committee that will monitor rodeos in the province. An independent veterinarian and animal behaviourist will be allowed to examine the animals before and during the events in Montreal and St-Tite,

and a committee will be formed to make recommendations concerning animal welfare at rodeos.

rbruemmer@postmedia.com (<mailto:rbruemmer@postmedia.com>)

twitter.com/renebruemmer (<http://twitter.com/renebruemmer>)



Workers set up bleachers on Tuesday for the NomadFest rodeo in the Old Port. *JOHN MAHONEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE*

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