

An adoptable cat
at Café des Chats
Montréal.

PHOTO CATCAFE.CA

Where Lattés Meet Cat Cuddles

By Elisabeth Fillmore

Cat Cafés—magical places where you can drink coffee, eat baked goods, and play with cats—are spreading across North America.

Cat cafés. You've likely heard of them. Probably wondered about them. Well, we're here to tell you to get yourself to your nearest cat café pronto!

For the uninitiated, a cat café is just what the name suggests: a place to drink coffee and eat banana bread, like any ordinary café, but with one notable, added super-bonus: there are cats. The cats, of course, are the cat café's main attraction. They can be watched, played with, and, in some cases, even adopted.

The concept of adding adoption to the cafés is a new one, and largely unique to North America. In 1998, when the world's first cat café, Cat Flower Garden, opened in Taipei, Taiwan, it was less for adoption, and more to play with cats. In metropolitan Asian cities, many apartments aren't pet friendly so a cat café fills a real need for quality kitty time desired by cat lovers unable to have pets of their own. Cat Flower Garden inspired a boom of cat cafés in Japan in the early 2000s, with the idea spreading to Europe, and, more recently North America.

The first cat café in North America, Café des Chats Montréal (Cat Café Montreal), opened in 2014. Located in Montreal's trendy Plateau area, this quiet and warm café is a cocoon of comfort for feline aficionados. Yes, there are fancy snacks and cat-themed drinks, but house rules prioritize cat welfare—patrons leave their shoes at the entrance and sanitize their hands before entering.

The cats' independence and privacy is respected; patrons are



A latté at Vancouver's Catfe.

INSET PHOTOS MICHELLE FURBACHER



Inset from top:
Vancouver's
Catfe, Orlando's
Cat Café, and
Vancouver's Catfe.



The scene at Oakland's cat cafe, Cat Town.

requested to watch the cats and quietly communicate with them before encouraging interaction. And all of the cats are adoptable, so if you fall in love, you could potentially bring your café buddy home.

Now, it seems the cat café has officially arrived. In 2015, the phrase “cat café” was recognized by the online edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. Need further proof? Last July, Adele stopped by Vancouver, BC's Catfe, a cat-themed café that doubles as an adoption center for felines. The staff were understandably thrilled—and surprised. “Adele showed up, last night,” reported Leona Morrison, a purrista at Catfe. “We had no idea she was coming.” The Grammy-winning singer was with her son and they apparently fell for Larry, one of the café's cats. Catfe, which has been open 15 months, has facilitated 304 adoptions to date.

Along with adoptions, beverages with a cat twist are a common theme among North American cat cafés. The latté art at Orlando's Cat Café is a cute cat face rather than the leaf-like swirl that usually adorns the top of your caffeinated beverage, and other fun snacks and food are on offer. Due to US food regulations and hygiene laws, the café portion and the cat portion of the café are separated, but you can bring your coffees and cakes next door to the cats if you want to. In order to interact with the cats, patrons make reservations online so the cats are never overwhelmed with too many people, and pay a nominal fee (recommended donation of \$8) to spend an hour with the cats. The café has also organized special events, such as screenings of TV shows, which allows patrons to watch TV while hanging out with cats. Ideal? We think so too.

Purringtons Cat Lounge, a cat café in Portland, Oregon, goes even further with its cat programming. Once a month, Purringtons offers Purr Yoga. According to Purringtons, “yoga with cats is about joy, mixing energy, and making it easier to light the fire of compassion.” During each one-and-half hour yoga class, the asana, or active part of practice, spans the first hour and the remaining 30 minutes are spent allowing practitioners to “find their meditative seat and/or spend time to simply enjoy sharing space and playing with the cats.” Purr Yoga is \$20 per session, and patrons rave about it, citing the welcoming atmosphere for all yogis, from novice to experts, as well as the joy of the 30 minutes of downtime with the cats, many of who come out to play after the session is finished.

With their community-building element, cat cafés are definitely unique. They provide an opportunity to spend time with cats, socialize with fellow cats lovers, and perhaps even make new friends. And best of all, most offer a very cool, homey way for adoptable cats to find forever homes outside of the shelter system. Add to that a possible Adele sighting and what could be better? ■



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“Hairball? What hairball?”

