

Big Fun in the Big Easy



Our five-minute guide on how to enjoy yourself in “N’awlins” – when you’re not doing business

BY CURT HARLER

If you’re headed to New Orleans for the big show, here are some tips to make your visit more fun and friendly. Say after me: “Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler (Let the good times roll).” After all, that’s why we’re goin’ to New Orleans.

Getting there

It will cost \$10 for the airport shuttle and it leaves the airport for downtown every 10 minutes. Cabs charge a flat \$21 for two people, and \$8 for each additional person. If you’re driving on the Interstate, don’t look for signs to say “French Quarter.” The signs will say “Vieux Carre” (old square).

Best freebies

My boss doesn’t pay me any better than your boss does, so here are some great, cheap thrills in New Orleans:

- Nothing beats the free trip across the Mississippi on the Canal Street Ferry that runs between the dock at the base

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of Canal Street and Algiers on the other side. Just stay on the boat and it'll take you back. The round trip is about 35 minutes.

- Check out any of the above-ground cemeteries. Go during daylight and go with a friend or two. Don't go at night. (It's the live ones, not the dead ones, you need to beware.) Try St. Louis Number One at the edge of the Vieux Carre a block from North Rampart Street. If you have a car, see the Metairie Cemetery, which is unparalleled.
- The National Park Service offers one-hour walking tours from its office in the French Quarter twice daily. They have different themes, but all are interesting and informative. The French Quarter walking tour, published by the Convention and Visitors Bureau, hits the high points of the Vieux Carre and has a driving tour of the Garden District.
- There are some cheap thrills, too. For a couple of bucks, you can have a beignet ("bin-yay") breakfast at Café du Monde (see below). Or buy some pralines at any of the shops in the Quarter. My favorite is Old Town at 627 Royal.
- Eat muffulettas, a huge sandwich available anywhere. I'm big, and half a muffuletta is plenty for lunch. Get it "dressed;" that is, with the works.
- Walk Bourbon Street after dark. It's cheap unless you fall for the kids' "Betcha I know where you got them shoes, mister" routine (answer is "in New Orleans") or start hitting the bars. Watch the crowds, see the girls "earn" beads tossed from the balconies or listen to the music. A bit of trivia: In the United States, only New Orleans and Las Vegas

do not have closing laws. Once you settle in for eating or drinking, see "expense account" listings below.

Food off the beaten path

Dickie Brennan's Steak House at 716 Iberville, and Chef Horst and Karen Pfeifer at Chartres and Ursulines are two French Quarter restaurants worth a look. NOLA (get it?) is a spin-off of Emeril's and has the same good food, but the downstairs is more informal than upstairs. My personal favorite (but it's getting more press these days): Bayona at 430 Dauphine.

Among the newer spots getting good reviews are Iron Mike's Grill (owned by recently fired Saints head coach Mike Ditka); an Indian place, Nirvana, at 4308 Magazine; and Mr. John's Steak and Seafood at 2112 St. Charles. My favorite for Cajun food is Mulate's, 201 Julia. A close second is Bon Ton Café, 401 Magazine. For Creole, try Andrew Jaeger's at 622 Conti or Tujague's ("Two-jacks") at 823 Decatur.

Best expense account eats

If "they" are buying, hit places like Antoine's, Emeril's, Galatoire's, or K-Paul's (a favorite with the women I know). The Court of Two Sisters, 613 Rue Royale, has a decent jambalaya jazz brunch.

Ordinarily, I avoid hotel food, but I can recommend both the Grill Room at the Windsor Court Hotel and Louis XVI at the St. Louis Hotel. Both are superior.

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Talk Like a Local

- Bayou — from the Choctaw for creek, a natural canal.
- Beignet — "bin -yay," a delicious donut covered with powdered sugar that looks like a pillow.
- Café au lait — a 50-50 coffee and milk mixture.
- Cajun — descendant of French colonists who came to New Orleans from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Canada; the cooking is country-style, robust and peppery. Expect sausage, crawfish, and lots of seafood.
- Courtbouillon — "coo-boo-yon" is a rich spicy stew or soup with fish, tomatoes and onions.
- Crawfish — even if spelled crayfish it is pronounced "crawfish." A freshwater critter that you eat.
- Creole — descendant of an early French or Spanish settler. Cooking is much



Crawfish — a New Orleans delight.

spicier than Cajun and can be divided into the fancy Haute Creole, like Oysters Bienville or Oysters Rockefeller, and lower Creole like red beans and rice.

- Etouffee — "ay-too-fay" means smothered, usually in a tomato-based sauce.

- Gumbo — from the African kingombo for okra, a main ingredient in many foods.
- Lagniappe — a bit extra for free.
- New Orleans — say "N'awlins" or "N'yawlyuns." Don't say "Noo Orleeens" unless you want to be made for an out-of-towner.
- Times-Picayune — the local paper. From a small Spanish coin worth 6.5 cents (two picayunes were a bit; two bits, a quarter).
- Parish — name for Louisiana's 64 counties; New Orleans is in Jefferson Parish
- Po' boy — local hoagie.
- Praline — say "praw-leen," and get the sweet made of pecans browned in sugar.
- Gris-gris — say "gree -gree," a Voodoo charm.
- Street names — Chartres is "charters," Conti is "con-tie;" accent the "gun" in Burgundy; vieux carre is "voo ka-ray."

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Need to eat fancy, but don't want the bill to kill you? Head over to the Garden District and enjoy a dinner at Commanders Palace at 1403 Washington. Or try Gautreau's with very good food at a reasonable cost.

Antoine's and Galatoire's, both in the Quarter, boast 100-year traditions. Arnauds also is a good spot. The food is excellent and the service is impeccable, but the tourist crowds can be a bit much. The dress code is more formal than most, so make sure you dress appropriately. If you like scenery with your food, try Bella Luna, upstairs at the French Market near Decatur and Dumaine. For a place with a view, the food's good.

Family attractions

• The Aquarium of the Americas at the foot of Canal Street is one of the better aquariums in the world.

• Take the streetcar tour along the Mississippi River.

• For \$4, take in a session or two at Preservation Hall at 726 St. Peter St. It will let the kids get a feel for real jazz,



not the fusion brand that's popular now.

• For a cheaper thrill, take a round-trip ride on the St. Charles Avenue trolley, all the way out of downtown to the mansions on Carrollton Avenue. The 13-mile run takes about 90 minutes and costs \$1 each way. A great way to see a lot of the city.

• The Audubon Zoo, at 6500 Magazine Street, is worth a visit.

• Swamp tours (there are many) leave most of the downtown hotels twice a day. Kids love the 'gator watching (no wild ideas about losing them in the swamp, Dad).

Call 800-672-6124 and get a copy of the Visitors Bureau pamphlet "More than 100 Things for Kids."

Adult attractions

There are still plenty of places to hear good jazz. Can Can Café at the Royal Sonesta, 340 Bourbon; Famous Door, 339 Bourbon; House of Blues, 225 Decatur; Jazz Meridien, in The Meridien, 614 Canal; Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville, 1104 Decatur; 21 Supper Club, 615 Toulouse; Palm Court, 1204 Decatur; Pete Fountain's in the Hilton; Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter; the Richelieu Room at Arnauds, 813 Bi-

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 enville; and Tipitina's at 233 North Peters or 310 Howard all are likely spots.

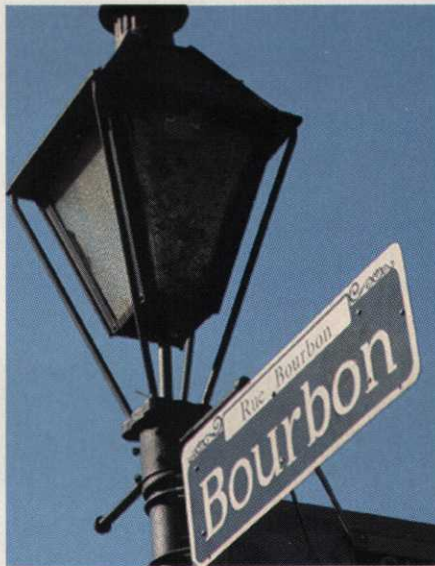
There is also gambling at Harrah's Casino, which opened in October, a block from the French Quarter and at other spots such as Boomtown Casino and Treasure Chest.

Outside town

- Take a boat down to the site of the Battle of New Orleans at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park. It's a half-day trip.
- Check out the ante-bellum mansions outside of New Orleans. Several firms run tours to places like Oak Alley. Gray Lines can be contacted at 800-535-7786.
- Ride a stern-wheeler and see New Orleans from the water.

Don't leave without:

- Having beignets and coffee or chocolate at Café du Monde.
- Go to Jackson Square and spend time people-watching.



- Listening to some jazz at Preservation Hall at 726 St. Peter St.
- Trying out the various hot sauces for sale everywhere
- Eating a Po' Boy (the local hoagie).
- Learning to pronounce Tchoupitoulas Street ("chop-a-too-las")

Other helpful tips

- Bring some self-sticking return address labels to make it easy to sign up for drawings.
- Wear walking shoes that have been broken in.
- Stay somewhat sober, especially on Bourbon Street. Pickpockets will be upset, but your boss will appreciate it.
- Get a U.S. Post Office Second-Day envelope and put the postage on at home. Mail literature back to yourself so you don't have to lug it on to the plane.
- Take extra business cards.
- Remove your trade-show badge. It screams, "Mug me." ■

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