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TRAVEL

Jazzing it up

Brass bands and sumptuous Southern food are the order of the day in New Orleans

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UPON HEARING THE words 'New Orleans', your mind may immediately conjure two highly contrasting images of Louisiana's best-known city.

The first is of a vibrant, fun-loving and musically influential metropolis, whose culture, food and architecture are heavily steeped in its French colonial past.

The second is of Hurricane Katrina, which decimated the city in August 2005.

While residents have varying opinions as to the natural disaster's continuing toll, New Orleans remains a fascinating place to visit both as a hotbed of cultural influence and as a good excuse to let your hair down.



FAMOUS FACES

As you might expect, New Orleans has spawned a multitude of famous musicians - from legends like Louis Armstrong (pictured) and Fats Domino through to modern acts such as Harry Connick Jr. and Lil Wayne.

Writer Truman Capote was born in the city, as was gothic novelist Anne Rice (with walking tours available in town based on her vampiric writings). Other celebrities to have come out of New Orleans include Ellen DeGeneres, Tyler Perry and Reese Witherspoon.



DAYTIME ACTIVITIES

There's plenty to keep a visitor occupied in 'Nyarlins' (as the locals pronounce it). The city is nicknamed 'The Big Easy' - with two theories suggesting the moniker came from the ease with which one could perform live music and obtain bootleg alcohol during the Prohibition era.

In the present day, the city retains a certain laissez-faire approach to life and rules that you won't find in many other U.S. cities. Combine this with the creative bustle that permeates busier areas - with live music shows everywhere you turn - and you'll likely discover the genteel Southerner in you during your stay.

If you're intrigued by mysticism, New Orleans is renowned for its voodoo heritage - which first arrived during the Spanish regime in the 18th century, when Caribbean slaves brought the spiritual practice with them.

To learn about the proliferation of voodoo in the area, check out The New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum. Or, for those looking to quickly satisfy their intrigue, there are plenty of shops selling voodoo trinkets to tourists (as well as tarot card readings in shops and on streets).

Try rollin' on the Mississippi River aboard the Steamboat Natchez (pictured), which docks by Woldenberg Park and operates both daytime and evening jazz cruises throughout the year.

Or, if you're interested in taking a step back in time, head to The National World War II Museum in the Central Business District - which opened in 2000 and focuses on the efforts of American forces in helping to secure the Allies' victory.



FLIGHTS

British Airways offers two flights per day from Dubai during the summer and a daily flight from Abu Dhabi International to London Heathrow, as well as six daily connecting flights to New Orleans via Chicago with American Airlines. Visit www.ba.com.

Or fly from Dubai on Emirates, stopping off at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport on your way. See www.emirates.com.



NIGHTLIFE AND MUSIC

New Orleans is a city that loves to party. Its most famous – and infamous – festival is Mardi Gras (pictured), in which parades of people and floats venture through the French Quarter. One observer way back in 1835 noted that the event was characterised by “fun, frolic and comic masquerading” as well mischief – which holds just as true in the current day.

If you find yourself in town early next year, note that the lively fest is scheduled for Tuesday, February 17, with the long weekend beginning four days previously.

Elsewhere during the year, go to Bourbon Street for all the boisterous entertainment you can handle (we won't venture into specifics; use your imagination). And when your senses are well and truly overloaded, try Frenchman Street for a slightly less frenzied spot of fun.

As the birthplace of both jazz and rhythm and blues, NOLA (as it's known informally) offers incredible music at pretty much every turn. Brass bands are liable to pop up on the sidewalk at a moment's notice, ready to belt out a tune in exchange for a few tips from their impromptu audience.

Expect to hear two anthems above all others: *When the Saints Go Marching In* and *Proud Mary* are both staples of any act's set, the former popularised by Louis Armstrong in the late 1930s and the latter an adopted anthem written by John Fogerty in 1969 and originally performed by his band, Creedence Clearwater Revival.

For something a little more contemporary, try Siberia bar in the St. Claude neighbourhood – a grimy but atmospheric gig venue which showcases upcoming talent such as prog rockers Bill Mountain and Ramones-inspired trio The Planchettes.

And should you happen to visit the city between April 24 and May 3 next year, be sure to attend the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival – a hugely popular musical celebration which in 2014 welcomed the likes of Eric Clapton, Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, Arcade Fire, Trey Songz and John Fogerty himself.

FOOD CORNER

Soul food and Cajun cuisine both feature prominently in eateries around town. If you're looking for the former, visit Mother's Restaurant on Poydras Street. The no-frills diner usually has a line of people outside waiting to enter its premises, which began life in 1938 as a place for local labourers to pick up a 'po boy' submarine sandwich, a NOLA favourite.

The restaurant's menu features items such as breakfast omelettes, fried chicken, seafood and grits (another local delicacy made from ground corn). But perhaps its signature dish is the 'Famous Ferdi Special'. Named after an old customer, the sandwich is stuffed with roast beef, shredded cabbage, pickles, mustard and more, then topped with gravy.

For those seeking something a little different, try the tasty alligator hot dog at Market Café on Decatur Street's French Market. The café boasts its own five-piece jazz combo, who perform outdoors while you eat, and also serves ubiquitous local dishes like jambalaya (a rice and meat plate derived from Spanish paella), gumbo (a type of seafood broth) and red beans and rice.

Once you've had your fill, wander across the street to Café du Monde. The renowned coffee stand featured in the recent Jon Favreau movie *Chef*, as they stopped by the establishment to try its famous 'beignet' fritters (pictured), which come in servings of three and are coated with powdered sugar.



WHERE TO STAY

Located in the heart of the French Quarter, Hotel Monteleone opened its doors in 1886 – taking its name from its Sicilian-born founder, Antonio Monteleone.

The family-owned hotel on Royal Street offers 600 guest rooms alongside a rooftop pool, 24-hour gym, 24-hour business centre, spa, 24 ballrooms and – perhaps the jewel in its crown – the Carousel Piano Bar & Lounge.

Installed in 1949, the revolving Carousel Bar seats 25 people, completing four motorised revolutions per hour. Over the years it has welcomed the likes of Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and Quentin Tarantino through its doors, while *Esquire Magazine* has named it among the best bars in America.

The four-star hotel, which has featured in films such as 1999's *Double Jeopardy* and 2004's *Glory Road*, is a short walk away from Bourbon Street and the Mississippi River. Other nearby entertainment includes the Aquarium of the Americas and the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, home to NFL team the New Orleans Saints. Or, if you're in a particularly fancy mood, hail a horse and carriage and explore the city the old-fashioned way.

When you start to feel peckish during your stay, try some traditional New Orleans fare at Criollo Restaurant and Lounge – which specialises in Louisiana Creole cuisine (a mixture of Spanish, French, Italian, African and Caribbean flavours).

And, finally don't forget to remain vigilant for ghosts – among them a man named William Wildemere who died inside the hotel of natural causes, and a 10-year-old boy who enjoys playing hide-and-seek.

Notoriously haunted, the Monteleone has experienced hundreds of supernatural events over the years. In 2003, it hosted the International Society of Paranormal Research, who found more than a dozen entities residing in the building.

See hotelmonteleone.com for more info on the hotel, which is a member of Preferred Hotel Group (<https://preferredhotelgroup.com>).