

INTRODUCING NEW ORLEANS



The Preservation Hall Jazz Band performs traditional jazz (p181)

The difference between you and this city is that you have an internal ‘no.’

‘Yeah, you right.’ Those three words are practically the motto of this city; a nonstop affirmation, an unceasing encouragement to have another – bite to eat, coffee, whiskey, whatever. For a city so proud of taking it easy, the pace of life here is maddening.

But for all that reveling in...well...revelry, this city isn’t a shallow hedonist. New Orleans embraces the spiritual, the cerebral and the shadows, those sources of her fabled arts and music. Here, they recognize *la beauté d’entropie*: the Beauty of Decay. Unlike so much of the USA, the Crescent City doesn’t operate in terms clean, preprocessed or safely packaged. New Orleans understands that gothic edges make Mardi Gras beads flash brighter, and that the flickering flames of Garden District gas lamps shine better in the dark.

Remember the three ‘T’s. The first two, Indulgence and Immersion, are easy to pick up on. It’s brown sugar on bacon instead of oatmeal for breakfast; a double served neat instead of light beer; sex in the morning instead of being early for work (‘My streetcar was down.’). But the biggest ‘T’ here is *Intermixing*. Tolerating everything and learning from it is the soul of this city. Social tensions and divisions of race and income keep New Orleans jittery, but when its citizens aspire to that great Creole ideal – a mix of all influences creating something better – we get all sorts of things. Jazz. Nouveau Louisiana cuisine. Story-tellers from African griots to Seventh Ward rappers to Tennessee Williams. But don’t forget the indulgence and immersion, because that Creole-ization gets watered down when folks don’t live life to its intellectual and epicurean hilt.

New Orleans may take it easy, but it takes it. The whole hog. Stuffed with rice and crawfish. Ya heard?

CITY LIFE

Defend New Orleans. Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans? The New New Orleans. Be Nice or Leave.

This is the public discourse of a city still saving itself; slogans of pride, exhortations of defiance and a fierce belief in New Orleans' uniqueness. Rebuilding has become part of the NOLA (New Orleans, LA) brand. This is a city whose image of itself is caught up in its own resurrection.

The 'Katrina Tattoo' – the line on thousands of buildings that marked the top elevation of 2005's Hurricane Katrina floodwaters – has faded, but that doesn't mean the Storm, as everyone calls it, is spent. You might be forgiven for thinking otherwise if you stayed within the 'White Teapot' extending from the blocks of Riverbend down in a curve along Uptown and Magazine St, up into the CBD, French Quarter and Faubourg Marigny. Few people lost homes here, and most visitors concentrate in these streets. Here, life is not only normal, but thriving.

Other swathes of the city – the Lower Ninth Ward and less media-covered neighborhoods like Lakeview and St Roch – are still dead zones where the welcome mat remains an emergency crew's 'X' marking. Insurance claims are still disputed. Road signs have yet to reappear. There's no cute '504ever' bumper stickers in the weeds growing through Milneburg's cracked lots.

New Orleans endures, irreversibly changed. Her unique-in-America way of doing things makes her special but, even lovers of the city admit, susceptible to inefficiency and corruption. So a new city is carved from the mud. The frontiers of green architecture and public charter schools, to name a few policy sectors, are pushed by innovators – transplants and natives – determined to defend this bastion of freaks, geeks, madmen, musicians, misfits, foodies and poets. They know they can't find drag queen/bunny suit Easter pub crawls followed by a second line in Birmingham or Jackson, even San Francisco or New York. That's what makes this city home, and being New Orleanian today means defending said home like a pissed off badger, while helping rebuild – and redefine – it a little every day.

'This is a city caught up in its own resurrection'



Some of the classic New Orleans architecture in the French Quarter (p68)

THE AUTHORS

Adam Karlin



On Adam's first trip to New Orleans, as a college freshman, he was that guy: the Bourbon St boozier who never leaves the French Quarter. To make up for this grievous error, for this book he threw himself into the Cres-

cent City and a cast of chefs, bartenders, waiters, social workers, community organizers, lawyers, beer brewers, journalists, musicians, artists and every other funky thread of the New Orleans tapestry. New Orleans has struck Adam, an itinerant wanderer, as a city that could be home. And that's the highest compliment he could give any place he's written about for *Lonely Planet*.

Adam was coordinating author and wrote all chapters except *Rebuilding New Orleans*, *Sleeping and Day Trips & Excursions*.

ADAM'S TOP NEW ORLEANS DAY

First off, it's Thursday, in April, when it's green as hell but not as muggy, festivals are in season and girls are wearing summer dresses. My favorite day of the week (because it's a good gig night) during my favorite time of year in one of my favorite cities in the world.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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I drive down Magazine St with the radio tuned to WWOZ or WTUL and the windows open to the spring air. Breakfast at Surrey's (p163), surely: think I'll go with whatever, because it's all good, washed down with fresh orange juice. Afterwards it's time for some café au lait and a little writing in Rue de la Course (p164). I like to laze around the Latter Library (p105) when I have off days, wandering the stacks and soaking up the sunlight. If my buddies are at their place around Bayou St John (p111) I might help them cut the grass in their front yard (it just gets so damn lush in spring) before we wander around the water. All that yard work makes us hungry, so best repair to Parkway Tavern (p171) for a po'boy. I'm thinking roast beef. Lotsa horseradish.

Me and my boys watch the sunset over the Bayou, hopefully with some crawfish at hand, then head to the Ogden Museum (p89) for its Thursday-evening concert. After the show we head to Bacchanal (p158) and get pleasantly drunk and full on wine and cheese, then repair to Vaughan's (p183) to watch the Kermit Rufins show and shake a tail feather. We stumble out and cab it to R Bar (p182) for a few shots before finishing the night back in Uptown at St Joe's (p188), where the Strawberry Abita flows until I'm cheerfully kicked out, ready to face Friday, when we do it all again.



Lisa Dunford

Heeding the siren's call, Lisa first traveled to the Big Easy after moving to southeast Texas to be a newspaper editor, writer and restaurant reviewer

in the early '90s. She's returned many times since, but it's the lilting French accent, upbeat two-step and delicious Cajun Country cuisine only a few hours from her home that call her back most often. Lisa is the author of the *Sleeping and Day Trips & Excursions* chapters.

GETTING STARTED

New Orleans is an easy city for folks who operate by the seat of their pants. There's always some kind of concert on the horizon or festival about to erupt, and let's face it: folks here are very easygoing.

There's a lot of hospitality if you've arrived with no idea of what to do. On the other hand, this is a destination that rewards a bit of forward planning, especially if you want to see big events like Mardi Gras or Jazz Fest, when accommodation is hard to come by and restaurants are fully booked. For a US city you get a lot of bang for your buck in New Orleans: the cost of living is comparatively low, so you'll get meals of London and Paris quality (seriously) at a midrange US city price point.

Drinks are pretty cheap, especially if you've just been in a city like New York, and we've never seen a regular weekly cover charge top \$10 (except, again, during events like Jazz Fest).

This town is easy for travelers – in some ways it's *made* for travelers. Tourism is the city's major money-maker. So as long as you can put up with maddening humidity in summer, lots of potholes in the roads, relatively slow but friendly service, great food, a never-say-die attitude and a penchant for parties, you and this city should fit together like crawfish and beer.

WHEN TO GO

The Gulf of Mexico provides New Orleans with plenty of moisture – the city receives about 60in of rainfall annually. No season is immune from rain.

From January to March the weather is quite variable, although rain is a given, but when spring arrives it brings long stretches of sunny, mild days that are perfect for the festivals.

Summer is hot and steamy; your clothes stick to your skin and you never feel properly dry. Brief afternoon showers, with thunder thrown in for dramatic effect, occur almost daily. On long summer days you can expect about eight or more hours of sunshine, out of a possible 14 hours. The months of September and October are the most likely to offer clear, temperate weather.

Winter temperatures average a comfortable 54°F, yet occasional drops in temperature,

combined with the damp atmosphere, can chill you to the bone. Snow is rare in New Orleans. During December's short days, fog and rain conspire to allow only 4½ hours of sunshine a day. Localized river fog often forms from December to May.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

New Orleanians are like kids when it comes to holidays: they'll take any excuse for a drink, a dance or a parade. The city has many holidays and festivals of its own, as well as all the federal holidays, and often does 'em better than anywhere else. Mardi Gras kicks into gear in February, making it the most festive time of year in New Orleans. The weather at this time sometimes has plans of its own, but figuratively speaking it rarely rains on the parade. Climate-wise, it doesn't get any better than April. With summer comes humidity and frequent showers; at this time locals

HURRICANE SEASON

Hurricanes – tropical cyclones in the Western Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico – strike anytime from June 1 to November 30, with the greatest frequency in late summer and early autumn. In especially busy years, hurricanes can occur well into December, even January.

A developing hurricane passes through several stages. A tropical depression is the formative stage, and a tropical storm is a strengthened tropical depression, with wind speeds between 39mph and 73mph. A Category One hurricane brings winds between 74mph and 95mph. This can produce a storm surge, or large waves, which can flood coastal roads. The most intense is a Category Five hurricane, with sustained winds of 156mph or more.

Hurricanes are sighted well in advance, though their exact course can never be predicted. There are two distinct stages of alert: a Hurricane Watch, issued when a hurricane *may* strike in the area within the next 36 to 48 hours, and a Hurricane Warning, issued when a hurricane is likely to strike the area.

start vacationing and musicians often go on tour, but there's always another big event on the horizon.

January

SUGAR BOWL

Jan 1

☎ 828-2440

This football game, between two of the nation's top-ranking college teams, takes place on New Year's Day. It originated in 1935 and fills the Superdome to capacity every year.

BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS CELEBRATION

☎ 589-4428

On the weekend closest to January 8, volunteers stage a re-creation of the decisive victory over the British in the War of 1812 at the original battleground in Chalmette National Historical Park. The highlight is the Saturday night tour, illuminated by lanterns, through battleground encampments. A noontime commemoration on Sunday in Jackson Sq features a military color guard in period dress.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY

3rd Mon in Jan

St Claude Ave

On this day, a charming midday parade, replete with brass bands, makes its way from the Bywater to the Tremé District, down St Claude Ave.

CARNIVAL SEASON

Early Carnival parades in January or February tend to be the most outlandish, such as the annual Krewe du Vieux parade that passes right through the French Quarter. Early in the Carnival season each year, the *Times-Picayune* runs a 'Carnival Central' section with maps of all the parades. See [p46](#) for more information.

February

CARNIVAL SEASON

St Charles Ave & Canal St

The greatest free show on earth really heats up during the three weeks before Mardi Gras, culminating with multiple parades each day. Routes vary, but the largest krewes stage massive parades, with elaborate floats and marching bands, that run along sections

of St Charles Ave and Canal St. None enter the French Quarter. See the Mardi Gras & Jazz Fest chapter for more information.

MARDI GRAS DAY

www.mardigrasneworleans.com

In February or early March, the outrageous activity reaches a crescendo as the French Quarter nearly bursts with costumed celebrants. It all ends at midnight with the beginning of Lent.

March

ST PATRICK'S DAY

Mar 17

Just when you thought the city would calm down, the festivities pick up again on St Pat's Day. At 6pm the annual Jim Monaghan parade, honoring the late owner of Molly's at the Market ([p182](#)), brings musicians and green-painted people together in the French Quarter. The parade ends up at Molly's. There's a simultaneous pub crawl disguised as a parade starting in the Bywater, at the corner of Burgundy and Piety Sts, and ending on Bourbon St in the Quarter. Even if these rowdy parades don't actually collide, you can easily jump the banks of one stream and find your way into the other. On the previous Sunday, the big Uptown/Irish Channel parade makes its way down Magazine St. Along the way, riders on the parade floats pelt bystanders with cabbages and potatoes. Follow them to Parasol's ([p164](#)), where a huge block party is a heel-kickin' good time.

INDIAN SUNDAY

Sun after Mar 19

www.mardigrasindians.com

St Joseph's Night, March 19, is a big masking event for black Indian gangs. After sunset, the Indians come out in their finery, and often their suits of feathers and beads are even more elaborate than they were on Mardi Gras. The confrontations between rival gangs can be intense, though rarely violent. If wandering the backstreets at night isn't your cup of tea, on the following Sunday, the Indians emerge for the last time for the Indian Sunday (also known as Super Sunday) parade. It's a much more relaxed and showy affair, which works to the audience's benefit. Bring a camera and get some amazing shots. The parade has no fixed route, but traditionally has gone through the heart of Mid-City. With the

neighborhood slow to recover from Hurricane Katrina, the event may undergo some changes; check the website for information.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS LITERARY FESTIVAL

☎ 581-1144; www.tennesseewilliams.net

The end of March features a four-day fete in the playwright's honor. Tennessee Williams lived in the French Quarter early in his career, and thereafter called New Orleans his 'spiritual home.' Attendees of the event keep his spirit alive with a 'Stell-a-a-a!' shouting contest, along with colorful walking tours, theater events, film screenings, literary celebrity interviews and the usual quantities of food and alcohol. The festival runs through the last weekend of the month, with events held at theaters, restaurants and hotels in the French Quarter.

LOUISIANA CRAWFISH FESTIVAL

☎ 874-1921; 8200 W Judge Perez Dr, Chalmette

A huge crawfish feed qualifies as the epitome of southern Louisiana culture, and that's just what this is. It's fun for the entire family, with rides, games, live Cajun music and an array of dishes featuring crawfish. It's held in nearby Chalmette (drive down Claiborne Ave and you'll find yourself in Chalmette) in late March/early April.

April

FRENCH QUARTER FESTIVAL

☎ 522-5730; www.fqfi.org

One of New Orleans' finest music festivals, the French Quarter Fest no longer feels like a warm-up for Jazz Fest. It follows a similar formula of celebrating superb music and scrumptious food, but this one has the advantage of a smaller size, intimate Vieux Carré setting and free admission. But when we say 'smaller,' we don't mean puny. The festival's 15 stages spaced throughout the Quarter showcase jazz, funk, Latin rhythms, Cajun, brass bands, R&B and more over a period of three days. Dozens of the city's most popular restaurants operate food stalls in Jackson Sq and elsewhere in the Quarter. The French Quarter Festival is held over the second or third weekend of April.

JAZZ FEST

The Fair Grounds Race Track – and, at night, the whole town – reverberates with good

sounds, plus food and crafts, over two weekends in the latter part of April and early May. See p50 for details.

May

WINE & FOOD EXPERIENCE

☎ 529-9463; www.nowfe.com

Well, this is just an excuse to act all high-brow with strangers, but it's fun if you like wine and food. And who in New Orleans doesn't? You sign on (and pay a pretty penny) for various plans. 'Experiences' may include a vintner dinner, with wine-and-food pairings being the primary focus; an evening street fair on Royal St, made jolly by wine and song; and a whole host of tastings, seminars and brunches.

June

GREAT FRENCH MARKET CREOLE TOMATO FESTIVAL

☎ 636-1020; www.frenchquarter.com/events

Whether you say 'to-may-toe' or 'to-mah-toe,' you're sure to dig this celebration of the delta-bred red natives. If you're quickly tomatoed out, there's plenty of food and entertainment, and a gospel choir marches the Quarter singing the praises of the big tomato. It takes place in the French Market during the second weekend of the month.

July

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Jul 4

Food stalls and entertainment stages are set up on the riverfront, and fireworks light up the sky over the 'Old Man' – that's the Mississippi River, not Uncle Sam.

ESSENCE MUSIC FESTIVAL

☎ 800-274-9398; www.essence.com/essence/emf

Essence magazine sponsors a star-studded lineup of R&B, hip-hop, jazz and blues performances at the Superdome around the July 4 weekend. Started in 1995, the event regularly has big-name black recording artists, along with an array of stalls selling arts and crafts and delectable foods.

TALES OF THE COCKTAIL

☎ 948-0511; www.talesofthecocktail.com

Sure, Bourbon St seems to be holding a 24/7 festival of booze 365 days a year, but this three-day event, begun in 2003, sets its

sights a little higher. Appreciating the art of 'mixology' is the main point, and getting lit up is only an incidental part of the fun. If it sounds a little highbrow, well, it is. But that's no excuse for shying away from the free cocktail hour, which kicks off the event in the Hotel Monteleone (p202). This is also a literary event – perhaps in the same spirit in which *Playboy* is a literary magazine – for at some of the events you get to hear knowledgeable writers talk about booze and bartending, while you try interesting sorts of new drinks.

August & September

SATCHMO SUMMERFEST Around Aug 4

☎ 636-1020; www.fqfi.org/satchmosummerfest
Louis Armstrong's birthday is celebrated with four days of music and food in the French Quarter. Three stages present local talents in 'trad' jazz, contemporary jazz and brass bands. The entertainment is free, and the food stalls offer festival staples such as po'boys, red beans and jambalaya at reasonable prices. At night the clubs hop, and throughout the fest seminars are conducted by notable jazz writers for serious music fans. It's tight like that.

SOUTHERN DECADENCE

☎ 522-8057; www.southerndecadence.com
Billing itself as the 'Gay Mardi Gras,' this five-day Labor Day weekend festival celebrates gay culture in the Lower Quarter. Expect music, food, dancing in the streets and a general boost in the city's gay population as thousands of visitors show up for the party. The Sunday parade is everything you'd expect from a city with a vital gay community, as well as rich traditions in masking and cross-dressing.

WHITE LINEN NIGHT

☎ 800-672-6124
Get decked out in your coolest white duds and wander about the Warehouse District, as galleries throw open their doors to art appreciators and lots of free-flowing drinks on the first Saturday in August.

October

VOODOO MUSIC EXPERIENCE

www.voodooomusicfest.com
In New Orleans rock 'n' roll tends to get overlooked, but not during Halloween

weekend, when the Voodoo Music Experience rocks City Park. Past acts have included the Foo Fighters, the Flaming Lips, Queens of the Stone Age, Billy Idol and Ryan Adams (all in one year!).

HALLOWEEN

Oct 31

Halloween is a holiday not taken lightly in New Orleans. Most of the fun is to be found in the giant costume party throughout the French Quarter. It's a big holiday for gay locals and tourists, with a lot of action centering on the Bourbon Pub & Parade Disco.

November

ALL SAINTS DAY

Nov 1

This being New Orleans, with its beautiful cities of the dead, you can expect to encounter memorable activities on this day. The cemeteries fill with people, some of them fairly eccentric, who come to pay their respects to ancestors and recently departed family and friends. It is by no means morbid or sad, as many people have picnics and parties. It wouldn't be out of line for a family to serve gumbo from a pot beside the family crypt. Interesting traditions are carried out, as many people spruce up the monuments and decorate them with creative memorials, some of which qualify as folk art. St Louis Cemetery No 1 (p112) and, around the corner, St Louis Cemetery No 2 are the easiest to drop in at,

ADVANCE PLANNING

Three Weeks Before You Go

Check online to see if any festivals are going down, and book tickets for any big name shows you may want to see at [Tipitina's](#) (p189) or [Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré](#) (p196).

One Week Before You Go

Try to organize a [car rental](#) (p237). Make bookings at any high-end restaurants – such as [Herbsaint](#) (p160) or [Bayona](#) (p154) – that you don't want to miss out on.

One Day Before You Go

Read the [Gambit](#) (www.bestofneworleans.com) and check www.nolafunguide.com to see what's going on in the way of live music during your visit.

but pretty much any cemetery in town will have something going on.

BAYOU BACCHANAL

1st Sat in Nov

www.bayoubacchanal.com

This Caribbean festival features steel drums, carnival dancing, reggae, jerk chicken and a big ol' parade, which takes over Canal St before marching to Louis Armstrong Park.

CELEBRATION IN THE OAKS

www.celebrationintheoaks.com

If over-enthusiastic displays of holiday lights and decorations turn you on, you might want to check out the colorful constellations at City Park. It's a unique New Orleans take on the spirit of Christmas in America – a little bit Vegas, a little bit Disneyland, with 2 miles of the park's magnificent oak trees providing the superstructure. You can view it in its entirety from your car (turn off those headlights) or in a horse-drawn carriage. A separate walking tour visits the botanical gardens and carousel area. The huge power cord is plugged into the socket every night after dark from the last week of November through to the first week in January. Admission is \$10 per motor vehicle and \$5 per person for the walking tour.

December

CHRISTMAS NEW ORLEANS STYLE

☎ 800-672-6124; www.fqfi.org

During December, St Charles Ave is a festival of light, as many of New Orleans' most posh homes are lavishly decorated and illuminated for the holidays. This is also a great time to tour historic homes. The lobby of the Fairmont Hotel in the CBD is transformed into a gaudy but charming Christmas grotto, its walls and ceiling concealed by shredded cotton. And, of course, the Celebration in the Oaks (above) continues all through the month. On Christmas Eve, St Louis Cathedral (p69) attracts a tremendous crowd for its midnight choral mass. Many restaurants offer réveillon dinners on Christmas Eve. **French Quarter Festivals** (www.fqfi.org) can provide a complete schedule of events, open homes and réveillon menus.

FEUX DE JOIE

☎ 524-0814

'Fires of joy' light the way along the Mississippi River levees above Orleans Parish

HOW MUCH?

Bottle of Abita beer \$3

Po'boy \$6-13

Gallon of gas \$2.70

Tacky T-shirt \$20

Bottled water \$1.50

Frenchmen St show \$5-10

Streetcar fare \$1.25

Admission to the Ogden Museum \$10

'Eye-opener' (morning cocktail) \$5-8

Mardi Gras Beads \$1-10, or your dignity

and below Baton Rouge in December and on Christmas Eve (December 24). To reach the giant bonfires you must either endure incredible traffic along the narrow River Rd, or drop a pretty penny to see the fires from a riverboat. Another option is to take I-10 to La Place (27 miles) or even Burnside (50 miles) to see the spectacle.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Dec 31

Revelers – mostly drunk tourists – pack the French Quarter, especially around Jackson Brewery (p125), where the Baby New Year is dropped from the roof at midnight. Adding to the frenzy are thousands of college football fans, in town for the annual Sugar Bowl (p13).

COSTS & MONEY

Against all odds, including the aftermath of Katrina and the financial crisis at the end of the century's first decade, the New Orleans economy is doing pretty well. Ironically, partially thanks to Hurricane Katrina bringing the city into the international spotlight, tourism has been expanding at a good clip. American travelers have stayed at home to keep vacation costs down, and foreign travelers have rediscovered this great city, which is very good news for New Orleanians – after all, tourism dollars are what this city is built on.

With that said, New Orleans is still pretty cheap by American standards. You can find decent rooms for \$100, eat out very well for under \$20 a meal, and enjoy the city's famed nightlife at very reasonable rates. Of course, if you want to spend more, New Orleans will spoil you – we're just saying you don't have to.

Some ways to save money here include taking streetcars or buses instead of taxis, hitting up certain bars on specific nights when they're guaranteed to serve cheap or free food – many do red beans and rice for gratis on Mondays – and using the internet to suss out free concerts and such held in city parks and squares, which tends to be a weekly occurrence.

INTERNET RESOURCES

While you're planning your trip, get up to speed on local New Orleans news, culture and events by checking out the following websites.

Gambit (www.bestofneworleans.com)

Louisiana Weekly (www.louisianaweekly.com)

Offbeat (www.offbeat.com)

Times-Picayune (www.nola.com)

Following are other useful websites, many of which serve as gateways to an infinite number of interesting links.

Louisiana Music Factory (www.louisianamusicfactory.com)

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival (www.nojazzfest.com)

Nola Fun Guide (www.nolafunguide.com)

WWOZ radio (www.wwoz.org)

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