

## SHOPPING

### top picks

- Dirty Coast (p132)
- Meyer the Hatter (p128)
- Retroactive (p133)
- Faubourg Marigny Book Store (p128)
- Maskarade (p124)
- New Orleans Music Exchange (p131)
- F&F Botanica (p133)
- Green Project (p128)
- Trashy Diva (p130)
- Yvonne La Fleur (p132)

# SHOPPING

It's not obvious at first, but there is more to shopping in New Orleans than terrible tackiness. A recent drive among city marketing types to promote 'shop local' campaigns, plus a wariness of the weather and a large number of strictly zoned historical districts, has kept the city relatively free of chain-store blah. We want to stress that you contribute to the rebirth of a great city when you opt to patronize local businesses. Check out [www.staylocal.org](http://www.staylocal.org) for details.

On to the fun! Yes, there's more than awful souvenirs, but there are some really *great* awful souvenirs, especially T-shirts. Other cheesy favorites include Mardi Gras masks, stripper outfits, voodoo paraphernalia, French Quarter-style street signs and, of course, beads, beads, beads. Besides the unintentional kitsch is quite a bit of the intentional, of the light-up religious icons and hurricane memorabilia school. This is a city that has a healthy sense of humor.

Music makes New Orleans go round, and this is a fantastic town for buying original CDs, vinyl and the like, plus some very high-quality instruments. A large literary scene has resulted in a good number of independent bookshops, some of which have evolved into unofficial anchors of their respective communities. And visual artists will find no shortage of stores selling supplies for their work.

Antiques are a big business here, and sometimes it feels like you can't walk past parts of Royal, Chartres, lower Decatur and Magazine Sts without tripping on some backyard, warehouse or studio space exhibiting beautiful examples of found furniture. Pieces tend to be relatively cheap compared to the antique action in similarly sized metropolises, and the genre goes beyond chairs and armoires to lots of old maps, watches, prints, books and similar doodads.

If you've ever been to a costume party in America, you likely have this town and its long tradition of 'masking' to thank for the privilege. Beyond the mask and wig shops in the Quarter are some very fine costume and vintage shops in areas such as Uptown, Riverbend and the Lower Garden District. The city's costume shops really get going as Mardi Gras approaches, although Halloween is also, as you might guess, huge.

Probably the most distinct face of the local shopping scene is the innumerable boutiques and vintage shops that are sprouting up all along Magazine St and in the vicinity of Riverbend. The post-Katrina arrival of artists, students and save-the-city types added a lot of funky sprinkles to an already pretty hip fashion sundae. A distinctive New Orleans style that is starting to evolve takes the preppy formality of a Southern garden party and wilds it up a little. Examples include linen shirts and light-colored pants for guys with smart straw fedoras and cloth flat caps; flowing but daring summer frocks for girls set off by 1920s- and '40s-style earrings and bangles; and the use of lots of little 'organic' elements in local jewelry design (feathers, flowers and the like). This isn't a city that has a lot of time for the cold, modern school of design or fashion. Locals have opted to live in a place that drips history, and when it comes to personal style, be it interior decor or exterior fashion, they like to reference older eras set off with their own individualistic accents.

Common shop hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am or 11am until 5pm or 6pm. Independently owned shops can keep odd hours. For instance, a shopkeeper might not feel any compunction about arriving an hour late to open. Some might even stay closed on the odd day or two each week. Many bookstores are open daily, and some keep later hours in the evening.

## FRENCH QUARTER

The Quarter is lined with great strips that are well suited to window shopping. Many regard Royal St as the 'Main St' of the French Quarter. Portions of it are closed to automobiles during daytime shopping hours. Between Iberville and St Ann Sts are a number of distinguished galleries and shops selling antiques and collectibles, housed in buildings that have been

prominent commercial addresses since before the Louisiana Purchase.

In shopping terms, Chartres St is Royal's equal. It's lined with small interesting stores dealing in antiques, art and expensive curiosities. Recently clothing boutiques and other small shops have extended the Royal St shopping area into the Lower Quarter to St Philip St. Lower Decatur St, below Governor Nicholls St, is lined with interesting antique