

# Understand New Orleans

## **NEW ORLEANS TODAY ..... 188**

Changing demographics are altering New Orleans, even as Louisiana slips into the sea.

## **HISTORY ..... 190**

How one of the oldest ports in America became jazz's birthplace, a modern innovation hub and an all-hours funkstorm.

## **PEOPLE OF NEW ORLEANS ..... 202**

Learn the folkways and quirks of the distinctive cast of characters that makes up one of America's most idiosyncratic cities.

## **ARCHITECTURE ..... 205**

How to recognize the architectural dress donned by this distinctive grand dame.

## **MUSIC ..... 210**

The music makes New Orleans, but just how did New Orleans make the music?

## **ENVIRONMENT.....213**

New Orleans is shaped by, and constantly shaping, its surrounding wetlands.

# New Orleans Today

New Orleans has entered a phase of oddly measured confidence buttressed by insecurity. New bars, restaurants and revitalized neighborhoods have given the city a hipness cachet among visitors that hasn't been present for decades. On the flip side, changes have been accompanied by wariness from locals. Better, they say, to be uniquely New Orleanian than hip. Which raises the question: a decade removed from Katrina, can the city's character continue to weather such change?

## Best on Film

### **A Streetcar Named Desire** (1951)

Classic Nola drama, with Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh.

**Down by Law** (1986) Jim Jarmusch, Tom Waits, Roberto Benigni, a prison break and a swamp.

**King Creole** (1958) Elvis hits up the old sleazy Quarter.

### **New Orleans Exposed** (2005)

Shoestring documentary offering a harrowing look at Big Easy housing projects.

### **Abbott & Costello Go to Mars** (1953)

The comic duo thinks they're going to Mars, end up at Mardi Gras and never realize they haven't left Earth.

## Best in Print

**Bienville's Dilemma** (Richard Campanella; 2008) Definitive guide to the city's physical and cultural geography.

**A Confederacy of Dunces** (John Kennedy Toole; 1980) Quintessential New Orleans picaresque novel.

**Nine Lives** (Dan Baum; 2009) Nine oral histories form a cross-section of modern New Orleans.

**New Orleans Noir** (2007) Short stories explore the city's dark side.

**The Awakening** (Kate Chopin; 1899) Love, tragedy and gender roles; one of the first American novels written from a woman's perspective.

## A Smoking Ban Smoking Gun?

New Orleans has enacted a smoking ban in indoor businesses from April 2015. This is the sort of public health policy the rest of the world cottoned on to over a decade ago, but New Orleans is proudly and stubbornly protective of its vices. As such, there has been a fascinating backlash, with opponents taking the position that the health of the city's soul is improved by something that is unhealthy to its lungs.

If that seems like a lot to swallow (or inhale, as it were), consider this observation, once made by a visitor: 'New Orleans is a place where you can drink outside and smoke inside.' Essentially, people don't want to lose a cheeky embrace of sin. Scratch the surface and you find many of those who oppose the ban are less prosmoking, and more against the idea of anyone in a position of power proclaiming what's best for everyone. You can stop New Orleanians from smoking indoors, but you'll never stomp their anti-authority attitude.

## C'mon, Hear the Noise

In recent years, an increasing number of famous bars, music venues and street musicians have been told to turn down their music by the New Orleans police. To say this was surprising would be a huge understatement: even the most puritan locals were shocked that the city of New Orleans was enforcing a previously rarely enforced noise ordinance in the live-music capital of the world.

After an outcry, the city council commissioned a report that recommended a French Quarter noise limit of between 90 and 100 decibels, measured at a venue's open doors and windows, but this level is disputed