



The Belle of **NEW** **ORLEANS**

I was so happy to have someplace to blow my horn.

- Louis Armstrong, 1954

There's some strange voodoo going on with my coffee here at Café du Monde in the French Quarter of New Orleans, so I summon the waiter, what? I say. "That's chicory, mon ami," he says, his French accent as French as it gets. I've got in hand a powdered sugar beignet, elsewhere known as a donut, and Jelly Roll Morton's *Blue Blood Blues* is wafting around the tables. From the café window I see the soaring cathedral William Faulkner found full of "beautiful saints and handsome angels" and the square called "Jackson" whose elaborate gardens, once site of an Indian portage trail, were styled by an eccentric baroness to honor the "Sun King" of France, Louis XIV.



Madcap masquerade fantasies are flaunted at Mardi Gras (left); the streetcar of St. Charles Avenue, where miles of grand Southern mansions are on view (right)



There's some strange voodoo going on all right, for here I am a land that culturally is Creole. But I'm cool. So the legal system is based upon the Napoleonic Code, the architecture is surprisingly Spanish and the city's famous Bourbon Street boasts a wild 'n crazy youth known for 800 saloons, 80 gambling parlors and even more bordellos – the “sporting palaces” where jazz greats like Louis Armstrong and King Oliver got their start. And never even *mind* the fires (1788, 1794), hurricanes (Betsy in 1965, Camille in 1969) and epidemics (1795, 1905) that totally – temporarily – flattened the place. I am in a land so flip-your-lid amazing that the way it's so fabulously *foreign* right here in our own USA makes it a prime Pilot Michael destination.

Pilot Michael? That's me. Squawking-in from the French Quarter of New Orleans. Before I jaw on and on about how this Mississippi River-side slice of southern wonder is a world unto its remarkable own, *waiter, bring me more of that chicory-laced “Civil War” coffee. Another beignet? don't mind if I do!* I'll need the wind of a Wynton Marsalis (yep, another local boy made good) to tell the tale start to finish. The Vieux Carré (Old Square) was originally a French settlement hacked out of river-side palmetto groves. Today the 6-by-13-block awe is the architectural centerpiece and cultural heart of New Orleans. While the greater “Big Easy” has more historic landmarks than any US city (40,000), some of the most impressive are here, along with houses of architectural wow, interesting shops and restaurants that flaunt a *hot damn that's good* brand of culinary magic. Sassy Cajun

The Rhythm of the Night

When the sun goes down in the French Quarter, the heart and soul of New Orleans is roused. From intimate jazz club to historic venue for blues, haunts where the legendary local sound comes out are the place to be when music music music is your mood. Pilot Michael's toe tapped *most* enthusiastically at these hot French Quarter spots:

Preservation Hall

“Now that's where you'll find all the greats,” said one himself, Louis Armstrong. Rustic and joyous historic venue where classic New Orleans jazz since the '20s has been king. www.preservationhall.com, 504.522.2841

Mr. B's Bistro

Elegant New Orleans gourmet bistro whose gumbo ya ya (chicken and andouille sausage gumbo) is accompanied by music easily as dazzling. www.mrbsbistro.com, 504.523.6727

Arnaud's

Classic Dixieland in the Bistro and crystal chandeliers in the dining room: this is legendary Creole cuisine served with legendary French Quarter fun. www.arnauds.com; 866.230.8891

Fritzel's European Jazz Club

A Bourbon Street jazz joint *extraordinaire*; lively, intimate, with music so good it's said to “melt the soul.” www.fritzelsjazz.com, 504.561.0432

House of Blues

This local favorite keeps the big acts jamming, whether gospel, blues, soul or jazz. www.hob.com/venues/clubvenues/neworleans, 504.529.2624

Bombay Club

Intimate piano bar whose martini bistro mixes one of the best in all New Orleans. Swanky, sophisticated, civilized. www.thebombayclub.com, 800.699.7711

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Pilot Michael RECOMMENDS



Holy Creole! if it isn't time to eat again. Here in the French Quarter it's *always* mealtime, especially since 250 years' worth of culinary tradition blends French, Spanish, African, Irish, Italian and Haitian French flavors into a dining adventure that's appetite dynamite. These are the restaurants where Pilot Michael's palate went wow!

Dickie Brennan's Bourbon House A seafood and oyster bar of true ohlala. Classic Creole fare, seafood, Champagne & oyster Fridays and a waitstaff of tableside stand-up comedians. www.bourbonhouse.com 504.522.0111

Galatoire's Spiff-up (jackets required) for a special night out at this historic grand dame of New Orleans restaurants where French Creole cooking becomes high art. www.galatoires.com, 504.525.2021

Dominique's Seduce your sweetie with the romance and fine French fare of this elegant *boite* in the Maison du Puy Hotel. 504.586.8000 www.maisondupuy.com,

Morton's of Chicago A classic palate cleanser for overindulgence in Cajun and Creole with its incomparable American steakhouse menu – straightforward and delicious. 504.566.0221

NOLA Celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse's fresh adaptations of classic Creole in an ambience as hip and fun as its creator. www.emerils.com 504.522.6652

Belle Luna Watch Old Man River keep on rolling as you dine: A Mississippi-side charmer of plush banquettes and creative Continental cuisine. www.bellalunarestaurant.com 504.529.1583

and spicy Creole, take me, I'm yours! And if all that isn't seductive enough, there's this: the French Quarter is where jazz was born. Legends like Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong got their start in Storyville, a redlight district that flourished from 1897 to 1917, and today the quarter throbs still to the pulse of it all: gospel, blues, soul, funk, rock 'n roll, ragtime, zydeco, salsa and, naturally, jazz. "Here," says a local, "people don't just listen to music, they live it."

As yours truly Pilot Michael will attest, plentiful are the clubs to prove it. Along Bourbon Street alone, there are enough jammin' joints to school you up the Yazoo in everything from Dixieland swing to gut-bucket blues; at famous Presentation Hall, the granddaddy of all jazz clubs beloved since the 1920s for its rustic authenticity,

there are five sets of freewheeling improv nightly. No air conditioning? no rest rooms? and your seat typically somewhere on the floor? It never gets better than this with banjos, bones, string basses and man oh man, like they say, "the ultimate New Orleans experience." Here's swinging at you, as Satchmo would say.

The quarter still throbs to the pulse of it all: gospel, blues, soul, funk, rock 'n roll, ragtime, zydeco, salsa and, naturally, jazz.

Mardi Gras? Well, yes, there's that. But the madcap, four-day springtime carnival is months away, which means this delighted Pilot Michael can explore the French Quarter sans masquerade and thrill to

its less frat-partyesque charms. It's a lovely day. Now that I've made quick work of my second beignet, I think I'll take a walk, or two. Ever since 1803 when Napoleon on behalf of the French sold 500 million acres of the Louisiana Purchase to Thomas Jefferson on the cheap – \$15 million – swamp-side New



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A Walk Through New Orleans' Literary History



The French Quarter is loaded with ghosts – especially the spirits of famous writers – and exploring the haunts where they lived, worked and were inspired by the unique neighborhood flavor is almost as fun as being wowed by the beauty of the buildings they penned within day in, day out. These historic architectural marvels include the Pontalba Buildings, a row of high-style Greek Revival row houses, circa 1850, built by a baroness after her disastrous marriage to a deranged French aristocrat. No wonder generations of writers here have been moved by the muse: Every inch of the French Quarter has a story!

For walkers, joggers, strollers and peppy promenaders, a literary tour on foot is a super way to peek into the lives of our nation's most treasured literary lions. Start at the upper Pontalba Building on Jackson Square, downtown side, where Katherine Anne Porter (*Ship of Fools*) rented an attic room for \$30 a month. Here, *Winesburg, Ohio's* Sherwood Anderson lived and men-

tored *The Sound and the Fury's* William Faulkner, the writer whose "powerful and unique contribution to the modern American novel" was recognized by the 1949 Nobel Prize; here, his literary soirées became legend when W. Somerset Maugham (*Of Human Bondage*) dropped in, and poet Edna St. Vincent Millay scandalized all with her short, tight skirts and clingy sweaters. Step along to 624 Pirate's Alley and Faulkner House Books. Here is where the great William wrote his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*. At 616 St. Peter St., Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, America's oldest repertory theater (since 1916), *Arrowsmith's* Sinclair Lewis took the stage; in 1930 he would go on to win the Nobel Prize for literature, the first ever awarded to an American. Farther along at the Avaret-Paretti House, 632 St. Peter, two-time Pulitzer honored playwright Tennessee Williams wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And at 711 Royal St. you'll find the "small hot bedroom almost entirely occupied by a brass bed" once belonging to *Breakfast at Tiffany's* Truman Capote. For Jack Kerouac fans and admirers of Henry Miller, the Pedesclaux-LeMonnie House at 636-640 Royal St. may quicken your pulse with interest: here lived the visionary Jon and Louise Webb and their hand-operated press. They were the couple bold enough to publish them both.

Delight in more literary lore at the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival March 24-28, 2004; www.tennesseewilliams.net or call 504-581-1144.

Orleans, part of the deal, has been full 'o fascinations. Cotton, tobacco, the slave trade, oil: as this important US port developed, it attracted Cajuns fleeing Nova Scotia, conquering Spanish, Caribbeans...in short, a wildly colorful community. Today the lingering arts of their lifestyles are best enjoyed on foot.

So stroll with me, now, along Royal and Chartres streets, the French Quarter area crowded with antiques shops and the wares of early master furniture makers. Maison Seignouret (at 520 Royal St.) has put pieces in the White House, so it's worth a good look-see. The historic New Orleans Collection Museum (533 Royal) houses in its Louisiana Purchase Gallery the actual documents finalizing the deal. A promenade along the Moonwalk wooden path that borders the Chippewa Indians' beloved *Missi sipi* or "big water" takes me from the French Market (pick-up great picnic goods here) to the steamboat *Natchez*. The dinner-and-jazz cruises on this pretty riverboat are so very Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*: in a word, a blast!

This being the French Quarter I could shop for voodoo dolls, gris-gris bags, alligator teeth and custom perfume. As it is my shoes are made for walking so this is what we'll do: sprint through a swell sample of the neighborhood's historic homes. What splendor! Madame John's Legacy (632 Dumaine St.) is a French Creole dazzler whose museum is full of folk art finds. The Beauregard-Keyes House (1113 Chartres St.) is a true 19th c. beauty, while the 1850 House (523 St. Ann St.) is a classic Creole rowhouse of exquisite antebellum style.

Well, I do declare! Couldn't I indeed walk on and on forever around this incredible quarter. But with so much more still to see, perhaps I best make like Satchmo, who liked things "not too slow, not too fast, kind of half-fast" and half-fast make some plans – to come back.

Visit www.NewOrleansOnline.com or call 800.672.6124 for further info and to obtain a free "Good Times Guide" travel planner to New Orleans and the French Quarter. X

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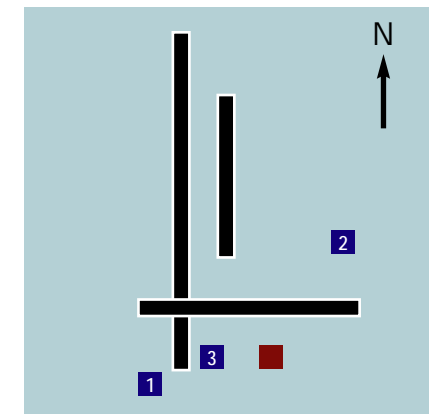
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