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*life & style for the **real girl***

**Essential Travel Guide Series**

# **New Orleans**

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## New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

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New Orleans is one of the oldest cities in the United States and it is absolutely worth the visit. What I love about New Orleans is that you don't need an entire week to see a lot of great things and fully experience the culture. You can see everything I've listed here in three to four days, depending on how you budget your time and how many museums you want to go to. I've listed everything from where to stay, where and what to eat, where to shop and what to see.

I find New Orleans to be a bit more of a casual city. Jeans, shorts and sundresses and comfortable footwear are a must. I always pack a dress for a more upscale dinner out and evening cocktails. Consider the humidity when packing as well – the humidity can be quite high at certain times of the year.

If you have the chance to head out of the city to see the surrounding areas for either a trip to Avery Island or a Swamp or Plantation tour, definitely do it. If you aren't sure if it's worth it, consider when you would have another opportunity to experience these parts of America's history and culture. This just might be a once in a lifetime opportunity!

Southern hospitality is real. I found New Orleans and Louisiana to be very friendly! Every establishment is full of service staff who can't do enough to give you great service and a great experience. You're often greeted with a 'sir' or 'ma'am' which just adds to the charm.

Ask service staff and the concierge at your hotel for additional information if you're looking to see, do or taste something specific. The locals want you to experience all their wonderful city has to offer!



## How to Use This Guide:

New Orleans is divided into distinct neighborhoods or districts and I've outlined what to see and do in each of them. Almost everything you need to see is in area in the map shown below. Of course there is always more to see than what I've listed here, but to me, this is the Essential Guide to New Orleans!

**My Tip:** New Orleans is one of those cities that I like to base my daily activities around what I'm going to eat. Food is such a great part of the local culture, if you plan it well, you can try so many amazing and different flavors.



Here is my comprehensive guide to the Big Easy!

# Logistics: When to Go, Where to Stay & How to Get Around

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## When to Go

Mid-October is one of the best times to visit New Orleans. It's still plenty hot (believe me!) but it isn't rainy, it's a bit drier than other times of the year and a bit cooler (i.e. mid 20s C). It's also post-hurricane season for the area and not during the craziness of Mardi Gras (unless that is specifically why you're heading down). It's also in the middle of the NFL season so you'll be able to catch the New Orleans Saints at the Superdome as well as a NBA Game (Pelicans). You can also catch a LSU game if college sports are more your thing! The atmosphere at these games make it an exciting experience, even for a non-sports fan.

## Where to Stay

I'm one of those people that when I travel to a new city, I like to be close to the action, but not in the centre of it. I prefer to be walking distance to the places I want to see, but give myself enough distance from the noise so that I can relax and enjoy some downtime, too. I like to stay at the [J.W. Marriott New Orleans](#). It's in the Central Business District next to the French Quarter (*across the street - Canal Street*), and is close to amenities and things you'll want to see without being in the middle of the French Quarter bustle. It's also close to a few different streetcar stops!

I find that each tourist guide tells you to visit [Harrah's New Orleans](#). In my opinion, it's just a hotel/casino not dissimilar to its namesake in Las Vegas. It is located a few blocks down Canal Street from the [J.W. Marriott](#), next to a few streetcar pickup/drop-off points and along the riverfront. If anything, it is a great place to stay for your visit, but there's no need to pop in to 'see the sights' just for the sake of it.

There are quite a few hotels around Canal Street and they're fairly reasonable (when it isn't Mardi Gras).

## How to Get Around

I recommend a taxi or other form of airport transfer. There are plenty of taxis in town and the streetcars are a great and fun way to explore this old city. A day pass is valid for 24 hours from the time you purchase it (i.e. if you purchase it at 3pm, it is valid until 3pm the next day) and there are plenty of things to see just from the streetcars! Streetcar rides are mentioned throughout this guide because they're unique and historic as well as an affordable way to see different parts of the city.

Unless you're going out to rural Louisiana, there's no need to rent a car. Many of these excursions outside of downtown New Orleans offer charters or transportation in their tour packages as well.

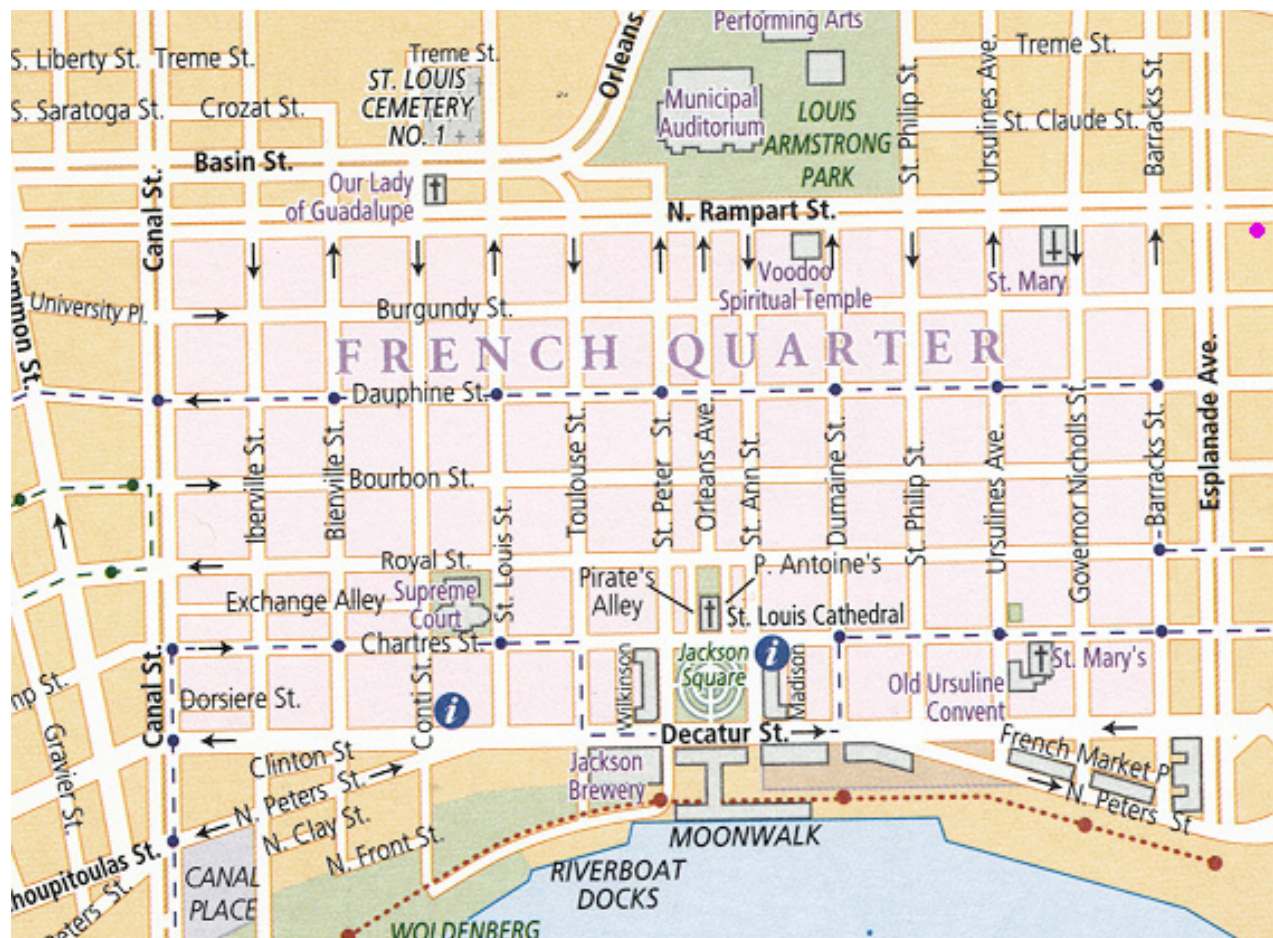
## Things to See & Do

There are so many amazing things to see in New Orleans and I of course can't list all of them. Here are my must-dos for your stay in the Big Easy!

### The French Quarter

The French Quarter is the area where you'll find most of the things you'll want to see while in New Orleans. This historic district is full of incredible architecture, night clubs and fantastic restaurants. If you have the time, stroll through each street to see the galleries, tea rooms (they also read tea leaves here), and other souvenir shops. This is where you'll find Bourbon Street, St. Louis Cathedral, Jackson Square, the French Market and more. This is a great place to pick up gifts (especially of the edible variety!) and even take a cooking class. (For more on what to buy, check out the summary at the end).

**My Tips:** Wander the French Quarter during different parts of the day to get the full experience. Take a cooking class here and pick up a box of pralines! There are also some great salt water taffy shops, too. The French Quarter is where you'll find countless amazing restaurants to try.



## **Bourbon Street**

Bourbon Street is likely one of the most notable places in New Orleans and is in the heart of the French Quarter. This street is filled with bars, nightclubs, restaurants and other touristy spots. It's fun to wander through and do some people watching! It's quieter in the morning and then picks up mid-afternoon and is lively all through the evening! It's something to see, for sure, but not where I would spend a lot of my time if I wanted the authentic New Orleans experience.

## **St. Louis Cathedral & Jackson Square**

All day and into the evening, Jackson Square is alive with street performers, musicians, magicians and artists selling their wares. Along the section outside the front of St. Louis Cathedral (a gorgeous old church) is where you'll find psychics, tarot card readers, palm readers and more. This square is also surrounded by restaurants and cafés that serve authentic creole and Cajun food and is where you'll find Café du Monde.

**My Tips:** Pop into a quiet café around the square for a Crawfish Po'Boy Sandwich or grab a Muffuletta at [Central Grocery](#) (big enough to share! You know you've found Central Grocery because of the lineup). Top this off with an order of Beignets and a Chicory Coffee at [Café du Monde](#).

## **Decatur Street**

Decatur Street runs from one end of the French Quarter to the other near the riverfront. This street is lined with shops, and takes you past the [Jackson Brewery](#), Jackson Square, and the [French Market](#). It's a great street for shopping! I suggest starting at Canal Street and heading towards the French Market - that way you'll see all of the shops and be able to stop for beignets at [Café du Monde](#) part way through! The section of Decatur Street just before the French Market is where you'll find some amazing hat shops and other spots full of southern charm.

## **The French Market**

The [French Market](#) is just that - a market in the French Quarter. This market is 6 blocks long and boasts over 3 centuries of history! It's along the river and you can take a streetcar to get there (this is a neat ride!). Here you'll find all sorts of souvenirs from t-shirts to food, cigars and voodoo dolls and other pieces of art. For more on what to buy, see the What To Buy section later in this guide.

## Warehouse/Arts District

This area is fairly quiet on the weekends except for those going to and from the museums in the area (this is where you'll find The National WWII Museum). I found much of this area to be under construction and in a few years I anticipate that it will be lively with shops, restaurants and galleries. This is also where you'll find the Riverwalk Outlet Mall. **My Tip:** This area is a great place to catch the St. Charles Avenue Streetcar over to the Garden District.

## The National WWII Museum

The [National WWII Museum](#) is a must-see! If there is one thing America does well, it's military museums and this one is no exception. It's a comprehensive guide from the start of the war to the end and features exhibits on each theatre of war. It's interactive and includes a theatre presentation that is narrated by Tom Hanks. When you pay your admission to the museum, they give you a "dog tag" that allows you to follow the story of a soldier through each exhibit (everyone gets a different soldier!). This museum is fun for all ages. I would budget at least a half day for this. Don't worry - there's a few themed cafés inside, too.

Why is this in NOLA? The [National WWII Museum](#) was formerly known as the D-Day Museum and the amphibious Higgins Boats that were used in the invasion were designed, built and tested in New Orleans. The museum recently expanded to feature more history on the war and include more history on the war. The expansion is ongoing to include additional exhibits.

## Other Museums:

There are so many museums in the New Orleans area that might pique your interest as well. I prefer to only see one or two on a trip and spend more of my time immersed in the food, culture and other things to see when I travel. Some of the other museums you might enjoy are:

- [Louisiana State Museum](#)
- [New Orleans Museum of Art](#) (NOMA)
- [Ogden Museum of Southern Art](#)
- [Aquarium of the Americas](#) (*right on the riverfront*)
- [Mardi Gras World](#) (a museum of all the floats used in Mardi Gras parades!)

## Other Things to See & Do

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I've already mentioned it, but there are SO MANY things to do in New Orleans. Here are a few additional things you might want to include into your schedule if you can!

### Steamboat Natchez

While in the south, why not take a ride on a real-life riverboat? [Steamboat Natchez](#) is an authentic steamboat that takes you up and down the Mississippi river. Learn about the history of New Orleans while listening to jazz music and enjoying creole cuisine! The ship does multiple cruises each day, but my favorite is the Jazz Brunch. Don't forget your souvenir photo!

### Cemetery Tours

The city of New Orleans is home to many elaborate above-ground tombs in gated cemeteries. You can take a guided tour during the day or at night. A brass band often follows along for the authentic New Orleans experience!

### Swamp & Plantation Tours

One thing that I absolutely recommend is an Airboat Swamp Tour! ([Swamp Adventures](#) is my recommendation). This is one of the coolest experiences you'll ever have! Cruise through the swamp on an airboat and see alligators and other natural wildlife. You might even be able to pick up a baby gator! The many routes of the swamp are framed by mossy oak trees, willows, reeds and other flora.

**My Tip:** Pack hearing protection and sunscreen!

New Orleans is surrounded by historic plantations and plantation homes, some of which are believed to be haunted! Often Plantation Tours are part of a Swamp Tour package.

### Tabasco – Avery Island

Did you know that Tabasco Sauce is from Louisiana? The McIlhenny Company still produces their sauces at [Avery Island](#). You can either rent a car or take a chartered tour out to the area where you'll see how and where the sauce is made. The visit will also include some great southern cuisine and a tour of the nature preserve and more. It's a must-see if you have the time and are a fan of the sauce and local culture.

### Professional Sports Games

New Orleans is home to a few professional sports teams including the New Orleans Saints (NFL) and Pelicans (NBA).



## The Real New Orleans

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If you want to escape the tourist bustle and experience the real culture of the city, I suggest two places: The Garden District and Frenchman Street. The Garden District is a lovely place to spend a morning or afternoon and Frenchman Street is perfect for after dinner cocktails and nightlife!

### The Garden District

The Garden District (only a fun streetcar ride away!) features traditional historic architecture. This is where you'll see the homes, mansions and estates that you associate with this area of the United States. Grab a chicory coffee and wander the streets lined with massive mossy oak trees.



## Frenchman Street

I found there were two music scenes in NOLA. The first was while walking down Bourbon Street, I heard 5 different cover bands in 5 different bars playing the same song (Black Crow's 'Hard to Handle') - that's fine if you're looking for a party. If you're looking for jazz and blues and really great, talented musicians that you can listen to while you sip bourbon and handcrafted southern cocktails then Frenchman Street is where you need to go. Frenchman Street begins where Decatur Street meets the edge of the French Quarter. Each bar is tiny and lively and full of great atmosphere. One of the coolest parts of this experience is that you don't have to leave the bar you've chosen to see different musical acts - after each set, the band picks up their gear and moves on to the next venue and a new one comes in after them!



## Must-Try: New Orleans Cocktails

When you think of New Orleans and cocktails, many think of whiskeys and bourbon, and there are many great varieties of these available there. I suggest trying a [Sazerac](#) – it's considered to be “America's First Cocktail” and “The Cocktail of New Orleans”. I suggest heading down to Frenchman Street for these.



## Where & What to Eat

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When in New Orleans, you must try as much of the local cuisine as you can! The mix of cultures that settled here provide flavors are like nothing you will experience anywhere else. There are so many amazing restaurants, bistros and cafés that serve some of the most incredible food you will ever eat. Here are my recommendations:

### Mr. B's Bistro & Brennan Family Restaurants

This upscale restaurant features what I'd like to call 'fancy southern cuisine' – the food was great, but it wasn't too fancy or fussy. It's boasted as "New Orleans' Finest Creole Restaurant" and is one of over ten restaurants in the city owned by the Brennan family, a local legacy. Each one of their restaurants has a different flair and features some of the best food in New Orleans. ([See the complete list of Brennan Family Restaurants here](#)).

### Café du Monde – Beignets & Chicory Coffee

I've mentioned this place many times in this guide and that is because it has some of the best Beignets I have ever had! I think I visited this spot every day when I was in New Orleans and you probably will, too! Be sure to try not only the Beignets, but Chicory Coffee – a local treat. Both the Beignet Mix and Coffee are available for sale in tins to take home!



## Local Treats to Try:

**Pralines** – There are countless praline shops throughout the French Quarter. Make sure to indulge your sweet tooth with this southern treat!

**Muffuletta** – This large sandwich is available at a few different places, but the best is at Central Grocery near the French Market. You'll know you've found the right place because of the lineup!

**King Cake** – These cakes are a traditional dessert during carnival season but some people eat them year round. If you want a taste of New Orleans at home, I suggest ordering one from [Randazzo's Camellia City Bakery](http://www.kingcakes.com). Head to their website to learn more about this traditional dish!



## Other Must-Try Local Foods:

Louisiana has so many great dishes to choose from that you could easily have something different for every meal and never try everything native to that area. Some of my other favorites that I encourage you to sample include:

- Crawfish Po'Boy Sandwich
- Jambalaya
- Biscuits & Gravy
- Bread Pudding
- Crawfish, Catfish and other local catches
- Cajun and Creole Cuisine

## Where to Shop

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New Orleans has some really interesting shops. The French Quarter itself is littered with shops and street vendors as well where you can pick up some one-of-a-kind items. Decatur Street and the [French Market](#) also feature a variety of items. The [Riverwalk Outlet Mall](#) is another great place to check out. It's a mix of factory and designer outlet stores, small restaurants and unique souvenir shops. There is also a Café du Monde here – the beignets are good, but make sure you check out the original in the French Quarter.

## What to Buy

You'll see repeats of quite a few items at the French Market and souvenir stores throughout the city. Some of these items include:

- Café du Monde Beignet Mix & Coffee with Chicory
- Pralines & Salt Water Taffy
- Hot Sauces & Tabasco Sauce
- Creole & Cajun Spices, Rubs and Marinades
- Cookbooks: Southern, Cajun, Creole and French
- Voodoo Dolls
- Wooden Art of African Influence
- Cigars and Tobacco
- Original Art and Photography (French Market and throughout the streets)
- Art Prints (Jazz Musicians, New Orleans Architecture, etc.)
- Mardi Gras Beads & Feather Masks

