



CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | VINTAGE NEW ORLEANS



instant escapes

# Vintage New Orleans

Trad jazz, old-world charm, ancient magic — the Big Easy's big on history

Sure, the city's got buzzy bars, hip restaurants and sexy sleeps now, but the scent of centuries past seeps from the cracks in its cinematic streets and the French Quarter's wrought-iron balconies. Voodoo and tarot, paddle steamers and po'boys, swing dance and cemeteries — it's time you lost yourself in old New Orleans. **By Paul Oswell**



## SEE & DO

● Take a city tour for the price of a street-car ticket (75p). The trams themselves are rumbustious little charmers, and can carry you from decorous St Charles Avenue (just off Canal Street; ① on map) to the buzzing bars and weird little shops of Magazine Street. En route you'll **trundle through the Garden District with its handsome antebellum mansions**, and at the end of the line, the bar at tacky-but-fun New Orleans Original Daiquiris ② has a cold one for you. When you're done, hop on for the ride back to Downtown.

● Join the crazy mix of cultures around Jackson Square ③, centre of the historic French Quarter. Here, in the shadow of St Louis Cathedral, are all the **brass bands, tarot-card readers, street performers and freaky local artists**, their unsettling paintings displayed on the railings around the small park.

● It's classic for a reason: **cruise the mighty Mississippi on an authentic paddlewheel steambot**. You'll find these honking, heaving, winning old vessels down on the Riverwalk ④, at the edge of the French Quarter, alongside bustling Spanish Plaza and the all-singing all-dancing Audubon Aquarium of the Americas (auduboninstitute.org; £14). Disembark to the sound of the on-board calliope organ, then plunder the shops at the castle-like old Jax Brewery ⑤.

● Skip hectic, touristy Bourbon Street in favour of the far classier and less

## BUSKING NOTES

Royal Street hosts the city's best street musicians. Etiquette requires you to drop a dollar for listening as you pass by, or a five if you stop to take in a few songs. The liveliest spots are outside Rouses supermarket

It's a classic: head to Royal Street for antiques, art — and cocktails; below left, cruising on an authentic paddlewheel steambot; voodoo dolls

abrasive Royal Street, which runs parallel — **think antiques shops and galleries rather than strip clubs and karaoke**. There are trendy modern galleries, such as Graphite (No. 936; graphitenola.com; ⑥), or Craig Tracy (No. 827; craigrtracy.com; ⑦), and at the end, stop for a Sazerac (the city's official cocktail) in the ornate, spinning Carousel bar of the historic Monteleone Hotel ⑧.

● Want timeless New Orleans? Lose yourself in City Park ⑨, NOLA's largest green space. As well as the leafy sprawl and waterways, there are **Botanical Gardens with a whimsical butterfly walk** and a spectacular grove of great mature oaks. Don't miss the on-site New Orleans Museum of Art (noma.org; £6), where a sculpture-garden houses works by Henry Moore and others.

● It was music that put this city on the map: bar-hop along Frenchmen Street and enjoy the last remaining **trad-jazz clubs, where the best of the local talent still play for tips**. Try swing dance at the Spotted Cat ⑩, puzzle over modern jazz at the Blue Nile ⑪, and open your ears and mind at Snug Harbor ⑫ and Dba ⑬ — you never know who might show up, but look for local legends Kermit Ruffins and Trombone Shorty.

● Let's do the time-warp. At the city's National World War II Museum (nationalww2museum.org; £14; ⑭) you can whizz back to wartime with '40s-style diner food in the canteen, and a sweet light-entertainment show. New Orleans was home of the Higgins Boat — the amphibious craft Eisenhower insisted 'won the war for us' — and this vast building has around 10,000 artefacts, from planes to submarines, and huge **interactive exhibits that recreate wartime experiences (try sending your own coded messages)**.

● Marvel at the Gothic grandeur of the old family tombs, but be sure to **honour the graves of the voodoo queens**, too, if you want to leave the city's famous cemeteries uncursed. You'll find a free tour of the ornate and spooky Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 online (lafayettecemetery.org; ⑮), but many companies run guided tours — try the excellent French Quarter Phantoms (frenchquarterphantoms.com; from £12pp). >



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EAT

● **The lunchtime sarnie**  
**PARKWAY TAVERN AND BAKERY** (Mains about £6)  
**Because:** You can't leave New Orleans without eating a Po' Boy (a long local sandwich variation made on French bread), so you may as well get the best: may we suggest the Monday and Wednesday fried oyster special?  
**Travel's tip:** When asked if you want it 'dressed', they mean with lettuce, tomato, pickles and mayonnaise. 538 Hagan Ave; parkwaypoorboys.com; ⑩

● **The recovery breakfast**  
**CAMELLIA GRILL** (Mains about £7)  
**Because:** New Orleans drinks 24 hours a day, so egg and carb-heavy hangover dishes are essential. **Travel's tip:** Don't be put out if the serving staff make fun of you — it's all part of the experience. 540 Chartres St; ⑩

● **The neighbourhood classic**  
**COOP'S PLACE** (Mains about £9)  
**Because:** Its 'local' food is genuinely loved by the locals (especially the jambalaya and fried chicken). Try the Coop's Taste Plate, which has a feast of Cajun delicacies. **Travel's tip:** Queues snake out of the door at peak times, so plan a mid-afternoon lunch or late-night dinner (it closes at 1am). 1109 Decatur St; coopsplace.net; ⑩

● **The non-Southern option**  
**DOMENICA** (Mains about £12)  
**Because:** You cannot live on gumbo and jambalaya alone, and modern Italian makes a refreshing change after a few days. **Travel's tip:** The happy hour is amazing. Come between 2pm and 5pm, when its incredible pizzas are half-price, as are wines, beers and cocktails. 123 Baronne St; 00 1504 648 6020, domenicarestaurant.com; ⑩

● **Creole with chandeliers**  
**AUGUST** (Mains about £25)  
**Because:** High-end Southern food is a thing of indulgent wonder, and none do it better than favourite local chef John Besh. Try his signature gnocchi with blue crab and black truffle. **Travel's tip:** The tasting menu is a great-value trip through Besh's repertoire and — unusually for this city — has an impressive vegetarian equivalent. 301 Tchoupitoulas St; 00 1504 299 9777, restaurantaugust.com; ⑩

**DRINKING RULES**  
 There are no rules. It's quite normal to drink at breakfast in New Orleans; try the boozy egg-white-and-cream Ramos Gin Fizz or an eye-opening Brandy Milk Punch.

**STREET TO STRUT**  
 Decatur St is another locals' fave. Witness bartending hero Nick Deitrich in action at Cane and Table, hang out with artists at coffee shop Envie, or drink with the rough diamonds at grungy dive bar The Abbey (not for the faint-hearted).

DRINK & SHOP  
 ● Central and sophisticated  
**BARTONIQUE**

**Because:** Sometimes you need a classy cocktail made with real care.  
**Travel's tip:** This cocktail bar makes many of its own ingredients, so go for a classic local concoction, such as the whiskey and cognac Vieux Carré. 820 North Rampart St; bartonique.com; ⑩

● **Locals' choice**  
**MOLLY'S AT THE MARKET**  
**Because:** It's hard to imagine a wider mix of patrons than the ones who gather here, from local celebs to post-work parties to punks. **Travel's tip:** The front bar gets busy but there's a cooler, less crowded back bar if you push through the throngs. 1107 Decatur St; mollysatthemarket.net; ⑩

● **Stylish souvenirs**  
**MEYER THE HATTER**  
**Because:** It's a hot, tropical city, so you'll need to buy dapper headgear if you're going to stay cool and look the part. **Travel's tip:** Take your time to chat to the veterans who run this city institution and you'll have a hat for life. 120 St Charles Ave; meyerthehatter.com; ⑩

**ASK THE LOCAL**  
 Robert Clark has lived in New Orleans for 10 years, bartending and now managing a local chain of bars

“ This is a city of free shows, from swanky hotel gigs, such as Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse ⑩ and Jeremy Davenport at the Ritz-Carlton ⑩ to all of Frenchman Street. My favourite is Monday nights at BJ's Lounge (4301 Burgundy St; ⑩) for King James & The Special Men. You can find some of the best food in bars — try Killer PoBoys at the Erin Rose (killerpoboys.com; ⑩). Cycling's a great way to see the city — I like the laid-back tours by the Confederacy of Cruisers (confederacyofcruisers.com). A great afternoon trip is to take the ferry from Canal Street across to Algiers Point ⑩, a cute little neighbourhood with a great British pub, the Crown and Anchor.



**STAY**  
 ● **The neighbourhood nook**  
**THE LOOKOUT INN** (Doubles from £60, room only)

**Because:** If you want to get out of the hubbub and live like a local, you can in this cute and kitsch guesthouse, which blends quirky colours with classic New Orleans architecture. **Travel's tip:** The suites are themed — Mardi Gras, Elvis and even Bollywood — so check the website ahead to figure out which one suits your sensibilities. 833 Poland Ave; 00 1504 947 8188, lookoutneworleans.com; ⑩

● **The musical high note**  
**THE FRENCHMEN HOTEL** (Doubles from £69, B&B)

**Because:** You can hear that sweet New Orleans jazz waft through the air as you kick back in the shady courtyard of this colourful Creole townhouse. **Travel's tip:** Ask for a poolside room, and look out for complimentary wine in the evenings. 417 Frenchmen St; 00 1504 945 5453, frenchmenhotel.com; ⑩

● **The rockstar retreat**  
**INTERNATIONAL HOUSE** (Doubles from £83, room only)

**Because:** It's set back from the partying clamour of the French Quarter and goes for a clean, monochrome style rather than Southern fanciness. **Travel's tip:** The Rockstar Rooms don't have windows, which may appeal to those wanting to sleep off a night on the razz. The lobby bar is one of Downtown's best. 221 Camp St; 00 1504 533 9550, ihhotel.com; ⑩

● **The TV tie-in**  
**JAZZ QUARTERS** (Doubles from £91, B&B)

**Because:** The post-Katrina television drama *Treme* has made the Tremé neighbourhood famous, and you can stay in secluded style in lovely, music-themed cottages. **Travel's tip:** Breakfast is a communal affair, so be sure to bring your best small talk to the table. 1129 St Philip St; 00 1504 523 1372, jazzquarters.com; ⑩



**Southern comforts:** clockwise from top left, Ashton's B&B; menu highlight; interior of the handy Hotel Mazarin; praline pecan pie at Jazz Quarters; New Orleans's quintessential jazz club, the Spotted Cat

● **The French Quarter spot**  
**HOTEL MAZARIN** (Doubles from £109, B&B)

**Because:** You're right in the thick of things in these modern guestrooms done out in black porcelain and granite. **Travel's tip:** It's in a handy spot to duck out of the craziness, and there's a great buffet breakfast. 730 Bienville St; 00 1 504 581 7300, hotelmazarin.com; ⑩

● **The breakfast and bed**  
**ASHTON'S B&B** (Doubles from £115, B&B)

**Because:** There's nothing like a home-cooked Southern breakfast, and these lovely people do it right — served up in their beautiful mansion. **Travel's tip:** Be aware you're a £10 cab ride from the centre. 2023 Esplanade Ave; 00 1 504 942 7048, ashtonsbb.com; ⑩

**EDITOR'S TIP**  
 There can be a real wait for cabs when New Orleans gets busy. Ask your hotel to book you one in advance.

**GET ME THERE**  
 GO INDEPENDENT

There are no direct flights to New Orleans, but BA (ba.com) connects via Chicago, Miami or Dallas from Heathrow with American Airlines;

fares vary depending on the season but start at about £770 return. Virgin (virgin-atlantic.com), Delta (delta.com) and United (united.com) also operate indirect flights.

**GO PACKAGED**  
**Virgin Holidays** (0844 225 1235, virginholidaysjourneys.co.uk) has a 15-day 'Southern Explorer' tour, with three days in New Orleans from £1,769pp, including flights. **Hayes & Jarvis** (01293 735831, hayesandjarvis.co.uk) has seven nights in New Orleans, with flights, from £1,099pp, room only.

**GET AROUND**  
 Downtown is easily walkable. For Uptown, take the street-car or a cab (00 1504 522 9771). Renting a bike is ideal; try **Bike NOLA** (1209 Decatur St; bikenola.net; from £18 for eight hours).

**FURTHER INFORMATION**  
 See **neworleanscvb.com**. Paul Oswell's book, *New Orleans for Free*, is available from amazon.com, from 78p (Kindle) and £2.25 (print). ■