



# NEW ORLEANS & ALL THAT JAZZ

BY MARY MOORE MASON

Jazz is to New Orleans what country music is to Nashville. The locals not only live with it but die with it, or perhaps, more accurately, we should say they meet their maker with a jazz beat – a strutting, rooting, tooting jazz funeral parade is a sight to behold!

THERE'S EVEN A STORY that when one of the elderly musicians who starred in the *Treme* HBO TV series passed over to the other side, his dignified, seated body first presided over a gala wake and was then driven in state through town in an open-topped car.

Be that as it may, since it was launched in 2010 the TV series has certainly put Tremé (pronounced TreeMAY) on the international tourism map. Telling the story of how the area's musicians and chefs dealt with the devastating wind and flood ravages of 2005's Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, the series reinforced Tremé's image as New Orleans' oldest African-America neighbourhood.

Its best-known site, Congo Square, where jazz began in pre-Civil War days with Sunday gatherings of singing, dancing and instrument-playing African slaves, has now been brought back to life. Part of Louis Armstrong Park, it includes a statue to its beloved namesake musician and film star as well as two venues for live entertainment – the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts, named after the famous New Orleans-born gospel singer, and the Municipal Auditorium. Tremé is also home to charming, brightly-painted wooden bungalows



ABOVE New Orleans street musicians always draw a crowd  
LEFT Bourbon Street revellers during Mardi Gras



as well as shops, restaurants and a newish jazz club, The Speakeasy, presided over by local jazz musician Kermit Ruffin.

Although jazz fans have traditionally headed for the French Quarter's over-commercialised Bourbon Street and iconic Preservation Hall, the newer, more-cutting-edge scene is to be found along lively Frenchmen Street in the picturesque Faubourg Marigny neighbourhood to the Quarter's east. Not only are all the clubs such as Snug Harbor and The Maison heaving with music lovers but the street echoes to the sound of brass bands and other *al fresco* groups.

For a really funky scene, although it's not really known for its music, head into the Bywater neighbourhood, where you can spend an entertaining time with folk/visionary artist 'Dr' Bob Shaffer in his outdoor/indoor hotchpotch of a studio. Presenting us with his business card, which states, 'Be Nice, Or Leave', he toured us past everything from a giant, decorated turtle shell and elaborate wood carvings to artworks studded with beer bottle-tops. "Alas," lamented Dr Bob, "my supply has dried up since I stopped drinking five years ago."

A number of New Orleans' musicians now live in the modern Musicians' Village, which was



A new hurricane- and flood-proof bungalow in the Musicians Village

constructed largely by volunteer organisations after the predominantly-African-American Ninth Ward was almost totally demolished by Katrina. Built high on pilings to protect them from future flooding, the buildings come in numerous different designs, some of them quite futuristic and environmentally sound. Among the celebrities contributing to New Orleans' rebuilding effort are local musician Harry Connick Jr and Hollywood superstar Brad Pitt.

### THE 'BIG EASY'S' FAB MUSIC FESTIVALS

In addition to its regular music scene, which sometimes features Connick, Ruffin and Wynton Marsalis and his three fellow jazz musician brothers, the city has music festivals throughout the year. In March, there's the New World Rhythms Fest; in July, the Essence Music Festival; in August, the Satchmo Musicfest; in October, the Crescent City Blues & BBQ Fest; and in November, the Voodoo Art & Music Experience. Also, somewhere along the way, there's usually a Louisiana Cajun/Zydeco Festival featuring that unique French-inspired music of the Louisiana swamplands.

But the daddy of them all is the April/May New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, which I had the good luck to attend last year. Held in the New Orleans Fairgrounds over two weekends, it features acts on eight stages that spotlight such talents as Willie Nelson, George Benson, Fleetwood Mac, The Original Dixieland Jazz Band and Ellis Marsalis. To add to the festive spirit, there also are tents dedicated to jazz, gospel and children's activities; flamboyant parades, some including the Mardi Gras Indians (African-Americans who dress up in flamboyant Native American costumes), and craft

## FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

One of the great joys of visiting New Orleans is its wealth of excellent restaurants, which feature delectable native Creole and Cajun cuisine. Here are just a few of the places we have personally sampled and can recommend:



**ANTOINE'S** – Established in 1840, this is the place to go for local ambience and a three-course Sunday jazz brunch (as we sipped our first Bloody Mary, the singer was belting out *Life Is Just a Cabaret*, *Old Chum* and the waiter revealed he had been there for 35 years). Temptations included soft shell-crab Florentine and a scrumptious, creamy

cheesecake. 713-725 Saint Louis Street, [antoines.com](http://antoines.com), 001 (504) 581 4422.

**ARNAUD'S** – Not only does this charming French Quarter restaurant serve up classic Creole cuisine but it also includes a jazz bistro and a Mardi Gras museum (its onetime owner was one of the movers and shakers behind the pre-Lenten festival), 813 Rue Bienville, [arnaudsrestaurant.com](http://arnaudsrestaurant.com), 001 (504) 523 5433.

**CAFÉ AMELIE** – Offering *al fresco* dining in the charming courtyard of the home of a one-time princess of Monaco, this establishment features light meals that include banana waffles for breakfast and chicken and andouille (spicy sausage) gumbo and catfish with Cajun mayo for lunch and dinner. 912 Royal Street, [cafemamelie.com](http://cafemamelie.com), 001 (504) 412 8965.



**CAFÉ DU MONDE** – Located at a particularly picturesque corner of the French Quarter, this is the place to sample *café au lait* and *beignets*, the delicious fried, powdered sugar-coated local doughnuts. 800 Decatur Street, 001 (504) 525 4544.

**COMMANDER'S PALACE** – This *grande dame* of the Garden District, housed in a splendid, bright-blue Victorian mansion, is popular for its Saturday and Sunday jazz brunches, martinis that only cost a quarter (25c), and such dishes as Louisiana shrimp and grits, Creole bread pudding and praline parfait. 1403 Washington Avenue, [commanderspalace.com](http://commanderspalace.com), 001(504) 899 8221.

**DOMINIQUE'S ON MAGAZINE** – With its sleek, all-white, minimalist décor, this newish Garden District restaurant has on offer innovative cocktails, gourmet dishes paired with well-chosen wines, and a back patio that features a vertical herb garden growing up its wall. 4213 Magazine Street, [dominiquesonmag.com](http://dominiquesonmag.com), 001 (504) 891 9282.

**GALATOIRE'S** – There are now two versions of this legendary French Quarter restaurant – the old family-owned, award-winning one established in 1905 and featuring all those traditional Creole recipes (209 Bourbon Street, [galatoires.com](http://galatoires.com), 001 (504) 525 2021) and the newer Galatoire's 33 Bar & Steak (215 Bourbon Street, [galatoires33barandsteak.com](http://galatoires33barandsteak.com), 001 (504) 335 3932), which, as one would expect, specialises in steaks while serving such traditional starters as Louisiana shrimp boil, lobster bisque and turtle soup.



**KINGFISH** – This is the answer for those who prefer down-home Southern cuisine served in a laid-back ambience. Among the specialties are smoked rabbit gumbo, andouille sausage wrapped in puff pastry with collard greens on the side, and pork and grits served with roasted corn. 337 Chartres Street, [cocktailbarneworleans.com](http://cocktailbarneworleans.com), 001 (504) 598 5005.

**TABLEAU** – The newest addition to the portfolio of famed restaurateur Dickie Brennan shares its space with the French Quarter's Le Petit Theatre and boasts balconies overlooking Jackson Square, the ambience of an old Louisiana plantation home and classic French Creole dishes with a unique twist. 616 St Peter Street, [tableaufrenchquarter.com](http://tableaufrenchquarter.com), 001 (504) 934 3463.

**America**  
*as you like it*

Specialists in tailor-made holidays across the USA and Canada

Tel: (020) 8742 8299  
[www.americasyoulikeit.com](http://www.americasyoulikeit.com)

**TRAVEL NOTES**

**GETTING THERE:** Although there are no direct flights from London to Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, Delta Air Line ([delta.com](http://delta.com), 0871 22 11 222) offers excellent connections to the city via its various transatlantic gateways.

**GETTING AROUND:** You can easily walk to most of the key attractions in the French Quarter, and buses and street cars serve many other areas. In addition to the mule-drawn carriage tours, there are walking, limo and bus tours (including some to outlying plantations) and cruises along the Mississippi River. For a personalised limo tour, we would recommend the one we took, Bespoke New Orleans run by Travis and Jennifer Simpson ([bespokenorleans.com](http://bespokenorleans.com), 001 (504) 534 8874). For personalised shopping tours, contact ALG Style ([ALGstyle.net](http://ALGstyle.net), 001 (504) 237 1104).

**ACCOMMODATION:** You're spoiled for hotel and inn choice in New Orleans. We stayed in – and loved – the opulent, landmark Windsor Court Hotel ([windsorcourthotel.com](http://windsorcourthotel.com), 001 (504) 523 6000), with its beautifully-furnished public and guest rooms, choice of restaurants, roof-top swimming pool and easy access to the French Quarter. Right in the heart of the quarter is the historic Hotel Monteleone ([hotelmonteleone.com](http://hotelmonteleone.com), 001 (504) 523 3341), frequented in the past by the likes of William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams and Ernest Hemingway, and featuring the unique, rotating Carousel Bar. And then there's The New Orleans Hotel Collection ([neworleanshotelcollection.com](http://neworleanshotelcollection.com), 001 (855) 798 6642), which offers a whole range of charming accommodation in five hotels, some in buildings with colourful histories – and the occasional ghost.

**THE NEW ORLEANS JAZZ & HERITAGE FESTIVAL:** In 2014, it will be held over two weekends, one beginning on Friday, April 25, and the other on Thursday, May 1. [nojazzfest.com](http://nojazzfest.com)

**FURTHER INFORMATION:** Visit [neworleanscvb.com](http://neworleanscvb.com) or contact the UK office of the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, 020 8460 7082.



The most-famous street car route leads along St Charles Avenue into the beautiful Garden District, where we gawked at the majestic mansions, shaded by huge Spanish-moss-swathed oak trees, checked out a couple of the fine restaurants, and shopped in the numerous boutiques

and gift shops along lively Magazine Street with the aid of shopping specialist ALG Style Tours. Among the choices were Aiden Gill (shaving equipment, ties and other presents for men), GOGO (interesting modern jewellery designed and made on the premises), Basics and House of Lounge (both with fab lingerie), Annelique (shoes) and Swap (vintage clothing).

So, now that I am back in London, New Orleans lingers on, if only in my wardrobe and in the occasional gourmet meal or exotic cocktail I conjure up thanks to those tempting Louisiana cookbooks I purchased along the way.

LEFT Two New Orleans' icons - its unique architecture and its mule-drawn carriages

ABOVE The most-famous street car route leads along St Charles Avenue into the beautiful Garden District

dedicated to Katrina's devastation and the city's gradual recovery and the other to the fabulous costumes and heritage of New Orleans' world-renowned, pre-Lenten Mardi Gras celebrations.

You can easily cover the French Quarter by foot or take a mule-drawn carriage whose driver doubles as an often-colourful narrator of local fact and fiction. (If you want to continue the music theme, check to see if the mule named Mahalia Jackson is available.)

**REVISITING WORLD WAR II AND THE GARDEN DISTRICT**

To proceed into the adjacent Warehouse/ Arts District we took a trolley ride along the Mississippi River waterfront, disembarking at the stop closest to the National World War II Museum. Querying why such a museum was there, we were told by the info desk attendant that it was because the Higgins landing craft that were vital to the D-Day invasion were built in the city. We viewed the thrilling film – as the theatre seats are seismically-enhanced, we literally felt the intensity of the bombardment – and the fascinating exhibitions covering the war throughout the world; enjoyed a live performance of WWII-style troop entertainment, including jazz, swing and songs by the museum's own Victory Belles; and then had a Happy Hour drink and hamburgers and hot dogs at the American Sector Restaurant. Our only complaint was that the whole experience gave the impression that the Yanks won the war without outside help.

▶ and food staffs, the latter featuring such delicious Louisiana specialties as shrimp gumbo and spicy andouille sausages.

Of course, New Orleans has much to offer besides its music scene. Visitors can enjoy a holiday in the 'Big Easy' without even leaving the fabled French Quarter. There, you will find historic buildings resplendent with filigreed, wrought-iron balconies; world-renowned restaurants, cafés and bars; charming streets, notably Rue Royale, lined with tempting antique, art, jewellery and clothing shops; and also much of historic note, particularly around Jackson Square. In addition to the mounted statue of General Andrew Jackson, who defeated the British in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans (and went on to become a US President), it is the site of the impressive St Louis' Cathedral flanked by The Cabildo and the almost identical Presbytere.

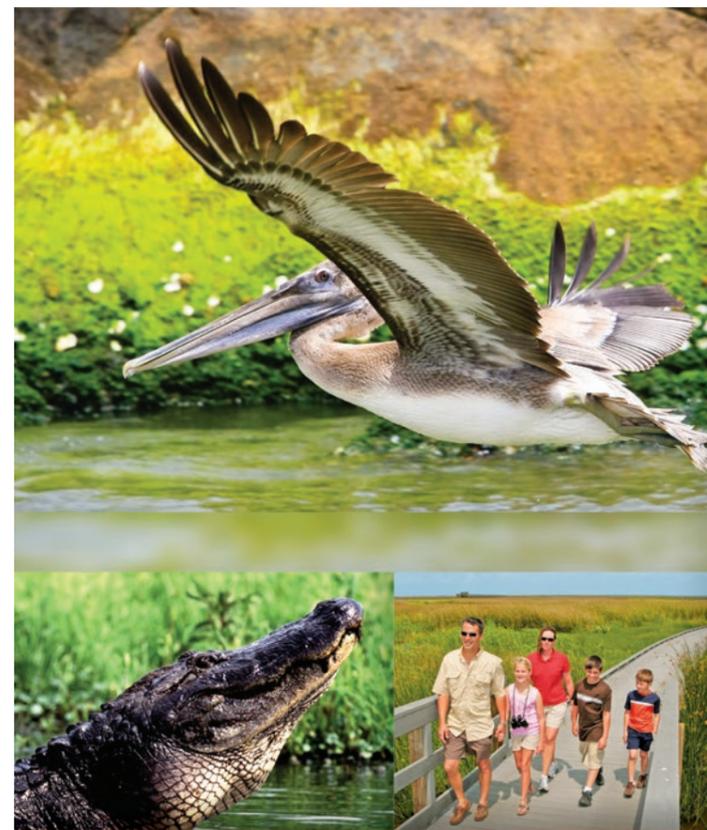
Built in 1799 as the seat of the city's Spanish Colonial rulers, the former building features the room where the Louisiana Purchase was signed in 1803, ceding vast tracks of land from France to the USA, plus exhibitions covered centuries of Louisiana history; the latter encompasses two outstanding exhibitions – one



ABOVE TOP Musicians in Snug Harbor, one of the best-known clubs on Frenchmen Street



ABOVE The city's annual spring Jazz & Heritage Festival showcases musicians on eight stages



Experience the **Louisiana Wild!**

Southwest Louisiana is your gateway to rich history, art, culture & cuisine, with a scenic backyard that consists of hundreds of miles of pristine Louisiana wetlands known as the

**Creole Nature Trail All-American Road.**

FREE Self-Guided Video Tour, search "CREOLE" in your app store.

USA Discover America .com



800-456-SWLA



Plan your trip at [VisitLakeCharles.org/Wild](http://VisitLakeCharles.org/Wild)