

THE REAL



Rip up your tourist brochures! Get your butt off Bourbon Street, and cross over to the "other side." Our no-holds-barred insider's guide is the *only* thing you'll ever need to experience New Orleans—and Mardi Gras—the way the coolest locals do.

"NEW ORLEANS WAS a place to hide," wrote Charles Bukowski, the dive bard and *Barfly* author. "I could piss away my life there."

Which is what this most infamous city is for most visitors, especially during Mardi Gras season: a place to get hammered and stay that way, lose your shirt, then your shit, hit the strip clubs and tourist traps of Bourbon Street, spend your cash on countless \$9 Hurricane drinks and "slippery nipple" shooters, all the while screaming, "Show us your tits!" at boozy, floozy coeds gone wild.

But is that what you *really* want to do when you're in this "strange, decadent city," as vampire novelist Anne Rice called it, for a long (read: lost) weekend? *The entire time?*

Mardi Gras this year falls on February 24—Fat Tuesday, as it's called—and for the entire month the party and parades will roll on, gaining size like a snowball down Everest. An estimated one million visitors are expected, inundating the Creole-cottaged cobblestone streets, still

sweeping up the horrors of Hurricane Katrina. That means fresh hell if you are in the French Quarter, where mounted police are just waiting for the opportunity to pounce.

Why get laid over in Obvious Land, when you could be imbibing and inhaling the spookiest, sexiest, tastiest, most haunted and hedonistic metropolis in the U.S., perhaps the world?

Hide your wallet in your tighty-whities and follow our A-team of experts—all seasoned veterans of crawling and brawling through every inch of the city—taking you, among many other best-kept secrets, to the extended block party of the Faubourg Marigny's Frenchmen Street, as well as a rollicking bar run down Magazine Street. Grab a go-cup, and, as the Cajuns say, "*Laissez les bon temps rouler!*" That's "Let the good times roll" to you, Yankee boy!

BY STEVE GARBARINO
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MADDY SIMPSON
PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION
BY ERIC HEINZ

Best

THE RAW AND THE COOKED: SWEETEST OYSTERS

Jonathan Swift once said, "He was a bold man that first ate an oyster." Pussy! The mollusks that thrive in the brackish waters of Lake Pontchartrain are the reason you come to New Orleans. And given the oyster's reputation for stiffening the ol' shuck stick, they just may be the secret ingredient to the city's hedonistic stew. If you like them raw, swirled into the preferred local concoction—horseradish, lemon juice, ketchup, and Tabasco—head to **Bozo's** (3117 21st St., Metairie), a no-frills, linoleum-tabled joint boasting some of the fattest, freshest oysters around. **Casamento's** (4330 Magazine St.), a tiled-from-top-to-bottom Uptown storefront, serves them fresh-shucked or fried and stuffed into a po'boy, to equally delicious effect. The oyster stew is manna, too. Noisy, bustling **Landry's Seafood House** (400 N. Peters St.) may attract the odd gastro-tourist (for good reason), but nothing like



the throngs that flock to **Acme Oyster House** (724 Iberville St.). If you're not so into the raw deal, go to **Drago's Seafood Restaurant** (2 Poydras St.), which specializes in grilled oysters, roasted over an open fire. Slurp!—*Julian Sancton*

Gator Mania!

Where to see a scaly beast (and other loads of croc).



1 White Alligator (6500 Magazine St., audubon.institute.org): In the Louisiana Swamp exhibit at the **Audubon Zoo**, you can watch the blue-eyed white alligator mix it up with the regulars to little effect. A case of reverse discrimination.

3 Great American Alligator Museum (2051 Magazine St., 504-523-5525): "Fossils, taxidermy, folk art," and assorted reptilian kitsch, oddly placed in an antique zone of the Lower Garden District. Bring home a gator paw keychain for the littlun!

2 Alligator Sightings Jean Lafitte Swamp Airboat Tour (800-445-4109): One of countless cracker operations that take you out into Hoodoo Land for about \$70 a person. This one's about a half-hour outside of the city in Marrero, La.

4 Alligator Boneyard Wanna see jaws of death? It's a frightening field of reptilian bones outside of an alligator processing plant near Lafayette. But you better turn on the GPS. Take I-10 and look for the Stansel Rice Co. and D&D Sporting, then ask a gas station attendant...

"I shot a big piece of JFK in New Orleans. Unlike any other American city, it belongs to another time and place. More dream than urban metropolis, it is, like Cuba, a memory of repressed desires."
Oliver Stone



Bayou Bests



HOTTEST SPOT FOR MARDI GRAS SEX Under the Bleachers in Lafayette Square

Nothing like getting frisky beneath the butts of hundreds of drunk, oblivious tourists—trust us. As they focus on the floats passing by on St. Charles Avenue, you'll be focusing on more carnal pursuits. Hey, it's Mardi Gras! No one'll notice a thing.

BEST PLACE TO GET A BITE

Boutique du Vampyre (712 Orleans St., feelthebite.com): Mark your territory on that UNO coed you met at the Abbey bar around the bend. This curio shop behind St. Louis Cathedral specializes in disturbingly realistic custom vampire fangs. Made of dental-grade acrylic from a mold of your chompers, they snap right in without glue. At \$100 to \$800 a pop, there's much at stake.

HORNIEST CLUBS

Coming here without seeing live music is like going to Amsterdam and passing up the hash brownies. If you want to hear traditional New Orleans jazz—don't call it "Dixieland" (that's what white dudes in straw hats play on the ferryboat in Disney World)—head to the **Palm Court Jazz Cafe** (1204 Decatur St.), a tiled-floor club with an oak bar and purist combos. The Faubourg Marigny is Jazz Central, and hipster hangout **d.b.a.** (618 Frenchman St.) hits all the right notes (great name-brand acts, great-looking crowd). But our favorite is the **Spotted Cat** (623 Frenchman St.), a sweaty little hole that squeezes squeezebox lovers in. Must-see: blues wizard Washboard Chaz. Uptown way, don't let the crowd that nightly spills out of legendary storefront tavern the **Maple Leaf Bar** (8316 Oak St.) stop you from catching the wild-man funk, R&B, jazz, zydeco, and electric blues, rocking the bar's stage and shaking the hammered-tin ceiling; Tuesday night is owned by the rollicking Rebirth Brass Band (arrive early). **Snug Harbor** (626 Frenchman St.) is the place for Neville Brothers sightings (Aaron's the one with that mole). If you're in a spiritual mood—or you just feel like hitting the lanes—roll over to the **Rock N' Bowl** (4133 S. Carrollton Ave.), whose owner, a fervent Catholic, returned from a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in the former Yugoslavia after making a petition to the Virgin Mary to help him financially take care of his family. When he returned he was asked if he wanted to buy a bowling alley, which he did, and turned it into a successful music club. He built it, and they came.

FRIENDLIEST STRIP CLUB

Rick's Cabaret (315 Bourbon St., ricks.com): Like dive bars, flesh factories are abundant here, ranging from the spectacular to the terrifying. Rick's is the best of the former, boasting a fun, non-creepy vibe and the hottest girls we've seen. Bonus: Instead of forcing you to buy them a \$20 drink, and a \$100 lap dance, they will sit and chat and "even make you laugh." Yeah, *that's* why you're there—to make a new friend!



KNOW YOUR N'AWLINS PATOIS: A GLOSSARY OF TERMS



sucking heads: slurping in the seasoned juices from the head of a crawfish

mudbugs: slang for crawfish

RBR: red beans and rice, served in households and cafés each Monday, known as "RBR Mondays"

axe: ask

yehyouright: yes, that is exactly correct

ye' mom and them: your family

y'at: Rednecks from the West Bank say, "where y'at?" instead of "what's up?"

cash money: cash —*Stinson Carter*



A BRASS BALL: All jazzed up at the Maple Leaf Bar.

Bayou Bests

DIVINEST DIVE IN DIXIE

The Saint Bar and Lounge (961 St. Mary St.): Telephone wires hum overhead and a streetlamp buzzes, threatening to go out as you approach the yellow neon halo on the pockmarked wooden door, here on this sketchy street. This is David Lynch Land. Enter and you are suddenly swept from harm's way into alkie heaven, the hole-iest of all dives—a serious honor here. True, the Saint, located in Uptown's Irish Channel neighborhood, isn't much to look at: drop ceilings rec-room paneling, a creepy little side room made for misbehavior. But the devil is in the details, like the surreal color photo booth in which you can attach your head to a bonneted baby's body. Alterna-dudes, resident crazies, slumming-it socialites, big daddies in seersucker, hotties in denim minis, and local rock bands cram the thrift-store couches and bar stools for muddy Bloodies and homemade moonshine. The music ranges from Jimmie Rodgers yokel to speed metal. Pet Lily, the bar cat, and say a prayer at the weirdo shrine to Saint Jude, the patron saint of lost causes (like you).

BEST PLACE TO WATCH A SMALL CHILD GET EATEN BY SNAPPING TURTLES

Audubon Park: Find Pitt Street—not named after

favorite son Brad—and take it until it runs into the park. Walk directly to the bayou's edge, and stop. If the sun is out and it's not too cold, you will see clusters of sinister turtles lying about in conga lines on fallen water oaks, *waiting, waiting*—for little Percival to wander away from Mom.

BIGGEST ATHLETIC SUPPORTER

Cooter Brown's Tavern & Oyster Bar (509 S. Carrollton Ave., cooterbrowns.com): More like a Wild West saloon in a ghost town than a traditional sports bar, Cooter Brown's—with its Pure Prairie League mascot—nonetheless has more plasma-screens-per-square-inch than anywhere else in the city. This Riverbend favorite of old-timers and the college crowd reeks of ammonia, and the rest rooms don't even have locks on the doors. But *that*—plus an extensive beer list and fresh oysters—is the point. No sausage factory, the local ladies like it, too.



BEST DISGUISE DEPOT

Uptown Costume and Dancewear (4326 Magazine St., 504-895-7969): You don't want co-workers or family members to recognize you during Mardi Gras, so all the better to be wearing a chicken outfit, Jerry Lewis teeth, a wolfman mask, a rubber penis nose, or a *Clockwork Orange* jumpsuit! Just avoid the pointy Ku Klux Klan hats: The locals will *not* be amused.

BEST REVENGE

Voodoo Doll from Voodoo Authentica (612 Dumaine; voodoooshop.com): "Practitioner-made" voodoo dolls are just the ticket for providing your prick of a boss with a little scrotal stinging. Juju, grigri, potions, and ritual kits aren't made to be taken lightly, but you have no intention of doing so, right?



NOM DE PLUME: Mask up at Uptown Costume Shop.

Best

BABE FACTORY: REPUBLIC

Republic (828 S. Peters St., republicnola.com): If you live in Old Metairie or the West Bank—'burbs of New Orleans—this is where the just-of-drinking-age hotties cross the bridges to test out their new spandex mini-dresses and six-inch heels, away from Mom and Pop's disapproving eyes. The two-story, 7,000-square-foot warehouse of dirty dancing is also where savvy local shop girls come to circle those upstairs VIP banquettes, accommodating some of the city's more eligible bachelors. The bottle service may seem "a bit much" for this town. But Republic is ultimately a democracy: It boasts some of the most mixed crowds in the city. No, this is *not* your grandfather's New Orleans.



MARDI GRAS SURVIVAL TIPS

1. American Express: Don't leave hotel *with* it. Keep cards, and cash, well-hidden—ditch that sucker's fat wallet. Your girlfriend should bring her ID. Barely Legal is a strip club here, but door guys check the "ladies" during Mardi Gras. Undercover cops abound.
2. Layer your clothes. Temperatures go up and down on you like that girl at Johnnie White's Hole-in-the-Wall. And know that this city gets wet.
3. Drink and drive by taking the streetcar. It'll transport your sorry ass from the French Quarter to the equally lubricated Garden District for \$1.25 a pop. Get off, so to speak, wherever you want. Many of them run until 2 A.M.
4. Call restaurants in advance for reservations before going—or at least to find out if they're open. New Orleans runs on its own time; some places are closed on the most unlikely of days—Tuesday?—and keep odd hours of operation. (Sundays, even during Mardi Gras, are deader than Jeff Buckley.)
5. Don't just wander around like a gypsy or take guidance from some weirdo. Plan a route in advance. Pick up a free *Gambit*, *WHEREYAT*, or *Antigravity* (for live-rock fans), the alternative tabs of the city. They list venues by neighborhood, dates of live shows, and happy hours, and offer capsule reviews of local eats and drinks. They're found in record shops and cafés.

"I love anything **Chef Donald Link** is involved with, and his restaurant **Cochon** is all about my favorite animal: pig. Chef Link is a heroic figure in my eyes—not just for his ability to coax rainbows of flavor from that most magical of beasts, but because he was one of the first chefs back in New Orleans after Katrina. He personifies the very best of NOLA food culture."

Anthony Bourdain, chef, TV show host
(No Reservations)



...AND MORE SLANG TO SLING

who dat? who is that?
lagniappe (lann-yap): a little something extra thrown in for free
banquette: sidewalk
neutral ground: median
gallery: balcony

mash the button: press the button
makin' groceries: buying groceries
buggy: grocery basket
pass a good time: have a good time
shotgun (single or double): a house with all rooms connected by a central hallway—S.C.

SAY THIS/NOT THAT



- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>a. Say "Nuwohr-lins," don't say, "N'awlins," and never say, "New Or-leens."</p> <p>b. Say "the River," not "the Mississippi River."</p> <p>c. Call it "the parade," not "Mardi Gras."</p> | <p>d. Say "Bur-GUN-dy" Street, not "Burgundy" Street.</p> <p>e. Tchoupitoulas Street, a key thoroughfare, is pronounced, "Chop-i-too-las."</p> <p>f. "Co-cola," not Coca-Cola.—S.C.</p> |
|--|---|

Local Libations of Distinction

Hurricanes, Monsoons, and Mudslides, oh, my! If you want a taste of New Orleans, then give these elixirs a whirl of the ol' swizzle stick. And ordering a Bloody Mary, anywhere, is a must—"spicy bean" included.



1 The **Ramos Gin Fizz**, a frothy hangover cure, was invented by Henry Ramos in 1888. Difficult to make, the milkshake-like drink is worth the wait (tip extra). Ingredients: dry gin, lemon juice, fresh egg whites, seltzer, powdered sugar, orange flower. We like 'em at **The Columns**.



2 The **Sazerac** was recently declared the official drink of New Orleans. This licorice-tasting cocktail is served chilled in an old-fashioned glass. Ingredients: three ounces of rye, simple syrup, Peychaud bitters, absinthe splash. Often served with an orange-rind twist. Go to **Antoine's**.



3 The **Pimm's Cup** was invented in the mid-18th century by English oyster bar owner James Pimm, and it somehow found its way to New Orleans. Ingredients: Pimm's No. 1, ginger ale, shot of seltzer, cucumber garnish. Served in a tall glass, it's the drink of favor at **Napoleon House**.



TOP 10 BARGAIN BARS

- Snake & Jake's Christmas Club Lounge** (7612 Oak St.): Santa Claus is drunk, year-round.
- Mother-in-Law Lounge** (1500 N. Claiborne Ave.): Leave the old ball and chain at home.
- The Kingpin Bar** (1307 Lyons St.): Uptown's casual, chick-friendly shrine to Elvis.
- The Saturn Bar** (3067 St. Claude Ave.): Truly a planet unto its own, far, far out there...
- Half Moon Bar** (1125 St. Mary St.): Great for daytime drinking, best neon sign in town.
- Buffa's** (1001 Esplanade Ave.): Soccer (grand)mom Dixie band on Sundays.
- Chuck's Bar** (510 Gravier St.): Open 24 hours, the last neighborhood bar in the CBD. "No Sleeping"
- St. Joe's Bar** (5535 Magazine St.): Monastery dark inside, heavenly patio out back.
- Igor's** (501 Esplanade Ave.) Laundromat and bar.

"We tell people they should go to New Orleans because it's not an easy place to describe. It's a special place, and a unique part of America, and the people are great. But you've got to go there to really experience it. You've gotta feel it. You've gotta come."

Angelina Jolie



Bayou Bests

BEST PLACE TO BLACK OUT

Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop (941 Bourbon St.): "Was that James Gandolfini I just pissed next to in the bathroom? Wait...I can see now. It was?" The gaslit, oldest freestanding structure in the U.S., and the oldest bar in New Orleans (circa 1772), is so dark inside day or night that you'll be squinting like a vampire when you leave. People vanish here.



CHEAPEST 24 HOURS OF YOUR LIFE

Ms. Mae's (4336 Magazine St.): The Uptown collegiate and post-collegiate pack-'em-in that's an almost guarantee for a one-night stand (for man, woman, or other) draws a boisterous, shot-swilling crowd. And imagine this: \$1 cocktails. It's a fun close to a night, or a morning. Next stop? Death.

CRAZIEST CREOLE KITCHEN

Jacques-Imo's Café (8324 Oak St., jacquesimoscafe.com): With a wild-man spirit that carries over to his boisterous rock'n'roll kitchen, Chef Jack Leonardi, the unofficial mayor of Oak Street, is New Orleans' Mario Batali (sans the clogs, red face, and piglet tail). The "experience" of eating at this casual but serious Creole-Cajun swamp-boogie house begins when diners walk directly through the bustling open kitchen into the dining room, where the Stones are cranking. But the real magic is the wildly imaginative, indigenous cuisine. No one does a better blackened redfish, period. And the shrimp-and-gator-sausage cheesecake is simply amazing. Feeling weird? Eat your dinner at the two-top in the flatbed of the Jacques-Imo's house truck. Encore!

SMOKIN'EST PLACE TO GET LIT

Mayan Import Company (3009 Magazine St., mayanimport.com) We don't know Jack about cigars, but there's a lot of them here, and the young, cool dudes who run this shop seem to know their Cohibas. Or, if you prefer, come for the dirt-cheap, hard-to-find import cigarettes—like Shepheard's Hotels. Best of all, it's housed in a former orphanage!

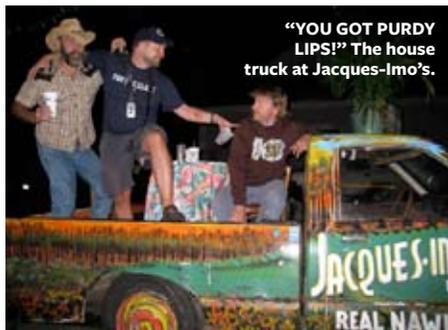


BEST CLUB TO STRUT YOUR STUFF, Y'ALL

Balcony Music Club (1331 Decatur St., at Esplanade Ave.): The sweaty Quarter-Marigny venue is luring a refreshingly mixed crowd of local twenty- and thirtysomethings—who all know how to swing, jitterbug, Cajun two-step, and have a wild time. Nightly, some of the most spontaneous acts in town, from new-Dixie and soul to funk and electric blues, play here. It all jumps, Jasper.

SWEETEST SPOT TO MAKE UP WITH HER

Sucré (3025 Magazine St., shopsucré.com): You really shouldn't have made out with your girlfriend's boozed-up BFF. But this is the place to make it all better with your sweet-toothed sweetheart the next day. See! You really are a refined gentlemen, choosing this newcomer confectionary and dessert room—quite the little modernist jewel box in the honky-tonk fray. Now, back to being a dick!



"YOU GOT PURDY LIPS!" The house truck at Jacques-Imo's.



"C'MON DOWN!"
Uptown girls at the
Mayfair Lounge.

Bayou Bests

BEST MARDI GRAS-YEAR-ROUND BAR

The Mayfair Lounge (1505 Amelia St.): To enter the Mayfair, you have to press a door buzzer, making every moment inside seem like you're in Buffalo Bill's torture pit. But really it's more like you're trapped inside a permanent Mardi Gras float. This favored local drinking hole is "decorated" with a ceiling encrusted with carnival beads, a wilted pool table, sexy postgrads, and the engaging, ageless proprietress Miss Gertie, who's been behind the bar since 1978.

SPICIEST MUDBUGS

Big Fisherman Seafood (3301 Magazine St.): Make a party on your hotel room terrace! Just head here, a market fave for Uptown locals. Pick up four or five pounds of boiled crawfish, served with Old Bay-seasoned corn and red potatoes, spread out some newspapers on the floor, and dig in.

BEST DEAD SHOW

Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 (Washington St. between Magazine and Prytania Sts.): You're going to simply die for this place. A favorite graveyard of Anne Rice's, the maze of collapsing, decrepit mausoleums and tombs in this Garden District haunt is scary as bejessus during the day and completely freaky-deaky come dusk. But it's the real-life muggers, not the ghost of some yellow fever victim, that visitors should be wary of.



EASIEST RIDERS

Bicycle Michael's (622 Frenchmen St., bicyclemichaels.com): In the middle of our favorite neighborhood, the Marigny, these fit-and-friendly stoners will set you up with the hybrid or mountain bike of your choice for \$25 a day (due back by morning). Many hotels let you keep them in your room. Don't spill that go-cup!

SEXIEST SHACK-UP SPOT

The Columns Hotel (3811 Saint Charles Ave., thecolumns.com): This anything-goes 19-room Italiante mansion, fronted by gigantic columns, is the place to stay or drink for anyone who's ever dreamed of living above a saloon. Wealthy young pros and Tulane students cram the front porch and the 14-foot-ceilinged mahogany barrooms adorned with satanic-looking trophy heads. You feel a sense of entitlement strutting down the grand, spiraling staircase from your hotel room, right into Party Central.



GET A ROOM:
Old School rules at
the Columns Hotel.

A Tale of Two Sandwiches

You got your sub, your cheesesteak, and your hoagie elsewhere. But New Orleans' two distinct sandwiches—the muffuletta and the po'boy—are like no others. And they don't cost a whole lotta bread.



MUFFULETTA



PO'BOY

Inventor	Salvatore Lupo	Clovis and Benjamin Martin
Pronunciation	muff-uh-LOT-uh	PO-boy
Origins	Created in 1906 by a Sicilian grocery store owner in the French Quarter	Created in 1929 by two street-car drivers, helping feed "those poor boys" on strike
Bread	Round Sicilian focaccia	Louisiana French bread
Key Ingredient	Marinated olive salad (with minced celery, cauliflower, carrots, and seasoning)	Sliced roast beef (with gravy), or fried oysters and shrimp; smoked Andouille sausage
The Filler	Capicola, salami, mortadella, Emmentaler, provolone	Mayonnaise ("mie-nez" here), lettuce, tomato, pickles
Where to Have One	At the stand-up counter in Central Grocery Co.	(For roast beef) Domilise's and Parasol's
Price	\$12.50 at Napoleon House (serves two) or \$3.95/quarter	\$5-\$14 for halves and wholes, at Guy's and Mother's

"There are a lot of places I like, but I like New Orleans better. There's a thousand different angles at any moment. At any time you could run into a ritual honoring some vaguely known queen. No action seems inappropriate here. The city is one very long poem." **Bob Dylan**



The Laws of the Jungle

It's called the Big Easy for a reason, but there's a few rules...



ODD LAWS STILL ON THE BOOKS

You can't:

1. Toss any of the following from a Mardi Gras float: plastic spears, oysters, rodents, sex toys.
2. Bring reptiles within 200 yards of a parade route.
3. Wear a mask outside of Mardi Gras.
4. Train pigs to fight.
5. Steal someone's crawfish. (Punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Same goes for stealing alligators.)
6. Sell hot tamales two blocks from a school.



RULES OF THE "GO-CUP"

The best thing about New Orleans is that you can drink liquor from a plastic cup just about anywhere outdoors.

However, you can't:

1. Carry an open glass container in the French Quarter.
2. Carry plastic or glass containers within a block of a Mardi Gras parade route, two hours before the parade.
3. Have an open container in a moving vehicle—maximum fine is \$200.

NOT ILLEGAL, BUT DON'T DO THESE THINGS

1. Drink anything from a plastic hand grenade.
2. Sport a blue or red tongue.
3. Take pictures of girls' breasts: What happens at Mardi Gras should stay at Mardi Gras.
4. Yell, "Par-ty Gras!"
5. Wear your "throw" beads around your neck the entire night.
6. Take local "talent" to your hotel. You may end up with one of those, "It was a dude, man!" tales.—J.S. and S.C.