

48 HOURS

NEW ORLEANS

Discover culture, nightlife and history as varied and satisfying as the food in the Big Easy, says Ella Buchan

The air was thick with the strains of saxophone and the scents of sweet, salty crawfish and cajun spice. Bodies and cups of beer swayed in time with the music as nearly 50,000 people partied along Oak Street in uptown New Orleans.

And all this to celebrate a humble sandwich. The Po-Boy Fest, which pays homage to the soft baguette, is one of 129 festivals held here annually. It says a lot about the city's love of food, music and a good old party.

Launched post-Hurricane Katrina in response to that tragic storm and the devastating floods that followed, it also says something about its resilience.

While scars are still visible, especially in the badly hit Ninth

Ward, 10 years on the city buzzes with positivity and renewal.

The number of annual visitors increased from 3.7 million in 2006 to 9.52 million in 2014, and there are more hotels, restaurants, music venues and cultural attractions than before.

Like the gumbo it's famous for, New Orleans is a melting pot of rich, spicy, delicious flavours. There's never been a better time to grab a spoon and dive in.

▶ DAY ONE

10.00: Get your bearings and a fun introduction to the city with a FreeWheelin' Bike Tour (£30). The Creole Crescent route cuts through the French Quarter and across broad, leafy Esplanade Avenue, whizzing

past cerise, spearmint and violet houses in the Marigny to the country's first African-American neighbourhood, the Treme. The tour stops in 1,300-acre City Park for beignets (bite-sized doughnut fritters) at Morning Call Cafe before looping back to the FreeWheelin' office on Burgundy Street.

freewheelinbiketours.com

13.00: Walk five minutes to Canal Street and jump on board the historic St Charles Streetcar (85p a ticket) to the Garden District. Hop off after 20 minutes at Washington Avenue. Turn left and walk one block to Lafayette Cemetery, one of the city's famous above-ground mausoleums.

13.30: Continue a few minutes down Washington Avenue until you hit Magazine Street. Take a left for a short walk to Lilly's Cafe (1813 Magazine), a local favourite that serves steaming bowls of Vietnamese pho and glazed tofu.

14.30: After lunch, browse the street's many vintage boutiques and souvenir shops. Try Fleurdy Girl (3117 Magazine) for funky T-shirts and locksmiths H Rault (3027 Magazine) for antique keys and quirky jewellery. Sucre (3025 Magazine) sells macarons and king cakes, traditionally served during Mardi Gras.

16.00: Walk 20 minutes up Magazine Street, in the direction of downtown, to the National →



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➔ **WWII Museum (£16).** The imposing, pale-grey building houses rare artefacts and photos, an interactive submarine experience and a 4D film with Tom Hanks. Its American Sector bar plays 1940s tunes and has half-priced drinks from 4pm-7pm. nationalww2museum.com

20.30: After resting up at your hotel, sample Chicken Creole and Oysters Rockefeller where they were invented at the French Quarter institution of Antoine's, credited with shaping the city's cuisine. Ask your waiter for a tour through 175 years of history, secret rooms belonging to the Mardi Gras 'crewes' and a concealed doorway in the ladies' toilet, which led to a tiny drinking den during Prohibition. antoines.com

23.00: Head around the corner to Bourbon Street, the city's famous nightlife strip. It can be hectic, but there are a few gems. Built in the 1700s, Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop claims to be the oldest bar in the US – and haunted. Maison Bourbon has non-stop live jazz or, for craft cocktails in a classier joint, duck down cross street Bienville to Arnaud's French 75. lafittesblacksmithshop.com maisonbourbon.com arnaudsrestaurant.com

00.00: Back on Bourbon Street, settle in for a show at Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse, tucked inside the Royal Sonesta Hotel. The dusky, intimate venue packs out every night for its jazz revues and saucy burlesque performances. With no cover charge, all it will cost you is the

price of a Sazerac cocktail or two. sonesta.com

▶ **DAY TWO**

10.00: Brunch is a religion in New Orleans. Literally so at the House Of Blues on Decatur Street, which hosts a Gospel Brunch on Sundays (adults £30, children £15). The buffet tables groan under mountains of eggs, grits, chicken and waffles, while bottomless mimosas and soulful singers rouse the audience to click fingers, stamp feet and wave napkins. If you're not in town over a weekend, The Court Of Two Sisters serves up daily helpings of comfort food and jazz in its pretty courtyard (adults £35, children £12). houseofblues.com/neworleans courtoftwosisters.com

11.30: Turn left on Decatur for a short stroll to Jackson Square and St Louis Cathedral, the oldest church



While the scars of Katrina are still visible in the Ninth Ward, 10 years on the city buzzes with positivity and renewal

in continual use in the US. Continue two blocks northwest to Royal Street, and beat the crowds for a coffee at Hotel Monteleone's Carousel Bar. From lunchtime this place is packed with people, all poised to pounce on an empty stool. Half the fun is watching the slick bartenders keep up with cocktail orders while customers do a 360-degree turn around the room. hotelmonteleone.com

12.00: Back on Royal, browse souvenirs, antique stores and galleries, including the Rodrigue Studio (730 Royal) showcasing the artist's iconic 'Blue Dog' paintings. Forever New Orleans (606 Royal) sells beignet mix and vintage street tiles, while U Art Gallery (427 Royal) has jazzy, affordable posters and prints.

14.00: Chances are you're still stuffed from brunch, so grab lunch on the go at the French Market, just off Decatur Street by the Mississippi. Munch alligator sausage on a stick (£5) while eyeing stalls selling cajun spices, shiny strings of Mardi Gras beads and voodoo fridge magnets. frenchmarket.org

15.00: See the Crescent City from a different perspective. Musically named Kayak-iti-yat runs guided paddles along the bayous of St John and ➔



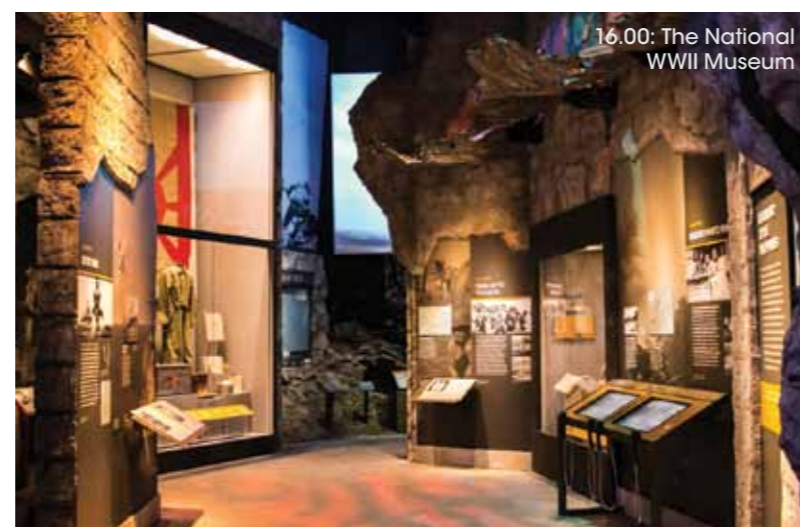
10.00: The French Quarter



13:00: Lafayette Cemetery



13:30: Magazine Street



16.00: The National WWII Museum



10:00: House of Blues



11.30: St Louis Cathedral

PICTURES: NEW ORLEANS ONLINE



WHERE TO STAY

SPLURGE

The Roosevelt

Stepping down the hallway of this Waldorf Astoria hotel, over mosaic tiles, under chandeliers and past potted palms, is like entering a bygone era. Enormous mahogany beds, pool with views over the rooftops and cocktails in the low-lit Sazerac Bar maintain the atmosphere of classic luxury. Doubles from £150 a night. therooseveltneworleans.com

SPEND

Hyatt Regency

Overlooking the Mercedes-Benz Superdome and an easy walk to the French Quarter and banks of the Mississippi, the 1,193-room Hyatt Regency is dizzyingly big. The in-house pizza delivery service, cafe with house-smoked barbecue and cocktail lounge with live jazz elevate it above your typical business hotel. Doubles from £90 a night. neworleans.hyatt.com

SAVE

Aloft

Part of W Hotels, the brand's stylish signature is apparent from the soothing fiber optic lights and pool table in the lobby to the photographs adorning the bedroom walls of close-ups of local life. Plush bedding and free bottled water are a godsend for clients indulging in the nightlife. Doubles from £50 a night. aloftneworleansdowntown.com

➔ Bienvenue, past Frank Lloyd-Wright inspired homes, West Indies-style architecture and the odd pelican (£27 for two hours). kayakitiyat.com

19.00: Sample some of the city's innovative cuisine at Compère Lapin ('brother rabbit'), the restaurant in new boutique hotel Old 77 on Tchoupitoulas Street. Chef Nina Compton blends local flavours with Caribbean influences to create dishes of dirty rice arancini and chicken with crispy skin, turnips and leeks. comperelapin.com

21.00: Turn left out of the hotel and walk 15 minutes to Preservation Hall on St Peter Street, where audiences of all



Frenchmen Street is where the locals come out to play, with one music haunt propping up the next

ages can catch a thrice-nightly jazz performance (£10 on the door). Soft lights flicker over the stone walls and a reverent hush falls over the crowd when the in-house band begins to play. preservationhall.com

22.00: Head towards the river, turn left on Decatur Street and a

10-minute walk will take to you Frenchmen Street. This is where the locals come out to play, with one music haunt propping up the next. Drinking on the street is allowed as you weave between The Spotted Cat, The Blue Nile and Maison for live jazz and blues, and witness a brass band/hip hop mash-up at BMC.

01.00: Retrace your steps down Decatur, past the French Market to the green and white-striped awnings of Cafe Du Monde. This 24-hour spot is heaving by day, so grab a table for a post-jazz snack in the moonlight. Many claim the sugar-smothered beignets, served with cafe au lait, are the best in New Orleans. cafedumonde.com



Aloft Hotel



22:00: Frenchmen Street



01:00: Cafe Du Monde

PICTURES: NEW ORLEANS ONLINE/COSMO CONDINA; JEAN-PAUL GISCLAIR; DAVID RICHMOND