



# a New Orleans

With its French heritage, its many streets and buildings that are nearly 200 years old, and a governing philosophy of affable nonchalance, New Orleans may be the ideal American city for a *flânerie*. A term originating in association with Paris and having no clear equivalent in English—common translations such as “dawdling or meandering” are an injustice—a *flânerie* is the engaged stroll of a *flâneur*, an avid connoisseur of the modern city. It is a leisurely walk through an urban landscape ripe with potential, no set destination in mind, the only goal a relaxed exploration of the infinite possibilities available within a rich metropolitan environment.

*History and diversions await on every corner*

by Brian Huddleston

# Orleans

## *Flânerie*

“Don’t you just love these long rainy afternoons in New

Orleans when an hour isn’t just an hour—but a little piece of eternity dropped

- Blanche Dubois, in Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*



*Nottaway Plantation Home.  
Photo courtesy of New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau © Richard Nowitz*

! into your hands—and who knows what to do with it?”

This article suggests things to see and do while at the 2007 AALL Annual Meeting and Conference in New Orleans, all within walking distance of the convention center and Meeting hotels. So get a free map at the front desk of your hotel and have a *flânerie* of your own.

### New Orleans Diversions

You can start by walking towards **Canal Street**, the widest street in America.

Originally planned to be, yes, a canal between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, Canal Street was also the demarcation between the *Vieux Carre*—“old square,” now known as the **French Quarter**—and the 19th century’s equivalent of suburban sprawl: latecomers to the city who developed and settled the opposite side of Canal Street, away from the French Quarter.

Several attractions can be found at the foot of Canal Street. **Harrah’s Casino** and the **Canal Place Shopping Centre** are right there. The **Audubon Aquarium of the Americas** offers a variety of sea life exhibits, such as a simulated Caribbean reef containing 132,000 gallons of water inhabited by sharks, sea turtles, and tropical fish that you view from *within* as you walk through a 30-foot transparent tunnel. And the **Canal Street-Algiers Ferry** runs across the Mississippi to **Algiers Point**, an old, primarily residential neighborhood that is part of the “West Bank” of New Orleans. The ferry is free for pedestrians, and its half-hour round trip is the best way to view the city’s skyline.

Cross Canal Street and you formally enter the French Quarter, whose streets were plotted in 1722. Walk down North Peters Street until it converges with Decatur Street at the statue of **Jean Baptiste de Bienville**, the early French governor of colonial Louisiana who first settled what is now New Orleans. Continue down Decatur and you’ll see the transition in these first few blocks from the modern commercial structures that surround Canal to the older buildings that reflect the French and Spanish influence upon the city’s early architecture.

Anchoring the heart of the French Quarter is **Jackson Square**, originally called the *Place d’Armes*. It has served at various times as a military parade ground and an open air market. That statue in its center is Andrew Jackson on horseback, and those are the spires of **St. Louis Cathedral** on the lakeside of the square. (New Orleanians are forced by the winding streets in the rest of the city to eschew points of the compass: directions are generally given as uptown and downtown—or upriver and

downriver—and lakeside and riverside). Street musicians and other performers usually can be found in front of the cathedral, and a variety of artists from novice portrait sketchers to serious, accomplished painters can be found with their work hanging on the iron fence around the square.

From Jackson Square you can venture in any direction into deeper explorations of the French Quarter. **Chartres** and **Royal** streets provide a wide range of shopping opportunities, from exclusive and swank antique stores to casual boutiques and knick-knack shops. Restaurants and bars, both renowned and reclusive, can be found all over; listings and descriptions are easy to get, or any local will gladly accommodate you with suggestions. And, yes, **Bourbon Street** is *sui generis* and offers plenty of entertaining methods to divest visitors of their money. So go ahead and check it out for yourself. Few locals spend any time there. Or admit they do.

At 400 Royal Street is the **Louisiana Supreme Court** building. Controversial when it was built in 1910 because its size and *Beaux-Arts* style clashed with the surrounding neighborhood, the court left this site for more modern quarters in 1958. The building changed ownership among different government agencies until it stood empty and deteriorating in 1981. Then after 20 years of planning and renovation, the court re-occupied the building in 2004. The statue in front is of **Edward Douglass White**, the only Louisianan ever to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court (associate justice from 1894 to 1910 and chief justice from 1910 to 1920).

Two places to eat near the court are worth a mention. Directly in front of the Supreme Court at 417 Royal Street is **Brennan’s**, one of the city’s top, nationally-ranked restaurants serving traditional New Orleans French-Creole cuisine (reservations and proper attire required). More modest is the **Napoleon House**, at the intersection of Chartres and St. Louis Streets. This 200-year-old building was home to an early mayor of New Orleans and obtained its name from the plans, at best vague and possibly apocryphal, of local supporters of the exiled French emperor who were to facilitate his rescue and bring him to New Orleans to live there. It is the perfect place to have a refreshing Pimm’s Cup after walking around in the summer’s heat or to have a casual meal or snack off the café menu.

If you seek music on your *flânerie*, you can usually follow your ears and achieve success without much effort, but you should also keep one address at hand:





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Photo courtesy of New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau  
© Jack Edwards



St. Louis Cathedral  
Photo courtesy of New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau  
© Richard Nowitz



“ **New Orleans: A courtesan, not old and yet no longer young, who shuns the sunlight that the illusion of her former glory be preserved. The mirrors in her house are dim and the frames are tarnished; all her house is dim and beautiful with age. She reclines gracefully upon a dull brocaded chaise-lounge, there is the scent of incense about her, and her draperies are arranged in formal folds. She lives in an atmosphere of a bygone and more gracious age.** ”

— William Faulkner, *New Orleans Sketches*

*Aquarium of the Americas  
Photo courtesy of New Orleans  
Convention and Visitors Bureau  
© Carl Purcell*



## Sight-Seeing 411

### **New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau**

[www.neworleanscvb.com](http://www.neworleanscvb.com)

### **New Orleans' Official Tourism Web Site**

[www.neworleansonline.com](http://www.neworleansonline.com)

### **Big Easy Magazine**

[www.bigeasy.com](http://www.bigeasy.com)

### **Audubon Aquarium of the Americas**

1 Canal Street

800/774-7394

Wednesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

[www.auduboninstitute.org](http://www.auduboninstitute.org)

### **Louisiana State Museum: The Cabildo and The Presbytere**

701 and 751 Chartres Street  
(on Jackson Square)

800/568-6968

Tuesday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

<http://lsm.crt.state.la.us>

### **Jean Lafitte French Quarter Visitor Center**

419 Decatur Street

504/589-2636

Daily, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

[www.nps.gov/jela/french-quarter-site.htm](http://www.nps.gov/jela/french-quarter-site.htm)

### **Haunted History Tours**

888/6-GHOSTS, 504/861-2727

[www.hauntedhistorytours.com](http://www.hauntedhistorytours.com)

### **Gray Line Tours New Orleans**

800/535-7786, 504/569-1401

[www.graylineneworleans.com](http://www.graylineneworleans.com)

726 St. Peter Street. This small, nondescript structure built in 1750 is **Preservation Hall**, the city's premiere venue for traditional New Orleans jazz. Get there early: it's a small space but the music is well worth the "standing room only" that results most nights after the few benches (yes, benches) fill up.

If, from Jackson Square, you choose to continue down Decatur Street, you'll come across **Café Du Monde**, open 24 hours a day and world famous for its *café au lait* and *beignets* (pastries made of tasty deep-fried dough and covered with powdered sugar). Further down Decatur and veering right where North Peters splits off will lead you to the **French Market**. In operation here since 1791, this open air market is now both a source of fresh produce and is a flea market offering a variety of goods ranging from gaudy souvenirs to quality crafts and jewelry. Just past the far edge of the French Market is **Esplanade Avenue**,

the downriver boundary of the French Quarter. (North Rampart Street is the lakeside border: that's Canal Street, the Mississippi River, Esplanade, and Rampart, for those of you taking notes.)

### **New Orleans History**

If you are entranced by a desire to learn more about New Orleans, there are plenty of options to help you soak up its history. The Louisiana State Museum operates five properties in the French Quarter. Two of them—**The Cabildo** and **The Presbytere**—flank St. Louis Cathedral on Jackson Square. The Cabildo, originally the seat of the city government under Spain, was also the site of the formal ceremony that transferred the Louisiana Territory from France to the United States at the conclusion of the Louisiana Purchase. It is now the flagship building of the State Museum, so stop by to tour the "Two Centuries of Louisiana History" exhibit and

to find out what's going on at the other State Museum properties. The **Historic New Orleans Collection** at 533 Royal Street is another museum with an extensive permanent collection covering all periods of Louisiana's history. Admission is free, and guided tours are offered several times a day for \$5 per person.

Most people don't think of our country's national parks as having a presence in large cities, but the National Park Service operates six sites in Louisiana, including the **Jean Lafitte French Quarter Visitor Center** at 419 Decatur Street. Exhibits on the history of New Orleans, the Mississippi River, and



#### Preservation Hall

726 St. Peter Street  
888/946-JAZZ  
www.preservationhall.com

#### Louisiana Children's Museum

420 Julia Street  
504/586-0725  
Wednesday-Saturday, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Sunday, 12-4:30 p.m.  
www.lcm.org

#### World War II Museum

945 Magazine Street  
504/527-6012  
Tuesday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
www.ddaymuseum.org

#### Confederate Museum

929 Camp Street  
504/523-4522  
Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.  
www.confederatemuseum.com

#### Ogden Museum of Southern Art

925 Camp Street  
504/539-9612  
Friday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Thursday, 6-8 p.m. (with live music)  
www.ogdenmuseum.org

#### New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center

900 Camp Street  
504/528-3800  
Thursday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.  
www.cacno.org

the surrounding region are supplemented by daily guided tours of the French Quarter conducted by National Park Rangers. These tours are free and leave at 9:30 a.m. each day of the week but are limited to 25 people (tickets are available when the center opens at 9 a.m.). The Park Service also operates the **New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park** at 916 N. Peters Street. The park rangers here are also musicians and they—or other local musicians—perform for free every Saturday at 2 p.m.

Besides the National Park Service, several companies also offer walking tours of the French Quarter. **Haunted History Tours** can guide you through several perambulating permutations of French Quarter legend and lore; their stories are as entertaining as they are historically, shall we say, *questionable*? **Gray Line Tours** also offers walking tours of the Quarter as well as bus tours of the rest of the city (and region), with perhaps a bit more veracity.

If you're really up for a good walk, or want to take a cab, a slightly less touristy area just outside the French Quarter can be found around **Frenchmen Street** between Decatur and Royal streets. Neighborhood clubs, such as **Snug Harbor**, **Café Brasil**, and **The Spotted Cat**, offer a variety of both traditional and more eclectic New Orleans music most nights of the week, all within a single two-block stretch. If you don't want to walk all the way back after the bands finish (that's well past midnight during the week, and usually around sunrise on the weekend), at least make sure you know how to get to Decatur Street back in the Quarter: it will be easier to catch a cab there than in front of the music clubs themselves.

#### New Orleans Miscellany

Once you've given the French Quarter a thorough perusal—or an initial reconnaissance with choice areas selected to be explored later in further detail—double back upriver and re-cross Canal Street. This section of the city is officially known as the Central Business District, but parts of it are informally known as the Arts District and the Museum District for the numerous galleries and museums found there.

Part of the appeal of a *flânerie* is the possibility of stumbling across something unusual and unanticipated, something you didn't know to look for. A perfect example of this is the **Piazza d'Italia** behind the Loews Hotel at 300 Poydras Street. The Piazza is a surprise to encounter, but one that would take a lot of exploring to randomly stumble upon, as it isn't easily visible from any of the major adjacent streets. To get to it, face the hotel from Poydras Street, go around the corner to your right and walk towards the clock.



Joan of Arc  
Photo courtesy of  
New Orleans  
Convention and  
Visitors Bureau  
© Harry Costner

Go through the gate in the black fence and you're there. Designed by architect Charles Willard Moore, the Piazza d'Italia is either a post-modern masterpiece full of obscure architectural references and in-jokes or is a garish out-of-place mishmash of clashing colors and shapes. Either way, it's a fun place, and its fountains are great for both kids and adults to splash around in on a hot summer day.

Just a few blocks from the Piazza d'Italia, roughly in the immediate area surrounding the intersection of **Julia** and **Tchoupitoulas** (*chop-uh-TOO-lus*) streets, is one of many thriving art gallery neighborhoods in New Orleans. The first of several museums that you are likely to encounter in this area is the **Louisiana Children's Museum** at 420 Julia Street. It offers 30,000 square feet of hands-on, interactive fun for children *and* grown-ups. And only another couple of blocks away are four other diverse and excellent museums, all in close proximity. The **National World War II Museum** (formerly the D-Day Museum) at 945 Magazine Street is the realization of the vision of the late historian and author Stephen Ambrose. It has been designated by Congress as the country's

official World War II museum and is the premiere exhibit of the heroic actions of the “Greatest Generation” on all fronts of the great war: European, Pacific, and the Home Front.

Around the corner from the World War II Museum is the **Memorial Hall Confederate Civil War Museum** at 929 Camp Street. It is the longest-operating museum in Louisiana and houses the world’s second biggest collection of Confederate memorabilia. In 1889, when Jefferson Davis died in New Orleans, he laid in state here for a day and a half and 60,000 people visited to pay their respects.

If militaria isn’t one of your interests, next to the Confederate Museum is the **Ogden Museum of Southern Art**. The only Smithsonian-affiliated museum in New Orleans, it contains the largest collection of Southern art in the world. Across from the Ogden is the **Contemporary Arts Center**, which has both an exhibit hall for visual arts in multiple media as well as performance spaces that accommodate a wide variety of music, drama, and dance.

The Museum District is only a few blocks away from the convention center and the Meeting hotels, so this narrative *flânerie* has returned to the vicinity of its starting point. Along this very roughly-sketched walk, detours and distractions are inevitable. It has not been an exhaustive catalog of sights and activities, nor a methodical block-by-block guide to a strictly pre-mapped walking tour. Such is not in keeping with the spirit of a true *flânerie*. Instead, it has been only a sampling of what you might discover yourself.

NOTE: The French Quarter and Central Business District are in the oldest



*Cities of the Dead*  
Photo courtesy of New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau  
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parts of New Orleans and were built on high ground, so the effects of Hurricane Katrina there were minimal. As the center of the city’s tourist and convention industries, they are also some of the most well-patrolled and thus safest parts of the city. Sporadic increases in crime rates reflect statistical spikes that wouldn’t make the national news if they happened anywhere else but in New Orleans during its recovery from Katrina. Overall, New Orleans is rebounding and ready for AALL, its members, and their families. It is a great, fun, safe place to visit. *Laissez le bon temps rouler!* ■

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University New Orleans Law Library.

“ Ever since I was barely in my twenties, I have loved New Orleans the way some men love women, if that means unreasonably. I fell in love with the city and an LSU sophomore on the same night, eating shrimp cooked seven ways in the Quarter, riding the ferry across the black, black river where fireworks burned the air at Algiers Point. I drank so much rum I could sleep standing up against a wall. The sophomore left me, smiling, but the city never did. ”

— Rick Bragg, *This Isn't the Last Dance*



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