

NEW ORLEANS



Our Roving Travel Editor Phil Tripp wrote a feature on 'The City That Care Forgot' in the April 2011 issue of *Rhythms* rhythms.com.au/reviews/new-orleans

We thought it was time for an update.

I make a point of going back to New Orleans every year, usually in March after South by Southwest. I worked as a major stage production manager for JazzFest for a decade, living there up to a month a year, and it's still my favourite city in the world, where revelations are inevitable, magic can be grasped in the air, musical tones are ubiquitous and rhythms from the ether charge your existence as they propel your feet and shake your hips. AND THE FOOD!!! Spices swirl through the gumbo, jambalayas, etouffees and creoles with a peppery zing that can only be cooled by local Dixie or Abita Beer. Or by a Barqs Root Beer if you're sober.

Serendipity happens too, whether it's a hole-in-the-wall BBQ shack that seduces your nostrils with its smoky allure or a door suddenly opening, blasting the blues onto the street and enveloping you in its hypnotic melody. In my case, the latest was an old time barber on Magazine Street that had been unchanged since the late 1800s where I had a scalp steam, straight razor shave, head massage and oil rub as the max extravagance.

So it troubles me sometimes when people keep asking, "Has it recovered from Hurricane Katrina?" and, "Is there anything left there?" as if it were blown off the map. Add to that the perception that everything that isn't submerged is oil-soaked from the leaking well offshore that was contained and cleaned up long ago.

Sure, there are a couple of outlying areas where you never would have gone anyway that are still hauntingly deserted and desolate. But looking

at the French Quarter and surrounds, Uptown, the Garden District, CBD, Riverside and most everywhere else and you can see that Nawlins did not lose its mojo. If anything, there are more new restaurants, venues and attractions than ever and most of the same great places that gave the Crescent City its spirit are still alive and well.

One of the must-sees remains Audubon Park and Zoo arguably the best in the US. The space is incredible and it's right on the river with modern and restored enclosures as well as a broad range of wildlife. It's one of three major attractions, which include a Butterfly Garden and Insectarium at the Canal Street terminus of the Streetcar within the US Customs House - an odd place for crawling bugs, pinned bodies on display and other surprises but it's a fascinating walkthrough. The third is Aquarium of the Americas a few blocks down at the Mississippi River shore where a wondrous mix of fish tanks and bayou displays show the diversity of local waterlife. auduboninstitute.org

But let's get into the music! Tipitinas, Howlin Wolf, House of Blues, Maple Leaf Bar, Preservation Hall and the music row of crazy Bourbon Street have all the classics. But the French Quarter is kinda passé now with newer music quadrants being led by Frenchmen Street just two blocks away from the lower Eastern edge on Decatur Street.

The area called Faubourg Marigny and Bywater has usurped boozy Bourbon Street as the go-to gathering place of music lovers with a street

market, buskers, art and a village feel rather than a parade of drunks. The website frenchmenstreetlive.com details the attractions and goings on.

The newest resident is the 20-year-old Louisiana Music Factory louisianamusicfactory.com, which was in the Quarter and housed a vast array of local music in 33, 45 and 78 vinyl, CD and DVDs. It's now just under the offices of Offbeat Magazine at 421 Frenchmen and a crucial stop if you're looking for physical product.

Just down the street at 532 Frenchmen is Blue Nile bluenilelive.com, one of the longest running live venues from the days when it was The Dream Palace with three showrooms for live brass, funk and rock. Newly renovated, it has a great balcony for viewing the action of the compact live music haven.

Next door at 536 is Three Muses thethreemuses.com, which combines exotic tapas, erotic cocktails and a wildly diverse music lineup that includes lunch. Expect gurr! powered ukulele to New Orleans Nightingale serenaders.

Up at 618 Frenchmen is d.b.a dbaneworleans.com with the best sound system in the city and the regular haunt of Jon Cleary, John Boutte, Tremé Brass Band and Walter 'Wolfman' Washington. And 30 beers on tap!

A short stumble at 623 is the Spotted Cat spottedcatmusicclub.com. With jazz to blues and Klezmer to Calypso, it's a tiny place with no cover and one drink a set minimum.

While real jazz has been anchored



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PATRICK AT PATRICK'S BAR VIN; THE SPOTTED CAT; THREE MUSES; HOTEL MAZARIN BAR; LOUISIANA MUSIC FACTORY. OPPOSITE PAGE: CHARTRES STREET; LOUIS ARMSTRONG PARK, THE STARTING LOCATION OF MANY SECOND LINE PARADES

at the **Snug Harbour** at 626 Frenchman snuggjazz.com for over thirty years, the new modern jazz hang is up on 445 S. Rampart St. **Little Gem Saloon** littlegemsaloon.com harks back to the legendary jazz age of the '30s with its Spanish Revival Ramp Room.

Though I'd hate to send you to 300 Bourbon Street, another special true jazz spot is **Irvn Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse** inside the Sonesta Hotel sonesta.com/RoyalNewOrleans, which is a cool, elegant room with great drinks.

If Dixieland and trad jazz floats your ferry, and you can't get into the perpetual queue at **Preservation Hall**, head a little further down to 641 at **Maison Bourbon** maisonbourbon.com where Harry Connick served his apprenticeship.

A favourite of mine that is newer and mo' hippa is **Chickie Wah Wah's** at 2828 Canal Street chickiewahwah.com It's a smoke free groove haunt with new stars Yakiniku All Stars, Meschiya Lake, Tom McDermott and frequent shows by piano prince Jon Cleary. Also great eats there care of Blue Oak BBQ.

The newest though is **Kermit Ruffins Seventh Ward Mother-in-Law-Lounge** at 1500 North Claiborne, which used to be Ernie K-Doe's venue before he passed in 2001. It's a mural covered landmark and shrine with a killer jukebox and live music as well as some of the best BBQ in the city.

The local radio station to listen to is **WWOZ** at 90.7 FM and they also have a fantastic website on local music happenings in a volunteer run community station wvpz.org A great resource for finding second line parades as well.

The two vital street papers are the weekly **Gambit**, which has a 20-year history and

great website bestofneworleans.com, and the monthly **Offbeat** offbeat.com, which runs a gig guide online with weekly updates as well as reviews of new product since 1988. Their site is a regular read for me to plan my trip as well as catch up on the latest news of the music scene.

Where to lay your head after all this music and food? In the previous article I outlined three properties, **Le Richelieu** lerichelieuhotel.com in the quiet part of the Quarter at 1234 Chartres; **Lookout Inn** which a charming B&B in the Bywater at 833 Poland St.; and the fabulous **Audubon Cottages** in their own huge compound a block off Bourbon and Canal.

The company that manages the Cottages has also built the admirable **New Orleans Hotel Collection** that has six hotels - all remodeled and reasonably priced. I pick the **Dauphine Orleans** dauphineorleans.com first because of its early 19th century buildings, palm filled courtyard with pool, May Baily's Place bar which is a converted brothel and their secure parking.

Hotel Mazarin hotelmazarin.com between Bourbon and Royal has an elegant courtyard with old style luxe furnishing interiors but a modern feel to all the rooms. And **Patrick's Bar Vin** - the only wine bar in the Quarter - is a total delight.

Just around the corner, **Hotel Marais** hotelmarais.com is a modern upscale sanctuary featuring another killer courtyard with wildly colourful interiors and a trendy atmosphere. It oozes hipness and features the same free amenities as its sister properties.

Finally, the **Bourbon Orleans** bourbonorleans.com on Royal, a half block from Jackson Square, has a rich history and

gorgeous architecture with a hushed grand lobby and located steps away from Bourbon Street.

Though the previous article lists the great NOLA eateries, I want to add one that is exceptional and cheap with the best tables beside Jackson Square. **Stanley** stanleyrestaurant.com makes great espresso, has killer dawn views and dishes like Banana Foster French Toast, Soft Shell Crabs or Corned Beef Hash and Poached Eggs.

I turned my editor Marty and family on to my favourites for their first trip, but like you, they found some of their own. They recommend **Mariza** on Chartres marizaneworleans.com for their anchovy and crispy pig ear salad served by a Melbourne waitress; and also **SoBou** sobounola.com also on Chartres which has distilled Southern and Cajun cooking into tasty tapas rather than super serves. Think Crispy Oyster Tacos or Yellowfin Tuna Cones.

There is no shortage of fine dining or hole in the wall treasures. My five not to miss are **Jacques-Imo's**, **Upperline**, **Brightsens**, **Willie Mae's Scotch House** (world's best chicken) and **Commander's Palace** where Creole cooking began.

Bands to catch? **Bonerama**, **Wild Magnolias**, **The Iguanas**, **Zydepunk**, **Galactic**, **Dumpstafunk**, **Papa Grows Funk**, **Radiators**, **Irma Thomas**, **Kermit Ruffin**, **Dirty Dozen Brass Band** and **Marcia Ball**.

Want more? **PhilTripp.com's** travel site has an in-depth tipsheet on Nawlins at <http://philtripp.com/tripps-journey-journalism/philsh-phave-places/>

Plus the **Rhythms** website has all past Phil columns. **R**