

Drop me off in New Orleans

CRAWLIN' N'AWLINS FOR SOME LATE-NIGHT GEMS

Words: Stephanie Williams

➤ If New York is the city that never sleeps, New Orleans is the city with nonstop jazz. Any night of the week, most hours of the day, jazz enthusiasts can get along to a gig. And not just any gig – New Orleans clubs feature the best of the best and incredible emerging artists as a matter of course. But in a city that has jazz at every corner, you'll need to plan your time cleverly to really get under the skin of this lively, lovely city.

The eclectic energy of the city can be partly attributed to its history. New Orleans is a genuine melting pot, a result of more than 300 years of history bringing together French, Spanish, Caribbean, African and wider European cultures. The result? A mix of unique architecture, food, people and sounds.

In the late 19th century, New Orleans was the only place in the New World where slaves were allowed drums and to openly practise Voodoo rituals – an act that was accepted by both rich and poor. While the rest of America was stomping their feet to marching tunes, New Orleans was boogying to Voodoo rhythms. And at the same time, the Europeans brought their horns to the party and a very early form of jazz was born.

While the debate rages with historians as to when and who began jazz as a genre, they're all clear on one thing – it happened in New Orleans.

The cultural mishmash doesn't stop there. In the French Quarter, the city's cultural hub and drawcard for travellers, you'll see a colourful mix of Spanish, French, Creole and American architecture, along with relaxing Spanish-walled courtyards and French cast-iron balconies – making ➤

Photo © Shannon Brinkman



Bourbon Street ain't no ghost town!

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

- > Beautiful old buildings appear in the French Quarter.
- > Fritzel's is the oldest jazz venue in town.
- > Be sure to indulge in street food, like a shrimp po' boy.
- > The Spotted Cat has a rustic charm.
- > Kermit Ruffins is a regular at the House of Blues.
- > The Mother-in-Law Lounge has a shrine-type feel to it.
- > Bourbon Street is considered the heart and soul of the French Quarter.



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people-watching a treat. Branch out a bit further to see the gracious mansions of St Charles Avenue (take the open-air streetcar) or the Musicians' Village in the Upper Ninth Ward, created by musician Harry Connick Jr and sax player Branford Marsalis after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The best way to really get to know N'awlins is to crawl through the jazz venues and dive bars and take a listen for yourself. While Tremé held the hotspot title prior to Katrina, now it's Frenchmen Street where you'll find two solid blocks of jazz, and St Claude Avenue, which is touted as the next big thing.

The Spotted Cat Music Club is a classic – and a great place to start. The musicianship is of the highest quality, yet the surrounds are authentically (and delightfully) gritty – you can still smoke here and the drinks are served up in plastic. Be warned: It gets packed out to standing room only, but that's just part of the charm.

One of the stayers of the jazz scene here is the legendary trumpeter Kermit Ruffins and his band, The Barbecue Swingers (they sometimes

with stars from the orchestra, for the ultimate jazz outing.

Of course, if you're after something a little more refined – perhaps some place where you can use your credit card (most jazz bars here are cash-only), escape the smoke and take a seat – Three Muses is for you. The share menu of meats and cheeses is absolutely adored by locals, the cocktails are expertly made, and the jazz schedule features a gig every night except Tuesdays.

Fritzel's European Jazz Pub is the oldest jazz venue in town, and worth a visit for that alone. While the drinks are on the expensive side, the traditional jazz program features musicians from across the world and surprise late-night jam sessions when performers end their stints elsewhere and gather here.

For something different and seriously dedicated to jazz, try Preservation Hall. Opened in 1961 with the mission of protecting and honouring the New Orleans jazz tradition, today the intimate and acoustic venue also lays claim to the famous Preservation Hall Jazz Band, a record label and a non-profit educational

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barbecue on stage!). His Thursday night jam sessions at neighbourhood dive Vaughan's were once the talk of the town with locals and off-the-beaten-track travellers, who enjoyed intermission out on the street with a bowl of steaming red beans and rice. But now Kermit has popped up as proprietor of the Mother-in-Law Lounge, once owned by singer Ernie K-Doe and named after his 1961 hit of the same name. While it's only been open again for a few months, this 'local performers only' bar is set to reignite the scene – or at least the barbecue!

Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse at the Royal Sonesta Hotel is a refined escape from the chaos of Bourbon Street. It's the perfect place to sit and sip a cocktail while listening to quality jazz. Irvin is a Grammy Award-winning trumpeter and artistic director of the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra. Get along here on a Wednesday night, when Irvin features in a long-running jazz jam

program that teaches young musicians about jazz. There are three shows each night, but you should note there are no food or drinks sold here (though you're welcome to bring your own in plastic containers).

This inspiring city is now comfortable in its own unique skin and openly keen to celebrate. Want to have a locally famous Hurricane cocktail at midday. Why not? Feel like sticking your head into a big brass-band show at 2am? It's got you covered. Have a craving for a cheesy quesadilla and a caramel milkshake at 5am? Step right up. And regardless of whether you enjoy listening intently with a drink in hand, dancing wildly until the wee hours of the morning or discovering the very best emerging talent, the New Orleans scene really does have something for all tastes. With so many quality jazz spaces in one location, you're only limited by the amount of time you have. **PC**

We're DEAD serious

Because New Orleans sits on top of a swamp, the deceased are buried in decorative aboveground tombs. And, believe it or not, tourists flock to them...

The most famous cemetery is St Louis Cemetery No. 1. Look out for Marie Laveau, a well-known Voodoo priestess in the 1800s. To this day, followers mark an 'X' on her tomb, turn around three times, knock on her tomb and yell out their wish in the hope of Marie granting it.

Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 is more famous for fictional burials and has been featured in many films, including *Double Jeopardy* and *Dracula*. Author Anne Rice even staged a funeral here to introduce her book *Memnoch the Devil*.

The largest collection of marble statues and tombs can be found at Metairie Cemetery, the resting place of well-known advice columnist Dorothy Dix and trumpeter Al Hirt.

Getting there
Visit your local Flight Centre for more advice and the latest deals on travelling to New Orleans. Go to flightcentre.com.au or call 131 600 24 hours.