

TAKE A TRIPP

For Australian roots and rock music pilgrims, New Orleans would head up the list of the USA's Top Ten music cities followed by Memphis, Austin, Chicago, Nashville, New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, Miami and Atlanta. As a former tour manager with a range of black

R&B, soul, jazz and Southern rock artists on the road, and now a travel writer after forty years in the music business, I'm happy to share my secrets with *Rhythms* readers who are planning to take advantage of cheaper flights and better bucks to take in the US.

In this and upcoming destination columns I'm doing every other month for *Rhythms*, I'll reveal the best live music venues in town, the most tempting eateries to pack your stomachs and where to put down your heads for sleep. There'll be a few dives, fests, holes in the wall, groovy inns and B&Bs as well as not-to-be missed places that are classic local attractions.

I go to Nawlins every year for about ten days either before or after my tour of duty with South by Southwest Music Festival in Austin in mid-March. Though the 'City That Care Forgot' has three major music festivals – two outdoors; New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival in late April, French Quarter Festival in early April and Essence Music Festival in the vast weatherproof and airconditioned Superdome in July – it's the small venues outlined below that are such a huge part of Nawlins' hypnotic musical charm.

Essence is more of an R&B/Urban event in the cavernous sports arena and once you leave, it's back to steamy and torrid weather outside. It's so hot you don't really want to eat, just suck down cold Dixie or Abita beer and the ubiquitous Hurricane, Hand Grenade and Daiquiri cocktails that are vended from sliding doors on the sides of bars.

Jazz Fest has been going as a multi-stage day event three days each of two weekends with night shows in various major venues and even a riverboat since 1970. With over 100 bands ranging from local heroes Allen Toussaint, The Neville Brothers, Fats Domino and heritage artists to major touring acts like Bon Jovi, Allman Brothers, Jimmy Buffet and Bob Dylan, the 10 day stages rotate bands all day with dozens of food stalls and a juried arts and crafts show. There are tents for gospel or blues and fields of fans outdoors in the heat and dust packed in front of major stages, and sometimes rain and mud to contend with.

Jazz Fest, despite its name, embraces many styles of music from R&B, roots, country, Cajun, funk, blues, gospel and rock to marching bands and Mardi Gras Indians in wild feathered and beaded outfits. It's estimated that 400,000 people participate and this year the event runs between April 29-May 8 (www.nojazzfest.com) with day tickets at \$45 and night shows variably priced.

Though fans from around the world embrace it annually, the locals tend to favour the French Quarter Festival (www.fqfi.org) for four days in early April featuring more than 275 hours of entertainment on 18 stages and 150 musical performances. It's the peak of spring

and the list of talent is more New Orleans and Louisiana rooted. It's been going for 28 years and is the largest free music festival in the South and is more like the way Jazz Fest used to be before it became commercialised.

I find it much more rewarding and easy to get about in the northern spring and autumn. March to May and September to November, when the temperatures are warm but not sizzling, it's not stiflingly humid and tourists are reduced making it easy to get into clubs, restaurants and the many attractions in town.

Mardi Gras is a riot if you go once – to be avoided as a return trip – and Bourbon Street is more like a ten block theme park of noise, debauchery, corny merch and canned music than a true flavour of the city.

The primary publications on New Orleans music are the street press style *Gambit* (gambitmagazine.com) and the monthly free *Off-beat* published since 1988 with an online gig guide at offbeat.com.au. Subscriptions to the print edition are \$90 a year.



Musically New Orleans nurtured the styles that became jazz by merging blues, gospel and marching funeral bands into trad or traditional jazz of which Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong is the patron saint. The house of worship for that is Preservation Hall which opens the door each night from 8:30 to 12:30 at 726 St Peter in the French Quarter, serving no food or drink and the best seats on the floor in front of the ageing players. Get there by 7:15 or you'll be in the back of the room.

But for more modern genres, the venues below (with expanded listings on the *Rhythms* website at www.rhythms.com.au) are the classic Crescent City dives and music venues. Though Bourbon Street seems to be a music centre, it's far too touristy, whereas the Frenchman Street area of Faubourg Marigny is the hot area followed by Uptown.

d.b.a 618 Frenchmen St. Faubourg Marigny 504/942-3731 dbabars.com/dbano

Tipitinas 501 Napoleon at Tchoupitoulas 504/895-8477 tipitinas.com

Mid City Lanes Rock 'n' Bowl 3016 S. Carrollton 504/861-5700 rockandbowl.com

Maple Leaf Bar 8316 Oak Street, Uptown 504/866-9359 mapleleafbar.com

House of Blues 225 Decatur St., French Quarter 504/310-4999 houseofblues.com/venues/clubvenues/neworleans

Irvin Mayfield's Jazz Playhouse 300 Bourbon in the Royal Sonesta sonesta.com/RoyalNewOrleans/index.cfm?fa=Restaurant2.home

Snug Harbour 626 Frenchmen Street, Faubourg Marigny 504/949-0696 snugjazz.com

Le Bon Temps Roule 4801 Magazine St. myspace.com/4801magazine

Blue Nile 32 Frenchman St 504/948-2543 bluenilelive.com

Vaughan's 800 Lesseps St Bywater

Maison 508 Frenchmen St Faubourg Marigny 504/371 5543 <http://maisonfrenchmen.com>

Saturn Lounge 3067 Saint Claude Ave 504/949 7532 myspace.com/saturnbar

Howlin' Wolf 828 S. Peters, Warehouse District 504/523-2551 www.thehowlinwolf.com

Muddy Water's 8301 Oak Street, Uptown 504/866-7174

Food Glorious Food

Like with music, food revelations are inevitable. One of the cool things about Nawlins is that you may encounter food – whether at a festival or restaurant – that you've never had before. Sometimes it becomes a lifelong addiction. This happened to me on numerous occasions.

Raw oysters... I'd never had them but in the early '70s I went to the Acme Oyster Bar and did my first dozen with a sauce of ketchup, horseradish, tabasco, a few drops of Worcestershire Sauce, a squeeze of lemon and these quivering blobs that were as big as a baby's fist.

Then there was crawfish, or mudbugs as they're called. A paper bag with a couple of pounds of scarlet mini-lobsters boiled in cayenne and other spices. You take one out, split it in half, squeeze the tip of the tail, pull it out with your teeth and then suck the head. Have a slurp of beer and repeat until you are full, your lips tingling, belly fat and head exploding with the spice.

There is no shortage of restaurants there but these are my faves – Tripp Tested over fifty visits to the city. My top 25 or so Nawlins eateries of all price ranges and food genres, have expanded information on the *Rhythms* website.

I always suggest reservations in New Orleans. In alpha order with area, phone, website and style:

Bayona 430 Dauphine St., French Quarter 504/525-4455 bayona.com *New World Southern*

Bistro at Maison de Ville 727 Toulouse St French Quarter 504/528-9206 bistromaisondeville.com

Brigtsen's 723 Dante St., Uptown 504/861-7610 brigtsens.com *Creole Cajun*

Cafe Adelaide 300 Poydras St CBD 504/595-3305 cafeadelaide.com *French Café*

Casamento's 4330 Magazine St Uptown 504/895-9761 casamentos.com *Seafood*

Cochon 930 Tchoupitoulas St. Warehouse District 504/588-2123 cochonrestaurant.com *Cajun*

Court of Two Sisters 613 Royal St French Quarter 504 522-7261 courtoftwosisters.com *Creole buffet*

Dante's Kitchen 736 Dante St Uptown 504/861-3121 danteskitchen.com *Southern*

Elizabeth's 601 Gallier St Bywater, 504/944-9272 *Southern Soul*

Frankie & Johnny's 321 Arabella St Uptown 504/899-9146 frankyandjohnnys.com *Boiled Seafood & Po'Boys*

Green Goddess 307 Exchange Alley French Quarter 504/301-3347 *World Food*

GW Fins 808 Bienville St French Quarter, 504/581-3467 gwfins.com *Seafood*

Herbsaint 701 St. Charles Ave CBD 504/524-4114 herbsaint.com *Creole Cajun*

Irene's Cuisine 539 St. Philip St French Quarter 504/529-8811 *Italian*



CASAMENTO'S RESTAURANT

Jacques-Imo's Café 8324 Oak St Uptown, 504/861-0886 jacquesimoscafe.com *Southern Local*

K Paul's Louisiana Kitchen 416 Chartres St French Quarter 504/524-7394 kpauls.com *Cajun Creole*

Mandina's 3900 Canal St Mid-City 504/482-9179 mandinasrestaurant.com *Creole*

MiLA 817 Common St CBD 504/412-2580 milaneworleans.com *Southern Eclectic*

Mothers 401 Poydras St CBD 504/523-9656 mothersrestaurant.net *Diner Chic*

NOLA 534 St. Louis St French Quarter 504/522-6652 www.emerils.com *Creole*

Pelican Club 312 Exchange Pl., French Quarter, 504/523-1504 www.pelicanclub.com *Eclectic*

Port of Call 838 Esplanade Ave French Quarter 504/523-0120 portofcallnola.com *American Burgers*

Praline Connection 542 Frenchmen St Faubourg Marigny 504/943-393 pralineconnection.com *Creole*

Ralph's On The Park 900 City Park Ave Mid-City 504/488-1000 ralphsonthepark.com *Creole*

Rio Mar 800 S. Peters St Warehouse District 504/525-3474 riomarseafood.com *Spanish Seafood*

Stella! 1032 Chartres St French Quarter 504/587-0091 restaurantstella.com *Eclectic*

The Joint 801 Poland Ave Bywater, 504/949-3232 *Southern BBQ*

Upperline 1413 Upperline St Garden District 504/891-9822 upperline.com *Eclectic Creole*

Willie Mae's Scotch House 2401 St Ann's, 6th Ward Esplanade 504/822-9503 *Soul Food*



THE JOINT

The top place to buy records in NOLA is **Louisiana Music Factory** (louisianamusicfactory.com) at 219 Decatur Street in the French Quarter which also has instore shows and a wide range of new and used records in an exhaustive collection of local artists.

Jim Russell Records (jimrussellrecords.com) at 1837 Magazine Street is the spot for popular and rare vinyl, 45s, 78s CDs and cassettes in all genres.

At some point you'll have to sleep and a top pick is **Lookout Inn**, 833 Poland Avenue in Bywater 504/947-8188 (lookoutneworleans.com) where themed suites in this allegedly haunted house include the wild Jungle Suite and the temple to the King, the Elvis Suite. Only a block from The Joint, it has a backyard cabana, pool, gas grille and each room has a bed area and private living room and is quiet.



THE ELVIS SUITE AT THE LOOKOUT INN

Other than that, I can highly recommend **Le Richelieu Hotel** (lerichelieuhotel.com) at 1234 Chartres St 504/529-2492 in the Quarter where the McCartneys holed up when recording Venus and Mars and which has the rare facility of free parking as well as suites and a pool. Another incredible property is **Audubon Cottages** operated by the Dauphine Hotel, which are seven old style houses in one block (auduboncottages.com) 504/586-1516.