

NEW ORLEANS

Though repercussions of Katrina continue even now, the gay community is hard at work reviving this most colorful of American cities. They deserve your support. Visit now – you won't be sorry!

Dann Carty

new Orleans is bouncing back, especially in the vibrant French Quarter. The vast live oaks gracing the garden median of the Esplanade still spread their enormous horizontal boughs right up to the delicate tracery of wrought-iron balconies. Secret palm-shaded courtyards with sibilant fountains hide discreet liaisons from passers-by. Entire blocks of 18th-century French buildings flicker in the gaslight. Columned architectural masterpieces flaunt their elegant interiors through the wavy glass panes of windows that rise from the porch deck to 15-foot ceilings. You'll wonder if you're still in America!

Parties

Though the rollicking is constant, come Mardi Gras, passions tend to heighten. Literally meaning "Fat Tuesday," Mardi Gras is the day before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Parties, parade floats, and balls precede solemn Lenten religious observations, and the streets are rife with splendid gowns and masks. The next Mardi Gras falls on February 5, 2008. As many here say, "This was the first Circuit Party!"

Since 1972, Southern Decadence has become a four-day long orgiastic annual

celebration held on the first Sunday before Labor Day. The festival usually kicks off at the corner of Royal and Barracks Streets, whence costumed marchers (including many gender-benders) traipse through the French Quarter at the behest of an annually appointed Grand Marshall, who picks an official theme for the rampant madness – not to mention an official alcoholic beverage! Tens of thousands of folks determined to be as decadent as they can make for a party that's as fun and sexy as it sounds.

New Year's eve, Gay Halloween, the Sugar Bowl, the French Quarter Festival, Jazz Fest, and Essence Festival are other highly trafficked events of note. But you don't need an excuse to visit this city bursting with Cajun and Creole flavor.

Going out

The good times and gay nightlife center in the French Quarter. Most establishments in the Quarter are within walking distance of each other, so bar-hopping is a breeze.

The throbbing epicenter of gay life is the corner of Bourbon and Ann Street. **Oz** (800 Bourbon Street), on that very corner, is a bustling, beloved show bar and dance club. All through the week performers are on the agenda, while sexy strippers turn up the heat on weekends. Great

music coupled with attentive staff makes this bar a treat. Try your luck at the gaming devices while getting lucky with a new friend, or relax and enjoy the multiple guest-stars that grace Oz's stages. Big windows make for a cruisy sideshow.

Bourbon Pub & Parade (801 Bourbon Street) is a dance bar and pub with a friendly staff. Tuesdays is Girls' Night Out, and Thursdays brings on the Student Body Contest. Upstairs, their Parade disco throbs for its Sunday Tea Dance. Free draft beer flows and inhibitions slacken. This bar is never empty.

Corner Pocket (940 St. Louis) has been continuing to regale for over 25 years now, transporting a bit of Montreal to the French Quarter. At this venue, young-uns shake their money-makers for a completely satisfied audience all through the week. Mardi Gras festivities at Corner Pocket kick off with their (in)famous wet jockey shorts contest. Boys will be dancing around the clock starting at 3 p.m. through 3 a.m. for the special Mardi Gras weekend from January 31 through February 5. Could it get any better?

Napoleon's Itch (734 Bourbon) is a comfy, mixed-crowd lounge in the Bourbon Orleans Hotel. Appetizers and snacks are shared until late night in this popular no-smoking martini and wine bar. Entertainment, amusement, and chill-out vibes

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permeate this bi-level, bi-curious haunt. Food and wine affairs, interactive comedy and art shows, and live music are all part of the fun. Remember that it's on this very corner that the most extraordinary live music concert in the South takes place during Southern Decadence. Put on by the owner of Napoleon's Itch, it's free. And in the middle of the street!

Cafe Lafitte in Exile (901 Bourbon Street) has been around since 1952 and attracts a diverse crowd. You're sure to have a great time here thanks to the helpful and friendly staff. There are pool tables on the upper level, machines to tweak, and many love connections to make. A daily happy hour from 4 to 9 p.m., plus regular drink specials, keep customers coming around. This oldest bar in New Orleans modernizes with karaoke and several state-of-the-art plasma screen televisions. Create your own adventure in this sexy historic bar.

Rawhide (740 Burgundy), rated one of the top-ten leather bars in the country, is big with the Levi/leather/fetish crowd, and smolders with an earthy, ursine passion. The air is thick with humid sensuality and the dark interior invites, then intoxicates. Everyone ends up here sooner or later.

Phoenix/Eagle (941 Elysian Fields) is a denim/leather venue full of hot men and helpful staff, making this bar a pleasant stop-in on your visit.

Golden Lantern (1239 Royal Street), the original crucible for Southern Decadence, caters to locals and tourists alike with yummy, cheap cocktails and an all-ages crowd.

Good Friends (740 Dauphine) offers swell happy hours as well as wi-fi access. It's best described as a "snappy casual" place. Good Friends is a popular late-night hangout, and has been home to the adorable Mardi Gras Krewe of Barkus

Nearby **Cowpokes** (2240 St. Claude Avenue), as the name suggests, is a country-western bar worth an evening out.

Society Page (524 N. Rampart) draws a crowd of all colors, or try Starlight by the Park (834 N. Rampart), which makes the most of a lovely back garden. The Rampart bars offer more of the magical essence of the Caribbean cult. Let that voodoo doll

put his pin in you for a change!

In Marigny, on the outskirts of the Quarter, you'll find even more distinctive watering holes, among them **Big Daddy's** (2513 Royal Street). **Cutter's** (706 Franklin Street) is a small piano bar displaying local artwork. Or try **Friendly Bar** (2301 Chartres Street), a local watering hole for gays, lesbians, and the occasional straight neighbor.

In the Bywater, beyond Marigny, is **Country Club** (634 Louisa Street). Unlike any other bar in New Orleans, Country Club is found in an old plantation home, with high ceilings and dark heart-of-pine floors that gleam under the potted palms. Yet in the enormous garden at the end of the airy central hall is a heated pool, skirted by a hot tub behind the crepe myrtles. Clothing-optional with a sauna, steam room, and gym, it is here the locals and the many Europeans attending Southern Decadence come to cool off. This is truly the jewel of the Bywater.

Baths

Recovering well from Katrina and rapidly remodeling, **Club New Orleans** (515 Toulouse) is raring to scale new heights with five floors of physical fun and frolic. This club is a solid link in the chain of Club Body Centers across the country.

Eating

Eating is serious business in New Orleans. Businessmen have been known to interrupt multi-million dollar negotiations to argue over whether the best roux is made with duck fat or lard. European influences can be felt in the measured pace and social nature of meals. The big gulf nearby yields a bounty of the freshest, most delicious warm-water seafood one can buy. Spicy sauces and flavor combinations that dazzle the palette are de rigueur. Often storytellers at heart, many New Orleans chefs and servers are versed in the Crescent City's history and will gayly lead diners through lessons in etymology, gastronomy, topography, and local politics.

Quarter Master (1100 Bourbon Street) is a self-proclaimed "Nelly Deli," the only such gay-owned establishment around. More than just a corner convenience store, the place serves three daily specials at lunch and dinner. They even offer a late-



Sexy in the Big Easy



Jason of Bourbon Street Pub / Parade

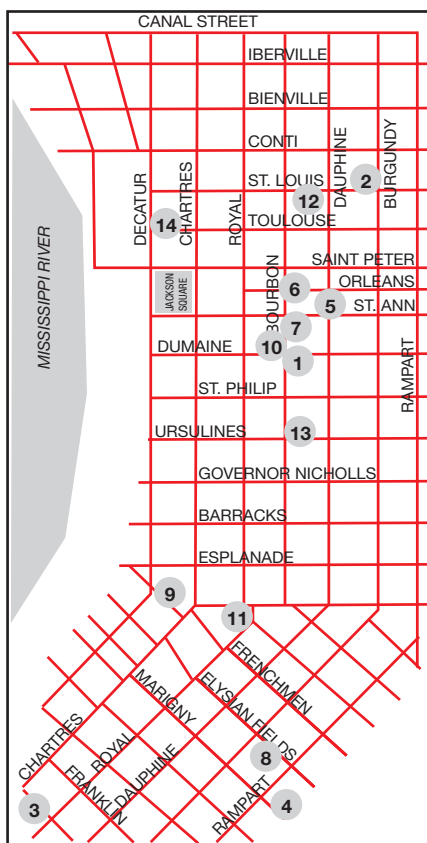
NEW ORLEANS

Bars/Clubs

- 1) **Café Lafitte In Exile**
(504) 522-8397
901 Bourbon
- 2) **Corner Pocket**
(504) 568-9829
940 St. Louis
- 3) **Country Club**
(504) 945-0742
634 Louisa
- 4) **Cowpokes**
(504) 947-0505
2240 St. Claude
- 5) **Good Friends**
(504) 566-7191
740 Dauphine
- 6) **Napoleon's Itch**
(504) 371-5450
734 Bourbon
- 7) **Oz**
(504) 593-9491
800 Bourbon
- 8) **Phoenix**
(504) 945-9264
941 Elysian Fields
- 9) **13**
(504) 942-1345
517 Frenchman St
- 10) **Clover Grill**
(504) 598-1010
900 Bourbon St
- 11) **Mona Lisa**
(504) 945-4472
1913 Royal St
- 12) **Petunia's**
(504) 522-6440
817 St. Louis
- 13) **Quarter-master**
(504) 529-1416
1100 Bourbon St

Health Clubs

- 14) **Club New Orleans**
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515 Toulouse
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Hot guys work over a hot grill at **Clover Grill** (900 Bourbon Street), another round-the-clock eatery (featured on many a TV travel channel) where one can satisfy cravings for burgers, waffles, or omelets in a camp milieu. This character-filled eatery features a front-of-house grill so you can watch the sexy cooks prepare your meal. This funky diner boasts a build-your-own-burger, grilled under an American-made hubcap. A fun and delicious experience whatever the time!

Moon Wok (800 Rue Dauphine), for Chinese takeout or dine-in, is conveniently located in the thick of it all.

Enjoy some traditional Louisiana cuisine at **Gumbo Shop** (630 Peter Street).

The reasonably-priced **Louisiana Pizza Kitchen** (95 French Market Place) offers light Italian fare in a casual setting.

For a special cup of coffee laced with chicory, there isn't any better than the touristy **Cafe du Monde** (1039 Decatur), where beignets (French donuts) are spawned and devoured with geometric progression. Powdered sugar and people-watching make this a sweet, must-do tradition.

Coffee Connection (941 Royal Street) is a cruisy straight/gay venue. For fine French pastries, pop in at **Croissant d'Or** (615 Ursuline Street).

Accommodations

At **Bon Maison Guest House** (835 Bourbon Street; Bonmaison.com; 504-561-8498), experience the charm of New Orleans at reasonable rates. This fabulous establishment lies in the heart of the French Quarter and near the center of gay life. The rooms are comfortable, and with wonderful hands-on management, you'll feel right at home. Even though you are smack in the middle of all the action, with its quiet courtyard that shelters rooms, you'll be at peace to enjoy your private bath and kitchenette. Book early!

In the Faubourg Marigny, FQ Accommodations operates **Olde Towne Inn** (1001 Marigny Street; 800-209-9408). With 25 rooms at hand, it's located around the corner from the Phoenix and It's About

Time. Continental breakfast is served in an open covered area made from a very renovated horse stable. A pet-friendly policy is stressed. Their tropical courtyard is a breath of fresh air.

"Through our gates pass happy guests," is the slogan at **Elysian Guest House** (1008 Elysian Fields; 504-324-4311), located across the street from the bar Phoenix. Built in the 1850s, this value-priced Victorian home offers two studios and three suites (each with own bath and entrance). Lush gardens and a large hot tub blend into the Elysian experience.

Creole Inn (2471 Dauphine; 504-948-3230), in the gay Marigny, offers comfortable, air-conditioned one- and two-bedroom suites with private baths, cable, and VCR – all at moderate rates. Continental breakfast, internet access, and local calls are included in the tariff. A giant live oak and soothing fountain in the garden courtyard make the garden suites like tree-houses. Smoking in the garden is permitted. Proprietor Doug will point you in the right direction when making plans for going out. Mention *The Guide* to get a ten-percent discount.

Lions Inn (2517 Chartres Street; 504-945-2339 or 800-485-6846) is a gorgeous and charming 140-year-old Edwardian bed-and-breakfast located five blocks from the Quarter. Sweet, handsome, and extremely knowledgeable, Stuart and Floyd are the perfect hosts. The romance is not limited to the ten guest quarters that are replete with elegant trimmings. A lush, clothing-optional garden with swimming pool and hot tub makes for much camaraderie (as do the complimentary wine and cocktails!). With a tagline that reads "Do whatever you wish, but do it quietly!" how could they possibly err? Bicycles are provided to guests to cruise around and explore the neighborhood. Mention *The Guide* for 20-percent summer discounts.

Marigny Manor House (2125 N. Ramparts Street; 504-943-7826) is a huge old ante-bellum mansion with four rooms that include a duplex suite on a brick paved courtyard. An old lion's-head fountain gurgles softly through the open windows into the elegant dining room where continental breakfasts are served by your urbane hosts, John and Gill.

Royal Street Courtyard (2438 Royal

Street; 504-943-6818) is a huge painted lady in the grand New Orleans tradition. Once the plantation home, its rear house was a garconniere (where the boys of the family, once they reached puberty, were expected to live). At one point it was a whorehouse called, innocently enough, the New Orleans Social Club. Now it has nine rooms from very cheap to moderate, with windows opening onto the porticoed upper porch overlooking the elegant formal garden. A hot tub in the rear garden and continental breakfasts in the grand dining room top it all off.

Although they may not have the money to advertise, the many small bed-and-breakfasts with one or two rooms are well worth exploring, especially for couples or groups of friends. Look into **Kate and Dave's B&B** (715 St. Ferdinand; 504-943-9863), half way to the Bywater. It has one room and an upstairs suite with a balcony overlooking the garden (which Kate says she has to tend with a machete, it's so lush), or **Sunburst Inn** (819 Mandeville Street; 504-947-1799), with two rooms that are as cozy as being in your own home but have complete privacy. Rooms have their own computers as well as wi-fi at **La Dauphine Residence des Artistes** (2316 Rue Dauphine; 504-948-2217), where the ebullient Ray Ruiz will charm you with all sorts of New Orleans lore. **Crescent City Guest House** (612 Marigny Street; 504-944-8722) includes four rooms and the use of a hot tub. The house is a typical shotgun built in 1885. **Creole Cottage** (623 Spain Street; 504-943-3281) is a small intimate spot with a lush brick courtyard and Don, the personable owner, who will make you feel right at home.

Shopping

Alternatives (909 Bourbon) caters to the "alternative" lifestyle, and carries a line of lubes, gifts, cards, shorts, jewelry (including Mardi Gras beads), glass sculpture, Billy dolls, voodoo dolls, and gifts hand-crafted by local artists.

The emphasis at **Hit Parade** (741 Bourbon Street) is YMLA and other brands of club wear, plus gay-pride items, including CDs, cards, and magazines.

Rab Dab (918 Royal Street) carries dance wear and summer wear for when you are caught unawares.

Second Skin Leather and Metal Company (521 St. Philip) is a purveyor of fine leather, latex, and erotica. Those into piercing will enjoy getting perforated here.

FAB (600 Frenchman Street) is an acronym for Faubourg Marigny Art and Books. Art and photography books (with a local slant), plus the city's largest collection of GLBT books can be found here. FAB also showcases and vends unique art from a collection of paintings, photographs, posters, and sculpture – many from local gay artists. This institution-of-a-bookstore has been steadfast for over 28 years.

And more...

There are several gay Mardi Gras clubs, or "krewes," in town. All of them hold elaborate costume balls during the season. Though technically not open to the general public, the events may sometimes be accessible if you're in the know. Try wrangling an invitation through the **Lesbian and Gay Community Center** (2114 Decatur Street; 504-945-1103).

Ambush (828 A Bourbon Street; Ambushmag.com) is "the Gulf South's

entertainment/news tabloid for adults." Their colorful web page makes for a journey with sound affects, full color, narrated tours, live audio/video, and a calendar of events.

Roberts Batson's Gay Heritage Tour (504-945-6789), a French Quarter stroll, touches on "the horrors, the hilarity, the homophobes, and the heroes" that bring gay history in New Orleans to life. The theatrical Roberts speaks volumes condensed in the two-and-a-half hour walking tour.

Amidst all the pleasure and fun of this city, one should not let one's guard down. Crime is currently down, but muggings and mischief can still occur. At night, traveling with a buddy or by cab is recommended.

Wherever you are in New Orleans, swamp air permeates everything with a sensual mystery, which is probably what makes everyone so randy. With bars that never close, jazz that oozes from everywhere, savory Cajun and Creole cuisine, and voodoo boutiques to hex your ex, there's plenty of reason to book your passage to the Big Easy and become part of this gay city's modern history. ▼



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