

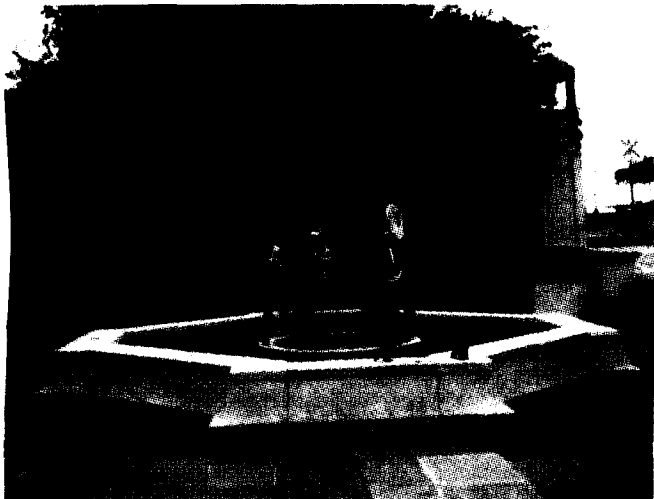
New Orleans offers good food, good times, and things you never knew existed

From Bourbon Street to the French Quarter, "N'awlins" offers tourists a unique cultural experience

By Steve Standridge
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The French Quarter of New Orleans is one of the most unique places in the United States. Its signature narrow streets and famous architecture spark the imagination. The hidden courtyards and balconies with wrought iron railings make it easy to believe that the French Quarter has been a continuous residential neighborhood since 1718.

Shops of every kind line the narrow streets. Fine art galleries, antiques, and African art stores are just a few of the many shops on Royal Street and others. Almost every block offers traditional tourist fare. These shops sell pretty much what one would expect: shirts, shot glasses, postcards, and racks full of Mardi Gras beads. Other shops specialize in authentic New Orleans culture; specifically Cajun and Creole food, music, and Voodoo.



Step through the doors of any Voodoo shop in the French Quarter, such as Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo, and prepare to be mesmerized by a magical and sinister mix of sights. If you need anything from the realm of the supernatural, or if you are just looking for an exotic souvenir, the House of Voodoo has just what you need. The front of the store has some traditional souvenirs like books about ghosts and haunted houses, and alligator heads (yes, alligator heads). But there is a small side

room for the more serious shopper, where you can find everything you need to put a curse on your enemies or wish fortune on your friends. This small, dark area of the store is stocked full of Voodoo dolls, charms and potions for every purpose.

For anyone who is a bit frightened by Voodoo, the French Quarter has plenty of less spooky history to see. To the west is Louis Armstrong Park; to the south, Lafayette Square. The middle of the French Quarter holds the grand St. Louis Cathedral, Jackson Square, and a monument to Joan of Arc. The mighty Mississippi River borders the city to the east. A trip to the waterfront is not complete without visiting the famous French Market. The farmers market is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and offers a truly eclectic mix of fresh fruits and vegetables and authentic Cajun food. One vendor offered 125 varieties of hot sauce. Others have traditional southern sweets.

