
Stop 10. New Orleans

Arrival datetime: Sunday April 14, 5:30PM
Sites visited: Natchez Trace Parkway, New Orleans
Accommodations: LaFitte Guest House
States traveled: Mississippi, Louisiana

Continuing south on the Natchez Trace made our journey to New Orleans a bit longer than it had to be. But again, it was worth the diversion. We hiked parts of the original trace, gazed at waterfalls, and toured a restored farm and inn.

Wildflowers lined the drive and the paths. The tree and grass lined highway continued even after we had left the trace and started down Mississippi Route 98 toward New Orleans.

New Orleans is not the site of any National Park and we had no plans to visit historic monuments. Michael had been to New Orleans only once on business, and Jennifer had never been. Whenever it happened that one of us went someplace interesting for business, we always tried to work out a way that the other could join the trip for the weekend. We had been unable to work it out at the time, but had it in our heads we would get to New Orleans at next opportunity. Driving cross-country seemed like the right opportunity. A friend of ours had given us a Bed and Breakfast guide to help us plan our trip, and in it we had found a Historical Guest House right in the heart of the French Quarter.

There was no traffic on the highway, but as we approached the French Quarter, we encountered closed streets and traffic jams. As recommended by the concierge

at our Guest House, we had a 2:00PM jazz brunch reservation at Court of Two Sisters, so we pulled into a parking garage and walked the remaining five blocks. We found ourselves in the middle of the annual French Quarter Festival. There



The French Quarter Festival.

were musicians and mimes, lone saxophone players, and giddy tourists all over the streets and waterfront. It was everything that we had ever seen depicted in movies or books about New Orleans. Though they lost our reservation, the Court of Two Sisters let us have brunch, and it was as fabulous as our concierge had promised. We sauntered through the streets, listening to music and shopping. As the afternoon waned, we called our hotel from the cell phone to get directions, checked in, and dressed for dinner.

We had dinner on the Natchez Steamship cruising the Mississippi. As on any boat



A Charley Chaplin mime in the French Quarter during Festival, we have ever sailed as passengers, Michael loved watching the captain and dockhands. The food on the Natchez



View of the French Quarter Festival from the Natchez Steamboat.

cruise was optional. We had taken the option of convenience and because two hours is a long time to cruise the harbor at night just drinking. But we would have been better off eating first or brown bagging it. We probably ate two dollars worth of limp, over-kerosene-heated,

cheap steam table fare. But the sunset, the bay, and a jazz band compensated. Though there was no dance floor, we danced a few steps by ourselves on the deck in the moonlight.

The Festival was still in full swing as we debarked. We strolled leisurely back to our hotel, on the lookout for some nice musical scene to merge into. But by that time, the streets were filled with drunk tourists, some bearing their breasts and mooning for beads thrown from balconies. Michael covered Jennifer's eyes and guided her around the crowds.

We had breakfast on our wrought iron balcony/fire escape, eavesdropping as the school crossing guard bantered with the neighbors on their way to work. Then we took a walking tour of the French Quarter. It was actually more of a lecture in five parts, each part in a different museum courtyard, except for one in a cemetery. We learned the history of the city through the eyes of a black Creole who blamed all present racial discrimination on the Yankees who corrupted the previously egalitarian ethnicity of the city after the Civil War. However, she did admit that the Creoles had slaves.

It was a Monday morning and there was no festival in progress. But there were still entertainers on closed streets and enough tourists to keep their instrument cases full. We took pictures with Charlie Chaplin. Like good tourists, we ate Creole Cuisine and shopped.

Dinner at Antoine's was the height of tourist indulgence. They had also lost our reservation but let us in anyway. Our formal attire drew quips and stares along

the six blocks we walked from our hotel. We were relieved to find that the other diners had also taken the dress code seriously, though most of them arrived by taxi. Between courses, the busboy exchanged our untouched water glasses for fresh ones. He also exchanged our half-eaten breadbasket for a fresh one. After dinner, we again wandered back to

our hotel with the intention of stopping at every nightclub whose music drew us in. Only one of them did, and it had help from a barker, who begged us to let him escort us to a table so he could prove to his management he was doing a good job. We slept heavily on our fluffy, pillow-strewn, four poster French antique bed.

Miles traveled: 275
Departure datetime: Tuesday April 16, 9:00AM
Departure weather: Sunny 78°