



» On a walk in the French Quarter, visitors can enjoy historic architecture, great street music and landmarks such as St. Louis Cathedral.

FRENCH QUARTER RAMBLE

By Eric Lucas

» **At one end of the Bourbon Street block** I'm walking, I find a famous busker, the bucket drummer Peter Rabbit, wowing onlookers with arena-quality percussion using paint buckets, cans and the walls behind him. The strains of a saxophone solo drift from a side street; the scents of rémoulade and gardenia compete with mint julep and chicory coffee; and barkers for bars and clubs promise unparalleled experiences as passersby peer inside. All this in one evening, on one block, on what is surely one of America's most famous nightlife streets.

I grew up in New Orleans, and walking the streets in and near the French Quarter was a favorite teenage pastime. I recommend starting at Canal Street, a major boulevard whose broad expanse heightens the contrast when you enter the narrow 18th century confines of the French Quarter—where the architecture features numerous wrought-iron balconies and has colonial Spanish as well as French influences. Follow Bourbon Street one block in from Canal, and two doors down on Iberville, and you'll likely find long lines, signifying the popularity of the po'boy sandwiches and other seafood at Acme Oyster House.

Five blocks farther into the quarter, on St. Peter Street, is Preservation Hall, the small yet famous music space, housed behind a very unassuming facade, where veteran performers

deliver succinct shows with songs such as *St. James Infirmary*, a quintessential jazz/blues tune, and that old chestnut *When the Saints Go Marching In*.

Keep going southeast on St. Peter Street and then head northeast a block on Chartres to reach Jackson Square, in front of St. Louis Cathedral. Here at the square, in the afternoon and early evening, you will often find buskers (often the same musicians who later head to jobs at local clubs) skillfully performing jazz standards. They are complemented by fortunetellers, chalk painters, jugglers and voodoo-doll vendors, all aiming to improve your outlook on life, for a modest contribution.

Rounding Jackson Square brings you to the French Market, a charming warren of shops and cafes selling everything from alligator fritters to Zatarain's Crawfish, Shrimp & Crab Boil seasoning mix. After a light, late meal—such as filé gumbo or jambalaya or crawfish étouffée—you can retrace your steps along Decatur to the venerable Cafe du Monde, with its marble tables, where you will find some of the best chicory coffee and beignets anywhere. Strolling back toward Canal along Decatur, if you're lucky, you'll happen on a bar with a local singer belting out "Got my mojo working, but it just don't work on you."

In New Orleans, French Quarter mojo works on everyone. ✂

■ Fly Alaska Airlines to Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY) from Seattle (SEA) and San Francisco (SFO).