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Four Nights in New Orleans (T19A-2)

I wanted to visit family in Fort Worth, Texas. I wanted to make a return visit to New Orleans after a 13-year absence. And I had some places in between that I wanted to see. So I decided on a trip where I'd fly to New Orleans, pick up a rental car, and drive to Fort Worth and back, visiting a number to sites along the way.

Back in New Orleans I dropped off the rental car at the airport and headed into the city. For purposes of this trip, I'd be sticking to sites in and around the French Quarter.

I've been to New Orleans six time before, although the first two were just day visits when I was camping in the area. During those past trips I got hooked on the food, Cajun and Zydeco music, the architecture of the French Quarter, and on regional history, including that of the Acadian/Cajun people. But I hadn't been back since 2006.

I didn't plan on a long visit. I figured that most of the sightseeing in the French Quarter probably hadn't changed much over the years, but there were some museums that I wanted to see that I had missed – or that didn't exist – on previous trips.

After checking into my hotel, I set out on a photo walk, taking advantage of the sunny, comfortable spring day.



Statue of Jean-Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville, who founded New Orleans while the 4th French Colonial Governor of Louisiana in 1718.

They celebrated the 300th anniversary of the founding of New Orleans last year.



A view down world-famous Bourbon Street and of one of its many neon signs.

Bourbon Street generally gets the most attention, and it is generally crowded with tourists at night behaving suburban-wild (Let's get selfies of us walking down the middle of the street holding oversized drinks! Woo-hoo!!).

The stores, restaurants and nightlife on Bourbon Street cater to those tourists.

In the past, for me the fun of walking down Bourbon Street at night was stopping at various live music venues to listen to some really good Cajun and Zydeco music – jazz was also common, but I'm not as much interested in that.

But that seemed to be mostly lost, as more typical rock and rap blared from the various venues. I found only one place on Bourbon Street where the band was playing Cajun music – and it was mostly empty.



The scene also seemed much tamer in general. The evening crowds weren't as crowded as I remembered from past visits, and there didn't seem to be as many guys on the balconies offering to throw bead necklaces down to women on the street who'd lift their shirts.

And very few people were working the crowd for tips (although I did hear "For a dollar I can tell you where you got your shoes" offers a couple times. First heard that one back in 1993 ("You got your shoes on your feet on Bourbon Street")

So all in all Bourbon Street seemed to be a lot quieter and tamer – suburban wild – than on past visits.



I eventually headed over to Jackson Square, home to St. Louis Cathedral and a statue of Andrew Jackson.



And then I joined the crowd for a plate of beignets at Café du Monde. Beignets are basically French square doughnuts covered with a healthy dose of powdered sugar. Not really an ideal choice for a diabetic like me, but I had behaved on the trip up until now. And, somewhat dumbfoundingly, my blood sugar level actually crashed a few hours later.

Maybe they have a special recipe. 😊



Shopping at the French Market



The Corn Stalk Fence



Preservation Hall is an intimate jazz venue. People line up for tickets for the five nightly shows – the tickets sell out quickly.



Shipping on the Mississippi River. The river level was especially high, well above the elevation of the French Quarter itself. New Orleans has an extensive system of levees, canals and pumps used to keep the city dry. The damage that New Orleans suffered from Hurricane Katrina was mostly the result of failures of that system.



The New Orleans Pharmacy Museum wasn't one of the museums I visited. But it is believed to have once housed the shop of one of the first licensed pharmacist in the country.



Muffuletta bread is a round flattish loaf of Italian-style bread covered with sesame seeds.

Central Grocery created the original muffuletta sandwich.

For a classic muffuletta sandwich, slice the loaf horizontally, add layers of salami, ham, Swiss cheese, provolone and mortadella, and top it with a chopped marinated olive salad.

Several variations now exist.

I have now had a muffuletta sandwich where it was created, a French dip sandwich where it was created, and a sundae where it was created among my dining firsts. I have also eaten at the original Kentucky Fried Chicken, the original Wendy's and the oldest surviving McDonalds in the past.



Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo shop is a Bourbon Street fixture. Stop by and sit for a spell.



Sign outside Hex Old World Witchery, a French Quarter witchcraft shop run by a pair of warlocks



This building once house Pierre Maspero's Slave Exchange. And Andrew Jackson met with the Lafitte brothers here to plan the defense of New Orleans in the War of 1812. Today it is home to the restaurant Original Pierre Maspero's.



William Faulkner wrote his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, while living here in 1925.



The New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park visitor center. Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve also has a visitor center in the French Quarter.



French Quarter architecture



French Quarter architecture and detail





A classic New Orleans “shotgun house”



Generally no more than 12 feet wide, a shotgun house typically consists of a sequence of 3-4 rooms from front to back. Tradition holds that if all the doors are open, a shotgun blast fired through the front door will safely exit through the backdoor.

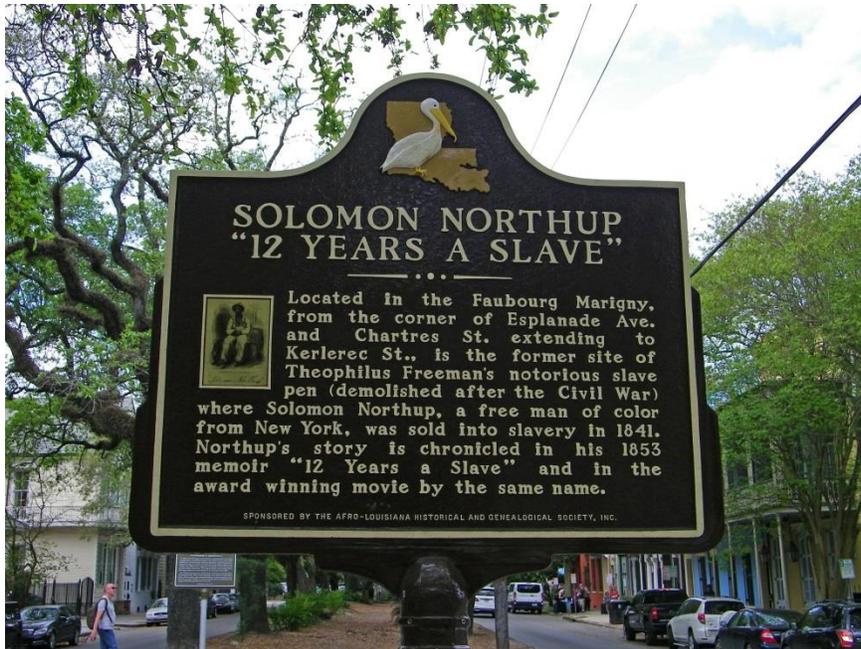
And then hit the house or neighbors behind it.



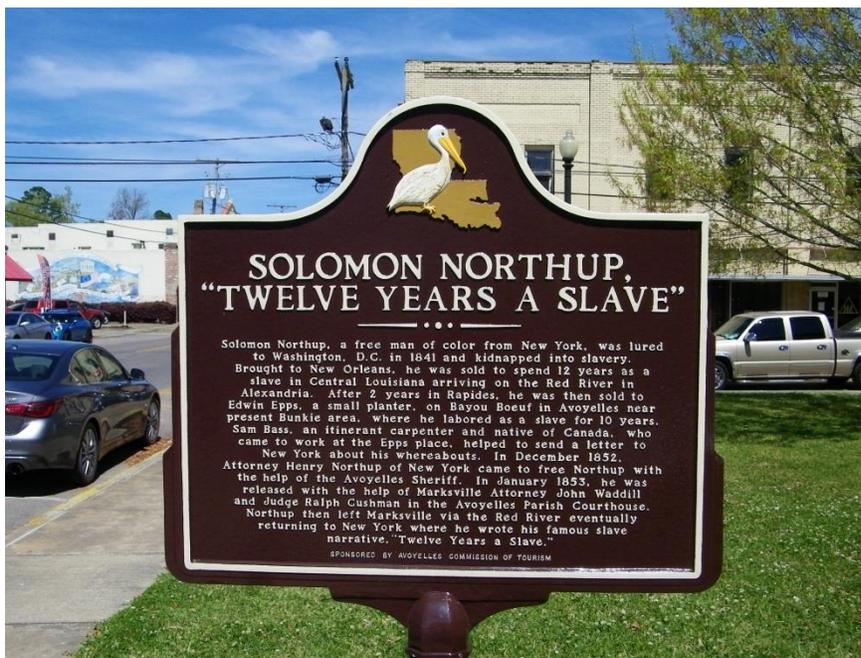
Frenchman Street in the Marigny neighborhood is at the heart of an emerging live music scene for more serious music fans than those who hang out on Bourbon Street



This Marigny block was once the site of the Theophilus Freeman Slave Pen site. After importing slaves was banned, New Orleans became the biggest site of domestic slave trading before the Civil War.



Solomon Northrup, a free man of color from New York, was kidnapped in Washington DC; he was among those sold into slavery here in 1841.



I came across this related marker when I was in Marksville, Louisiana a few days earlier. Northrup was a slave in the Marksville area for several years before regaining his freedom here in early 1853.

Northrup returned to New York where he wrote about his experience in Twelve Years a Slave, made into a movie in 2013.



The highlight of my New Orleans museum visits was the National World War II Museum.

The museum has a number of solid exhibits, especially those focused on D-Day, the Road to Berlin and the Road to Tokyo. Trip Advisor ranks it as one of the top museums in the world.

So although I liked the museum, I'll take a bit of issue with that ranking. I've been to a number of World War II-related sites in Europe, including museums, concentration/death camps, prisons, Nazi facilities, battle sites, memorials, cemeteries and so on, so my experience undoubtedly skews my perspective more than a bit.



The National World War II Museum presents a decidedly American-slanted perspective. I would have liked to see more on the buildup to the war overall, and not just America's entering the war. More about the Holocaust. More about our allies. More about the aftermath.

Of course, that would probably take a much larger museum, and the National World War II Museum is already pretty big. But what I saw as I toured the museum often reminded me of what I wasn't seeing.



That said, I still can highly recommend visiting the National World War II Museum should you find yourself in New Orleans.



I made a return visit to the Aquarium of the Americas. I wasn't as impressed this time around, though, as I've been to few more impressive aquariums in the years since I first visited here.



The Historic New Orleans Voodoo Museum is more of a smallish collection than a museum, but it is certainly worth a stop to see a number of voodoo-related artifacts, including altars, profiles, gris-gris, and so on.

If you're concerned that I'd try to cast a voodoo spell on you by having you look at a carefully selected photo, don't worry. I'd never try something like that.

Trust me.



The New Orleans Jazz Museum has a couple large exhibit spaces with changing themes. So I didn't get the overview of jazz history in New Orleans that I had hoped for, but the exhibits I did see – one on drums and one on a local musician – were interesting nonetheless.



The jazz museum is housed in what was once the New Orleans Mint. The museum includes an exhibit focused on the mint.



The exhibit space I visited for the Historic New Orleans Collection Museum is small but features an extensive collection of key documents related to early New Orleans and Louisiana history on display. Its coverage of the period after Louisiana statehood was more spotty.



Shovel used in the Superdome groundbreaking ceremony.



The Presbytere Museum, next to St. Louis Cathedral, had two interesting exhibits, one focused on Mardi Gras and one focused on the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans.



A Mardi Gras costume



In the aftermath of Katrina, search/rescue/recovery workers went door to door looking for people and victims, and marked the houses they visited with information on what they found and when. I saw some of this when I toured hurricane-stricken neighborhoods back in 2006.



Imaginative bathroom doors in the Presbytere Museum.



For my last sightseeing stop I headed for Louis Armstrong Park, just to the north of the French Quarter in the Treme neighborhood to take a look around. I got this picture of a sculpture of a marching brass band while I was there.

But I also found that the Congo Square Rhythms Festival was underway there. The program featured 20 high school brass bands competing for prize money. I caught the last couple bands, which were quite impressive.



While waiting to find out which bands won the prize money, some of the students started an impromptu jam session on their own. Soon they were joined by many of the performing students from the other schools. They may have been competitors on stage, but playing together they put on one heck of a show for several minutes.

It was a nice way to end the sightseeing portion of my trip.