

22 Reasons Why America needs New Orleans by Unkown

New York Times

For outsiders New Orleans was a place to party and eat food that is way too rich. For the folks who live there it's more complicated - it's home. Eighty-five percent of them were born there, and they're not going anywhere permanently, so forget this idea they're going to move the city somewhere else. It's not going to happen. New Orleans is the opposite of America, and we must hold onto places that are the opposite of us. New Orleans is not fast or energetic or efficient, not a go-get-'em Calvinist well-ordered city. It's slow, lazy, sleepy, sweaty, hot, wet, lazy and exotic. I had a house there, up until three weeks ago, when I sold it. My friends say I'm lucky. I don't feel lucky.

Here are 22 reasons America needs New Orleans, the national capital of eccentricity:

1. The turtle soup at Galatoire's is presented in a white porcelain tureen, then ladled into your bowl by a waiter who reveals with a wicked smile that the turtle's name was Fred.
2. The hats in Fleur de Paris, a shop on Royal Street, are perfectly frivolous and ridiculous, beautiful visions of silk and lace.
3. Nowhere else in the country do so many Roman Catholic churches coexist peacefully with so many voodoo shops.
4. If you are a grown man, this is the only place in America where you can step off an airplane, and be guaranteed that within 30 minutes a respectable woman unknown to you will call you "baby," as in, "How you doin', baby!" If you are a grown woman, you will be called "darlin' " whether you are the least bit darlin' or not.
5. The beads of sweat on the unlined face of the conductor on the St. Charles streetcar.
6. Mardi Gras beads, but only the ones you catch, thrown by an actual masker on a float. The ones that hit the ground don't count unless they bounced off your hand or arm first.
7. The Lucky Dog is a venerated local frankfurter that has come a long way, culinarily speaking, from the days when Ignatius J. Reilly peddled them to tourists in "A Confederacy of Dunces." Now they are really good, especially if it is 4 a.m. and you are hungry.
8. I once met Thelma Toole, mother of John Kennedy Toole, author of "A Confederacy of Dunces," who asked if I would buy her a "very expensive meal at the finest restaurant." This lady rolled her R's like an 1860's stage actress to indicate her intellectual superiority to the rest of us. I took her to the restaurant of her choice, and by evening's end she had all the waiters gathered at our table, spellbound by stories of "Kenny." "My son was a genius, with a large and oddly-shaped head," she boomed. Imagine what other great books Kenny might have written, she said, had he not killed himself in a car on that beach in Biloxi.

22 Reasons Why America needs New Orleans by Unknown

New York Times

9. Every Twelfth Night, Henri Schindler, a local historian and Mardi Gras curator, holds a magnificent masked ball on the second floor of the Napoleon House, at the corner of Chartres and St. Louis Streets. White curtains blow in and out of the large empty rooms as masked figures glide past on a cushion of mystery.

10. Locals go to the Maple Leaf and Tipitina's to hear music. Also to Frenchmen Street, a cluster of 10 or 12 small bars and clubs featuring, on any given night, 10 or 12 kinds of music, about 8 of which will be funky. (The other four will be too loud.) Usually at the better places there's a Neville involved, or a Marsalis.

11. My friend Martha Ann Samuels, a real estate agent, revealed to me the actual location of Stanley and Blanche's house on Elysian Fields Avenue, a secret she learned from Tennessee Williams himself when she helped him buy a condo in the Quarter. (I'm not telling.)

12. Oyster loaf at Casamento's on Magazine Street. The crunchy local French bread showers crumbs on your hands. Each bite contains bread, mayo and the delectable local bivalve, breaded and brilliantly fried. Casamento's closes down for the summer because oysters are better other times of the year.

13. At JazzFest, citizens happily stand in long lines in the blazing sun for a chance to eat crawfish bread, white boudin sausage and alligator gumbo to the thump of Rockin' Dopsy from the Congo Square stage. (Could someone please put the JazzFest committee in charge of the Superdome?)

14. You can stand at the foot of Ursulines Avenue and watch a huge oceangoing ship slide by above the level of your head.

15. Along the promenade where the river passes Jackson Square, tourists still fall for one of the oldest New Orleans scams. A friendly fellow proposes that for a dollar he can tell you where you got them shoes. When you accept the bet, he says, "You got them shoes on your feet!" He keeps the dollar.

16. It has the only airport named for a jazz trumpeter, the indelible Louis Armstrong.

17. In the Confederate Museum near Lee Circle is a crown of thorns said to have been woven by Pope Pius IX himself, and sent as a gift to Jefferson Davis while he was imprisoned shortly after the Civil War. For me this artifact represents the height of Southern absurdity, and must be preserved for those future generations who will not believe it.

18. Every Thursday night at Donna's on Rampart Street, Tom McDermott plays the fastest, wildest ragtime, Brazilian and stride piano you've ever heard. It's scary how fast his fingers move when he gets going. His feet come up off the floor.

22 Reasons Why America needs New Orleans by Unknown

New York Times

19. Rich people live on the high ground. Poorer people live on the low ground. Last week some of the rich folks' houses got wet, too.

20. Piety Street is one block over from Desire. Not a long walk at all.