

NEW ORLEANS: WHERE THE SHOPPING IS EASY

Visitors to New Orleans plan to come with an empty stomach, the better to enjoy the world-renowned cuisine. Only the initiated know to bring along empty bags as well, the better to fill them with wonderful surprises waiting in unique stores throughout the city's charming and accessible neighborhoods.

When it comes to shopping, few American cities offer the unusual blend of originality, charm and convenience that characterize the New Orleans retail experience. Not to say there is any lack of major national department stores such as Sak's or Macy's (most of the nation's big name brand names are here). But it is in the one-of-a-kind specialty shops tucked away on French Quarter streets, or on the 5-mile long Magazine Street, or in the Arts Warehouse District community located near the Convention Center and hotels, and increasingly in the Bywater/Marigny area just below the French Quarter that comprise an incomparable shopper's paradise.

How to get it all in without missing the Jazz clubs, museums and restaurants on your short list? It's easy: plan your shopping around the cultural tour of your choice. The real secret to New Orleans shopping is that it doesn't take long to get anywhere – much less from one shop to another, or from your favorite restaurant to your new favorite shop. Traffic tends to be lighter here than in most American cities, and the public transit system is excellent and well utilized. (Caveat: in the last week of carnival season, a carnival parade can shut down a street. Deal with this serendipitous event by leaving your car in what has just become a parking lot in the street, go to the corner and enjoy the parade.)

What can you get here that you can't get elsewhere? Try plantation furniture gems; 19th century jewelry that graced the thrusts of Creole beauties; huge sets of elegant china, crystal and silver from Uptown mansions, country hide-aways and French Quarter town houses; contemporary, folk and early American art; original contemporary jewelry; apparel and objects made by regional designers and artisans who prefer the special charms of New Orleans to the rigors of big city art scenes.

Antiques come in from the country, off containers from England and Europe, or out of homes that prefer designs from bygone eras to today's high-tech or over-decorated interiors. Designers can be as stylish as Mignon Faget, New Orleans' own Elsa Peretti, or as flamboyant as Yvonne La Fleur. Her hats are just the thing for over-the-top Easter parades of carriages through the Quarter, or your next girls-only lunch at Galatoire's or Antoine's.

Stationery designer Alexa Pulitzer's note cards, invitations and pads feature Palmetto plants and elegant little crowns, a testimony to the sub-tropical landscape and the pervasiveness of carnival's royal tinge. Glass makers, potters, metal designers, furniture makers fill weekend art fairs with their work. Vintage shops offer excellent carnival costumes along with the city's once ubiquitous linen suits and great old straw hats. Want to know where to shop for what? Here are some clues:

Antiques and Gifts

Looking for high-end European antiques? Head for the French Quarter or the Upper numbered blocks on Magazine Street. Elegant old china sets, classic 19th Century crystal, elaborate silver can be found at M.S. Rau Antiques on Royal Street. New Orleans Silversmiths on Chartres and As You Like It Silver Shop on Magazine.

For estate jewelry, try Joan Good Antiques and Dixon and Harris of Royal, both on Royal Street. Scouring the city for vintage clothes and accessories, hand-made, one-of-a-kind tops, skirts, dresses and long coats from old kimonos, gowns and other fabrics? Head to Royal Street in the Quarter.

For leftover Mardi Gras costumes from previous revelers, from Kings to clowns, just right for your one day of masking in the Quarter, or whatever wild party is ahead in your life, try almost any antiques shop on Decatur Street in the Quarter.

Apparel, Accessories and Jewelry

Looking for established apparel designers? Try Canal Place. Check boutiques on Magazine Street for the hippest, trendiest clothes in almost any size.

Shoes for Fashionistas.

Victoria's uptown or in the Quarter; Shoefly, Shoe Nami, and Pied-Nu on Magazine Street, or Saks in CanalPlace.

Funky, handmade, reconstructed, gothic and vintage apparel: try Lower Magazine Street, the Quarter or the Marigny.

Need Contemporary Jewelry? From silver seashells to six strand button pearl chokers? Try Mignon Faget on Magazine or Canal Place. Alligator, Lizard bags, belts and boots can be found at Wehmeier's in the Quarter.

Art and Objects d'art.

Want something new for your established contemporary art collection? You'll find over a dozen nearby on Julia Street in the Warehouse district.

To find art by the latest sensation in town, or from other key national art centers, go to the Contemporary Arts Center on Camp Street (near Lee Circle) where sculptures, paintings, photographs and more are exhibited and can be purchased.

Are you an "emerging" art collector looking for the newer and less costly works of art? D'Alley, Inc. will have something for you in the Quarter, or try RHINO Contemporary Craft company in Canal Place.

Is your home more traditional, and a nice landscape or still life just right? A Gallery for Fine Photography on Chartres, Alexander & Victor Fine Art, Martin Lawrence Galleries, and Bryant Galleries are all on Royal Street and may have something for you.

Looking for folk art from the region? Head for the Louisiana State Museum Gift shop on Jackson Square (inside the Cabildo) or John Stinson Fine Arts on South Peters at the edge of the French

Quarter. What about exotic African, Caribbean, Haitian and New Orleans original art? Try Stella Jones Gallery downtown on St. Charles Avenue or Street Scene Galleries on Decatur.

Weekend art fairs in Mid-City and Bywater-Marigny will feature the typical range of crafts, but with plenty of New Orleans originals such as old post-card tiles and coasters.

New Orleans Culinary Treasures.

You can find New Orleans coffees such as Community, French Market, Luzianne or Union at any supermarket. Pralines in endless special flavors, pecan clusters and taffy are still made fresh at Aunt Sally's Creole Pralines on Royal Street, Pralines by Jean on St.Charles or Evans Candy Company and Southern Candymakers, both on Decatur.

For fresh pecans, look at the French Market in the Quarter, or most supermarkets. Satsumas, a slightly tart, yet mild tangerine/orange like fruit can be found on vegetable wagons at City Park, on Carrollton Avenue or in most supermarkets. They are grown in the fertile groves of Plaquemines Parish, where a wonderfully sweet navel orange is plentiful during the early winter months. The growers will pack a supply for shipping home.

You'll find Creole mustards...a gritty piquant version of French poupon-like mustard from Zatarain's at any supermarket. There are endless selections of hot sauces from Tabasco to dozens of others in most super-markets. Some of these stores will also have a supply of turbinado, a raw sugar from Louisiana cane fields. It's neither white nor brown, but kind of Creole.

While in the French Market, don't forget to look for sugar canes...they stand about 10' tall and sit atop an SUV like skis. Head down Decatur to Central Grocery for a muffaletta, a kind of round po-boy with lots of antipasto on top of layers of salami and cheese.

For fresh crawfish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, catfish, speckled trout, redfish, all nicely packed in ice to go, simply find one of the many locally owned fresh seafood stores.

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