

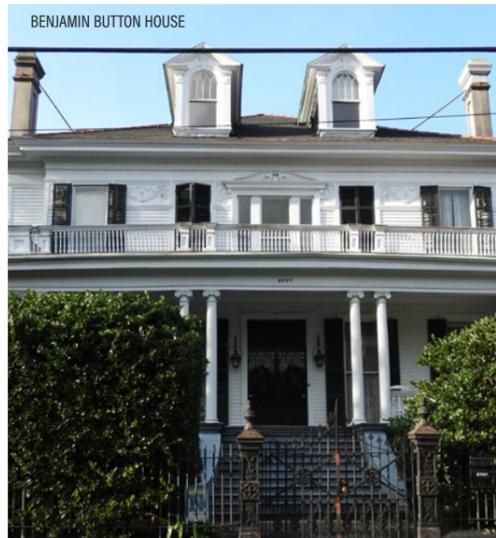
NEW ORLEANS: BEYOND BOURBON ST.

When the sun rises in New Orleans, the Crescent City reveals quiet paths that many tourists don't take time to explore. The Garden District, home to writers, musicians, and other celebrities, is a relaxing escape from the round-the-clock partying of the French Quarter.

STORY: MARY ANN DESANTIS // PHOTOS: TONY AND MARY ANN DESANTIS

Some cities are legendary. New Orleans, Louisiana, is one of those places. People are curious about the famous—sometimes infamous—city at the mouth of the Mississippi River as soon as they hear I grew up only a couple of hours from there.

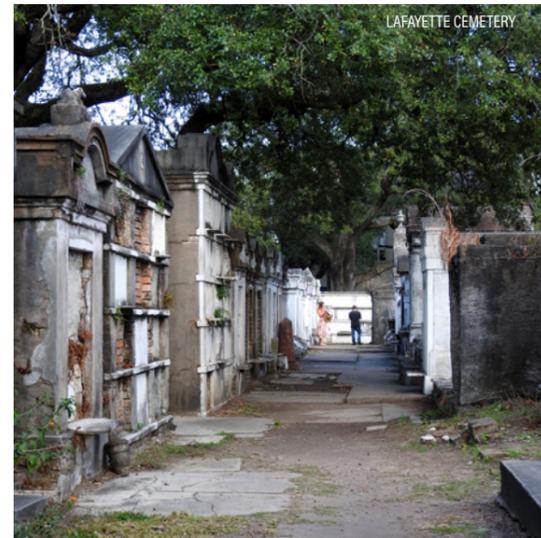
Of course, everyone wants to know about the legendary sites: the French Quarter, Preservation Jazz Hall, Café du Monde, Mardi



BENJAMIN BUTTON HOUSE



ANNE RICE HOUSE



LAFAYETTE CEMETERY



JAZZ LEGENDS



COMMANDERS PALACE

Gras routes, and renowned restaurants like Antoine's and Brennan's. For many years, those were the things that I, too, most associated with New Orleans. Digging deeper—and walking farther—I discovered the Garden District, an area that has had a gravitational pull for writers, musicians, athletes, filmmakers, and celebrities for decades.

"People, especially creative types, are drawn to the city by everything...from the architecture, to the food and the music. It's such a melting pot," says New Orleans native Randy Keng, who grew up in the area known as Mid-City.

Although New Orleans is a melting pot of cultures

now, it wasn't that way when Americans began arriving in the French and Creole-dominated Vieux Carré (Old Square) after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Language barriers, religious differences, and mutual snobbery created friction. "Les Américains" as they were called by the Creoles, moved upriver and settled into "the village of Lafayette." In 1832, a group of businessmen purchased the Livaudais Plantation near the settlement and quickly gridded the land into 80 city blocks. The development efforts paid off because wealthy shipping magnates and cotton brokers rushed in to build antebellum

mansions with large lawns, and Lafayette was its own city by 1833. With plenty of space and fertile plantation soil, the area became known as the Garden District, which the city of New Orleans annexed in 1852.

The charm of the Garden District actually began when I boarded the St. Charles Streetcar and rode the noisy line from Canal Street to Washington Avenue. Originally steam-powered, the St. Charles Streetcar began in 1835 and is the oldest active streetcar in the world. Other street cars crisscross New Orleans, and they are an economical way to get around the city (See Trip Tip).

Most organized tours of the Garden District begin at Washington Avenue and Prytania Street at the Garden District Book Shop, which has a stellar collection of signed editions. I chose a more leisurely and less-expensive way to get a glimpse of the well-preserved Italianate, Greek Revival, and Victorian-styled mansions with a free, self-guided map from www.bigboytravel.com/louisiana/neworleans/gardendistrictwalkingtour/.

Most of the private homes in the Garden District are not open to the public, but tours often point out the former homes of actor Nicolas Cage and gothic writer Anne Rice,

who used her Prytania Street home as the setting for her 1997 novel, "Violin." It's also easy to recognize the house where "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," starring Brad Pitt, was filmed. Around the corner is the house where football's legendary Manning brothers grew up.

Another setting for many film projects is the Lafayette Cemetery No. 1, across the street from the Garden District Book Shop. Fans of the television show "NCIS: New Orleans" will recognize the maze of mausoleums while others—like me—will never forget Ashley Judd's character being locked inside

a Lafayette tomb in the 1999 movie "Double Jeopardy."

Whenever anyone talks about legendary restaurants in New Orleans, the name "Commander's Palace" is always at the top of the list. The colorful culinary institution, known for its brunches, is at the corner of Washington Avenue and Coliseum Street near Lafayette Cemetery. It's also a delicious end to the walking tour.



Mary Ann DeSantis
Mary Ann DeSantis has written features for Style publications since 2006. She was recognized with first place Florida Press Club Excellence in Journalism Awards for Travel Writing in 2012 and again in 2016.



Trip Tip

For \$3, buy a one-day "Jazzy Pass" from any streetcar driver if you have exact change. The pass allows you to ride as much as you want during a 24-hour period. Otherwise, each ride costs you \$1.25. Be patient, because these electric cars fill up fast, and you may have to wait for the next one to come down the line.



Other Daytime Attractions in the Big Easy

Finding great music in New Orleans is easy whether it's in the French Quarter or in the Faubourg Marigny neighborhood to the north of the Quarter. Sampling the spicy Creole cuisine is also a fun way to spend an evening, but daytime can be rewarding, too. Here are a few must-see places for the daylight hours:

HISTORIC JACKSON SQUARE AND THE "MOON WALK": Known in the 18th century as "Place d'Armes," and later renamed for the Battle of New Orleans hero Andrew Jackson, this picturesque plaza is the heart of New Orleans. Surrounded by historic buildings including the St. Louis Cathedral, Jackson Square is also an open-air artists' colony. Just across Decatur Street is an elevated riverside promenade named for former mayor Maurice "Moon" Landrieu. The "Moon Walk" is a great place to watch the river traffic and street performers.

HOTEL MONTELEONE: Since 1866, this elegant hotel has served the rich and famous. You don't have to be a guest to walk through the ornate lobby and read the displays about the literary giants—Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty, and John Grisham to name a few—who have stayed, written, and drank here.



THE NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM: Open since June 6, 2000, the National WWII Museum spans an entire block in the city's Central Business District. Founded by the late historian and author Stephen Ambrose, the museum was originally known as the National D-Day Museum. In 2003, Congress officially designated it as America's National WWII Museum. People often ask, "Why New Orleans?" The museum has its roots in the Higgins boats, which were manufactured in New Orleans. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower—and later U.S. President—said the war would have been much different without those flat-bottom boats.



OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART: A wonderful collection of new and old art from the American South. The modern atrium is nestled between two historic buildings near the National World War II Museum.

CAFÉ DU MONDE: Yes, it's a touristy thing to do, but eating beignets covered in powdered sugar is a New Orleans tradition that shouldn't be missed. If the line is long, go to the walk-up window in the rear and then take the French-style doughnuts and chicory coffee to the Moon Walk, where plenty of benches await.

