

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Going south during the summer may not be everyone's first choice, but I spent a week last month in New Orleans (NOLA) at a traditional jazz band camp for adults. It was my first visit post-Katrina (2005), and thankfully the French Quarter seemed exactly as I remembered it.

I decided that traveling from the Louis Armstrong airport to my hotel would be a good opportunity to try Uber for the first time - I had already downloaded the app and had read up on how to use it. I followed the simple routine to broadcast my location and destination, and I immediately received a phone call from my driver who accepted the fare.

He said he was already at the American Airlines pickup area, and despite me knowing what car he was driving and him knowing that I was waving my arms, we couldn't see each other. After some additional back-and-forth on our cell phones, it was determined that the problem could possibly be that I was in New Orleans and he was in Chicago - my iPhone somehow had retained my previous airport info. So my first Uber charge was a \$5 cancellation fee for stupidity.

It was my amazing good fortune to arrive in New Orleans the same day of the Annual World Naked Bike (WNBR). It's an international clothing-optional human-powered transport (mostly bike) ride which the WNBR site claims "...demonstrates the vulnerability of cyclists on the road and is a protest against car culture."

The ride route was widely published and the parade was facilitated by NOLA motorcycle police who rode ahead and closed off intersections. Despite public nudity being illegal almost everywhere, many participants were completely naked. Nobody seemed to care except for the midwestern teenage girls behind me in the parade crowd who couldn't stop exclaiming, "Oh my God!".

The only downside for me was that about two-thirds of the 350-or-so participants were male – it was something of a sausage-fest. That and the fact that most of the participants had bodies that nobody would want to see naked. Ever. In any case, I have a three-minute iPhone video of the event if anyone would like to see it.

LuAnn flew down to join me halfway through the week, and we visited the War of 1812 Chalmette Battlefield – site of the decisive Battle of New Orleans won by future president Andrew Jackson. My American history has always been a little fuzzy, and someday I hope to learn why we were fighting Great Britain again so soon after the Revolutionary War.

At the jazz band camp, I spent most of my time rehearsing with various Dixieland ensembles made up of campers of widely varying ages and experience. There were some high school “scholarship” students invited, and one of them was telling me how nervous he gets when playing a solo. I told him that a shot of Jameson’s ten minutes before performing always does the trick for me. When I noticed the look on his face I added, “Forget I said that.”

There are numerous jazz clubs in New Orleans, and campers are free to try to sit in with the house bands - I ended up performing in three different clubs plus Preservation Hall. The trick is to ambush the band leaders in-between sets, and when they ask what experience you have, lie.

Our hotel, the Bourbon Orleans, bordered Bourbon Street which has evolved into a 24/7 open-air, open-container rock-and-roll party. It was typically hot and humid while we were there, and I asked a local how long it would stay this way. He said, “Four months.” When I said, “Then what?” he replied, “Three more months.”

If you’ve never been to New Orleans, or it has been a while, you should go. During the winter.

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