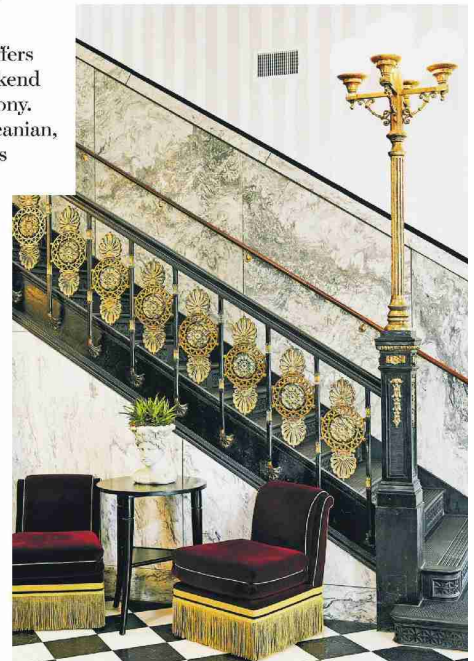
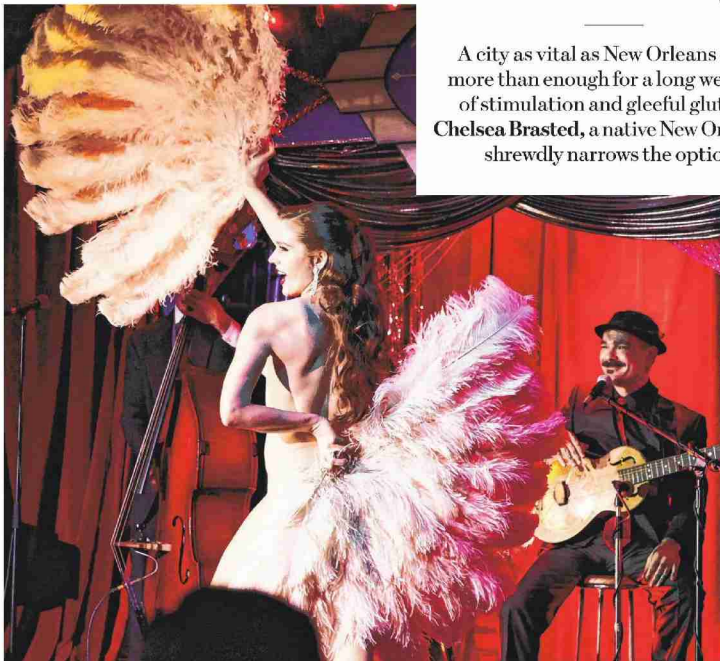




TAKE MONDAY OFF

The Big Little Easy

A city as vital as New Orleans offers more than enough for a long weekend of stimulation and gleeful gluttony. Chelsea Brasted, a native New Orleanian, shrewdly narrows the options



DOWN IN NEW ORLEANS Clockwise from top left: A cotton-candy confection at Brennan's, a classic French Quarter brunch spot; more elegant than the Hurricane, the Jardin de Mémé cocktail Bar Marilou, made with Chartreuse, St. Germain and absinthe; the lobby of the new Maison la Luz hotel in the Central Business District; a burlesque show at AllWays Lounge & Theatre.

I **F YOU HAVE FRIENDS** in New Orleans you haven't heard from in a while, it's probably because they haven't had the energy to pick up the phone. But the intense heat of the last few months is finally starting to peel away, and the animated funkiness of the city is back on full display. The music, the food, the freedom to take adult beverages outside in go-cups—this 300-year-old port town thoroughly lives up to its hype during the autumn months but lacks the marauding tourist mobs you encounter during winter's Mardi Gras and spring's Jazz Fest. Not that this time of year wants for appetizing events: Crescent City Blues and BBQ Festival kicks off this Friday (Oct. 18-20) and, equally perilous to waistlines, the Po-Boy Festival, serving more than 60 versions of the locally revered sandwiches, falls on Nov. 3. If you're in town on a Sunday, expect to find locals cheering (and, often, praying) for the fate of the New Orleans Saints at nearly every bar.

While it's understandably tempting for visitors to return to the places that feel comfortably worn-in (restaurants such as [Brennan's](#) and Cafe du Monde come to mind), consider this guide a challenge to also experience something new, like sipping an aperitif in the Elysian Bar's courtyard or strolling the newly expanded Besthoff Sculpture Garden. Whatever you do, tackle this itinerary with the knowledge that schedules here often change without notice (blame the unpredictable weather, traffic or hangovers). Your schedule might go awry while you're here, too. It's all too easy to take it easy here, but we've at least given you a splendid starter kit.

Day One: Friday

6 p.m. After flying into Louis Armstrong International Airport, drive about 20 minutes to New Orleans' Central Business District and check into Maison de la Luz. Earlier this year, Atelier Ace, the team behind Ace Hotels, opened this tribute to maximalist Southern luxury, awash in gold accents, colored marble floors and trompe l'oeil wallpaper. The typical temptation is to stay in the nearby French Quarter, but, by making this hotel your base, you're wisely avoiding the harried swaying of the too-inebriated (*from \$300 a night, [maisondelaluz.com](#)*).

8:30 p.m. Step inside Palm & Pine, a restaurant set in an old French Quarter townhouse, and a reminder that fine dining doesn't have to feel stuffy. Savor this fact when you dip into the pimento cheese on their Preservation Plate and when someone offers to bring over the tequila cart. (*308 N. Rampart St., [palmandpinenola.com](#)*).

10:00 p.m. Grab a nightcap at Bar Marilou back at your hotel. Celebrate your arrival while crunching the rum- and campari-soaked ice in a citrusy Brave Margot.

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Day Two: Saturday

9 a.m. You'll want to dress up for brunch today, so start your morning by getting a ride—not walking—to Jackson Square. Stroll past the Cabildo to the tiny Spitfire Coffee. Barely bigger than a closet, it's a magnet for the city's coffee nerds (627 St. Peter St., spitfirecoffee.com).

9:15 a.m. Take your coffee to go and walk the length of Royal Street to see the French Quarter architecture, most of which is actually Spanish; fires in the latter half of the 18th century wiped out many of the French constructions. Watch as artisans, street poets and performers begin to take up their requisite corners.

10 a.m. Make your way to the salmon-pink building that houses the venerable [Brennan's](#) Restaurant. Enjoy the old-school hospitality and balletic waitstaff. Begin with a nutmeg-topped Brandy milk punch before ordering the eggs Sardou, a Creole breakfast of artichokes and poached eggs, draped in Hollandaise sauce. Ignore your satiety and request the Bananas Foster, invented here, for dessert. The flambé happens tableside. Reservations recommended (417 Royal St., brennansneworleans.com).

12 p.m. Teeter away from the French Quarter and into Louis Armstrong Park. Take a walk around to see Congo Square, the gathering place for 17th- and 18th-century New Orleans slaves, which became a cradle for the city's music.

12:15 p.m. Slip into the Backstreet Cultural Museum to learn the history of the city's Mardi Gras Indians (aka Black Masking Indians), social aid and pleasure clubs and other traditions. Peer closely at the

Mardi Gras Indian suits on display, and remember each bead is sewn by hand (1116 Henriette Delille St., backstreetmuseum.org).

1:45 p.m. Take a 10-minute drive over to the Music Box Village, a cacophonous collection of interactive musical tiny houses. Each building has its own soundtrack: Open a door to elicit a squeal, step on a wooden plank to make it zing or strum your hand along a line of wind chimes (4557 N. Rampart St., musicboxvillage.com).

2:30 p.m. It's a mile walk through the Bywater neighborhood to Euclid Records, where you can lose track of time digging for new and used records (3301 Chartres St., euclidnola.com), including those from New Orleans artists like Ernie K. Doe and James Booker. On the way, enjoy the walk past Creole cottages and friendly neighborhood bars.

3:30 p.m. Take a few minutes to explore the Bargain Center, a thrift store filled with weird relics, from vintage T-shirts to old Carnival costumes (3200 Dauphine St.).

3:45 p.m. Explore artwork from one of New Orleans's most urgent artists today, Brandan "B-mike" Odums. In and around his continuously evolving gallery and studio space, Studio Be, Mr. Odums has created monumental, powerfully provocative graffiti murals (2941 Royal St., bmike.com).

5 p.m. Make a quick trip to Bywater American Bistro, a neighborhood restaurant from chefs Nina Compton and Levi Raines. Grab a spicy BAB Sour (with rum, coconut and jerk spice orgeat) and ask for it to go (2900 Char-

tres St., bywateramericanbistro.com).

5:15 p.m. Appreciate just how close New Orleans hews to the water that is both its foe and friend with a riverside walk. Take the entrance to Crescent Park at about 2900 Chartres Street, climbing over the big red staircase to see an unparalleled view of the curve of the Mississippi River, which gives New Orleans its Crescent City nickname.

5:45 p.m. Exit the park the same way you came in, zig-zagging down Royal and Dauphine streets past the Marigny Opera House. Stop to read the plaque commemorating the arrest of Homer Plessy from the infamous Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court case, which established the "separate but equal" doctrine.

6:15 p.m. The Gustavian design of the Elysian Bar and its home, the Hotel Peter and Paul, have made headlines since they opened in 2018. Gilt sconces, rattan furniture and cozy gingham make it all feel like a European castle was plopped in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Sip an Aperitivo Montenaro in the courtyard. If you can't resist snacking, opt for that day's seasonal variety of whipped ricotta and sourdough flatbread (2317 Burgundy St., theelysianbar.com)

7:30 p.m. Ignore the neon sign that calls it a pizza place and instead look for the off-kilter black-and-white letters stuck to the door to know you've found Saint-Germain. If you're smart, you'll make reservations well in advance for whatever's on the tasting menu that night. Whatever you order, make sure you say "yes" to the menu's wine pairings (3054 St. Claude Ave.,



DAYMON GARDNER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Clockwise from above: **Brennan's**, in the heart of the French Quarter, is known for its old-school hospitality and bananas foster flambéd tableside; fresh cheese and toasted country bread at Saint-Germain wine bar; Krewé, the New Orleans-born sunglass shop.