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A New Orleans "To-Do" List

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By Parmjit Parmar Special to AOL Travel

Barbara Herman is a perfume historian and author who adores living in New Orleans. I asked her where she would take someone on a walking tour of NOLA. Here's what she told me:

"New Orleans is a place to discover by wandering. So I would suggest starting in the French Quarter... and wander. Take the streetcar uptown to the Garden District and Audubon Park...and wander. And come back down to the Marigny, Treme, and Bywater and wander.

As for my favorite spots in the city? There are so many I'm afraid that if I list them, I'm going to leave one out. But here goes..."

BARS:

The Allways Lounge: Bar and live music/theater space. I saw Queerlesque here over the summer: queer burlesque performers from around the country. Also the amazing singer Eliza Rickman and her toy piano, from LA.

Saturn Bar: Dive bar, music venue, dance parties.

The Saint in the Lower Garden District (I'm getting too old for it, and it's pretty hipsterific, but still fun)

The Columns Hotel's balcony during the spring and summer. It's a historic hotel where Pretty Baby was filmed, and the bar inside is gorgeous.

The Abbey in the Quarter, which is a true dive

Cosimo's in the Quarter. Mellow bar with a pool table and dart boards in the back.

Lost Love Lounge in the Marigny, which hosts bingo nights, Karaoke, True Blood viewing nights, and serves Vietnamese food, if you can believe it.

Mimi's, a two-story venue with live music upstairs and dance parties. (Monday night is Swing night.) Really good gourmet food is served at the bar, too.

Friendly Bar, which I recommend with reservations. It's a very oddball neighborhood bar that is unofficially a gay bar but is also filled with all manner of louche eccentrics. Great jukebox and nice bartenders. True story: As I was answering these questions, I was having a glass of wine there and writing. I was interrupted for about 20 minutes listening to the amusing ravings of a man who called himself Mistress Tormentia.

The Country Club: Restaurant in the front, bar and public swimming pool/pickup joint in the back. Like the Friendly Bar, the Country Club is known as a gay bar, but like everything in New Orleans, it's mixed and welcoming of everyone. (And to cool off on a summer night here with friends is fun! Clothing optional!)

The Mudlark Theatre: A performance space created by a couple New Orleans-based puppeteers in their living room. It looks like something out of a Tim Burton set or an enchanted fairy tale forest. Musicians and performers blow through New Orleans and play one or two sets here. (I've heard fabulous accordian players, toy piano-players, traditional singers/flat-foot dancers from West Viriginia, New Orleans' own Why Are We Building Such a Big Ship? brass band, etc.) Pandora Gastelum, who hosts these things with her roommate/partner, often serves drinks and/or cupcakes or crepes. All for around \$5 a performance!

RESTAURANTS:

Sylvain in the Quarter. Fantastic cocktails and gastropub fare.

Elizabeth's in the Bywater (Had my last birthday party here.) Amazing seafood dishes, huge portions, laid-back staff. The hand-painted sign outside is sweet.

Bayona: Susan Spicer's jewel in the Quarter. I haven't been back in a while, but when I go I'm getting the rack of lamb with a red-wine/veal stock reduction with aged goat cheese. It's that good that I remember it more than ten years later.

French Market in the Quarter for oysters on the half-shell. Cheap and fresh.

Casamento's for Po-Boys and gumbo.

Captain Sal's for down-home fried anything.

The Cake Cafe for delicious crab omlettes, breakfast croissants, and all manner of cupcakes. Satsuma cafe in the Bywater for organic salads, sandwiches soups, and Detox juices for those who over-indulged the night before

Galatoire's for Oysters Rockefeller and sole meunière

Frady's in the Bywater for mac and cheese, mini-Muffalettas, and fried catfish.

Brigtsens by the Riverbend. I have a soft spot in my heart for this place because my first serious boyfriend took me here and it seemed so romantic. It's set in an old house, so each dining area was a former living room or bedroom. The bathroom still has its clawfoot tub! And the food is just classic, decadent New Orleans. Old school and worth a try.



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