

NEW ORLEANS: AN EXPERIENCE

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The upcoming annual Conference of the Society of American Archivists in New Orleans coincides with two other events with ties, however tenuous, to LAGAR. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meets the same week we do and Sunday the 05th is the parade day for "Southern Decadence Weekend" (Gay Mardi Gras)!

"Decadence Weekend" began about 20 years ago. It seems a costume party held the Sunday before Labor Day turned into a pub crawl that gathered more and more partiers as it went along. It was such a hit, the hosts decided to repeat the thing yearly. Within a few years, the party turned from a largely straight group to a mostly gay affair.

Over the years, the costumes became more and more outrageous and the decadence theme stuck. Now "Southern Decadence Weekend" is an established holiday known as a Gay Mardi Gras complete with a parade king, a loose theme around which the party operates, radical drag and much exposed flesh of all genders. It begins the Thursday before Labor Day and peaks with a parade on Sunday.

Unlike regular Mardi Gras, this parade has no set route. One of the host bars is Good Friends in the French Quarter. They hold a "Big Hair" contest after the parade on Sunday in the downstairs bar.

It is our good fortune to have the LAGAR Happy Hour-Social on day, Sep 04 at 6 PM in the Queen's Head Pub, above the Good Friends Bar. The Pub is a pleasant facility (in that distinctly decayed and decadent New Orleans way) with historic photographs of past Mardi Gras Queens on the walls in a full bar.

LAGAR will have the place to ourselves with a bartender. The location is within easy walking distance of other bars, restaurants and interesting sites within the Quarter. As with any large city, be aware of your surroundings and project an air of self-security.

New Orleans in September means HOT AND HUMID!. Leave your suits and heavy dresses at home, burn your ties and forget about staying dry. Expect mid-90s, at least 80% humidity, strong sun and rain for 30 to 45 minutes a day. Oh yeah, don't forget, the Quarter is 10 feet BELOW sea level. You can carry a drink if it's in plastic. No glass allowed.

Cardinal directions are useless in the Crescent City as the streets follow the general curve of the river. Instead, directions are given in relation to the river's current and where you are between the river and Lake Pontchartrain. The Quarter is downriver, downtown; Tulane and Audubon Park are upriver, uptown; St. Louis Cathedral is downriver, riverside. Good Friends is lakeside. Don't worry though, just walk around and enjoy the view!

NEW ORLEANS: A GUIDE

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"New Orleans, land of enchantment ...". No wait, that's New Mexico. Anyway, enveloping is more like it. The city envelopes you with smells from lush tropical florals to the odd, indefinable odor of the Quarter.

Also enveloping is the culture and general way of life. If you have been here before, you may have favorite places. For newcomers, what follows is a sampling of some of my favorites. I've ventured out beyond the French Quarter to help give you a more well-rounded picture of the city.

Most of the places suggested are casual. September in New Orleans is

not conducive to formal wear. With exception of the Bayou St. John area, you can reach most of the places on this list by streetcar (\$1.00 each way, exact change please). Find a map and highlight your destinations.

Don't be lulled by the carefree atmosphere of the Quarter. As in any big city, it's best to travel in groups. Residential areas of the Quarter are beautiful to wander in during the day, but stay in business areas at night with well-lit and well-populated streets. DON'T get lost, avoid Armstrong Park and be cautious on Rampart Street, and for the love of Zeus, don't get on the streetcar and ask for change for a \$100 bill!

FRENCH QUARTER*Restaurants:*

Mona Lisa. 1212 Royal. Fantastic pizza (the Garden is best). Probably the only establishment in the city without a liquor license. You can pick up wine at the grocery across the street.

Louisiana Pizza Kitchen. 95 French Market Place. Pretentious, but very good. Good wine selection. Remember: the waiters know more than you.

Clover Grill. 900 Bourbon. Best place for an energy boost after/during bar hopping. Mind what you divulge to the waiters. Donna Summer forever on the jukebox.

St. Ann's Deli. 800 Dauphine. Another good place to recoup. Good cheese fries. Sharpen your numbed brain by reading the tables.

Bars:

Bourbon Pub. 801 Bourbon. "... does anyone here have any hair gel?" This address marks the invisible straight/gay line of Bourbon Street. Have a drink downstairs, pursue someone upstairs to the Parade Disco. Great balcony.