

NEW ORLEANS

A wealth of world-class cultures adds to the Crescent City's one-of-a-kind appeal.

New Orleans has always been a hub of creativity, boasting an electrifying music scene and unparalleled cuisine that draw visitors from all over the world. That imagination and inventiveness is also present in the city's artistic landscape, where a diverse array of museums, galleries, cutting-edge exhibition spaces, arts events and film festivals complement New Orleans' rich heritage. And the sheer number of cultural offerings means that there's always something going on in the Birthplace of Jazz.

With a world-class European and American collection, the New Orleans Museum of Art (noma.org) is a must-see for fine-art lovers. So, too, is the adjacent Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden, with nearly sixty works by the likes of Pierre Auguste Renoir, Robert Indiana, Isamu Noguchi and Claes Oldenburg scattered among a stunning five-acre park with native pine forests, magnolia groves, cypress trees and ancient live oaks draped with Spanish moss. Admission is always free, and it's a magical place to spend a

Friday evening, when the garden stays open until 8:45 p.m.

There's also plenty to see in the vibrant Warehouse Arts District, a former industrial zone that today buzzes with chic galleries, stylish boutiques and fine restaurants. Drop by the eclectic Contemporary Arts Center (cacno.org), where you might catch an avant-garde dance performance, take in an exciting live-music show such as an N.E.A. Jazz Masters performance, experience the work of an emerging filmmaker or discover a trendsetting new visual artist. On Oct. 6, the venue will play host to the annual extravaganza Art for Arts' Sake. Join in with the thousands who flock to the gallery-lined Julia and Magazine Streets to check out classic and contemporary art, sculpture, crafts, and photography and celebrate the arts with live music, DJs, drinks and food.

The district is also home to the popular National WWII Museum (nationalww2museum.org), a testament to the everyday men and women who contributed to the Allied victory. History buffs will discover a treasure trove of artifacts, photographs, film footage,

personal narratives and an ongoing lecture series featuring authors and scholars who further illuminate this world-changing event. And don't miss the spectacular visual effects of Tom Hanks' 4-D cinematic experience, "Beyond All Boundaries," at the Solomon Victory Theater.

It seems that every week in the Crescent City, a festival or special event is taking place — such as the star-studded New Orleans Film Festival (Oct. 12-18, 2012), which in its 23 years has welcomed industry leaders including Oscar-winning director Jonathan Demme ("The Silence of the Lambs") and Wendell Pierce ("The Wire," "Treme"), and screened top movies including "The Artist" and "A Dangerous Method." But the fest isn't just about celebrities. You can discover up-and-coming filmmakers as well, with programs like "keeping {SCORE}," which focuses on music and musicians. Meanwhile, the curious flock to places such as the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum (voodoomuseum.com) to explore the mysteries and folklore of this rich tradition.

On any given night in New Orleans, live music spills out of clubs along Bourbon and Frenchman Streets — bands play jazz, Zydeco, rock, country, Cajun and more. But it wouldn't be New Orleans without the blues, and that's what Crescent City Blues and BBQ Festival celebrates, with performances at this year's event, held Oct. 12-14, by legends such as Keb Mo and Clarence Carter. Along with great music, dozens of vendors will be serving up traditional barbecue and other local fare. Art has a presence here, too; a massive crafts fair will feature artisans from throughout the region selling their hand-made wares.

With so much music, food, film, history and arts to enjoy, New Orleans is a getaway you'll keep coming back to.

For more information about New Orleans cuisine, special events and deals, visit NewOrleansOnline.com. And while you're at it, download GO NOLA: The Official Tourism App of the City of New Orleans. It's free. ♣

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