

editor's note



AS I STEPPED OUT OF THE TAXI ONTO CANAL STREET TODAY, I WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK BY HOW CLEAN NEW ORLEANS LOOKED. During my two visits last year, each morning the French Quarter looked like a frat party gone bad—and it didn't improve much throughout the rest of the day. Of course, pre-Katrina, the city wasn't much better.

But during this visit, in mid-March, the city was both different and the same as I always remembered.

For me, the biggest constant is the food (much to my wife's consternation and my growing girth). And that hasn't changed since my first trip to New Orleans in 1984. Whether it's gumbo at Mulate's or the crawfish over fried eggplant at Tujague's, the food remains classic and delectable.

The biggest change I had noticed on previous post-Katrina trips was the paucity of people. Last year, walks down Bourbon Street were unnaturally quiet. The crowds were noticeably absent; the music was all but halted. But on this visit, the crowds were back, beer still cost just a buck, and the music was its usual loud mélange of rock, jazz, and blues.

I've always had mixed feelings about New Orleans. There's this incredible sense of excitement, but I'm getting kind of old for the noise and drinking. Fortunately, I do love window shopping—and I don't think there's a better city for interesting artifacts and doodads (my boys loved the alligator heads I picked up on my last visit and proudly display them next to the piranhas from my trip to Brazil). You can have Bourbon Street; I prefer walking up Royal Street during the day, poking my nose into one

antique shop after another. And if I really have time, there are some incredibly funky shops up in the Garden District on Magazine Street (I just wish I could figure out an economical way to ship that antique table home).

Of course I don't think New Orleans will ever be exactly like it was before Katrina. But no vibrant city can truly remain frozen in time. I can say that if you enjoyed visiting New Orleans in the past, you'll probably enjoy it just as much now. Yes, I've heard a lot of people express concern about safety. But frankly, as I walked around the French Quarter, I didn't feel at all unsafe. There were crowds of people—and a noticeable police presence. It was no different than walking around any big city at night; whether you're in New York, Chicago, or Houston, you need to be alert.

New Orleans has made an obvious and concerted effort to meet the needs of visitors. The new sanitation company hired at the beginning of this year has paid off; the city has never been cleaner. Restaurants are open. The people are welcoming. The music has returned to the city.

I hope you'll have the chance to experience it for yourself. And I hope to see you at this year's NASCC: The Steel Conference in New Orleans April 18–21 (visit www.aisc.org/nascc for more information).

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