

## Come On Back To New Orleans!



Contrary to popular belief, New Orleans is far from being the city only categorized as being ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. While the wounds are still fresh and the memory of the horrific images still remain, the heart of the city still beats with same love and passion that it has ALWAYS been known for.

Having just been in New Orleans for the Essence Festival a few months earlier I was really looking forward to returning to the city that I had fallen back in love with. I found myself looking at the city with a new hope and I was proud to be selected by publicist Bonnie Warren as a journalist to come back to the Crescent City. Ms. Warren is the epitome of a southern belle with a cosmopolitan flare. I describe her as a cross between Grace Kelly and Blanche Devereaux of *The Golden Girls*. She knows her city and it was a real treat to see it through her eyes.

Harrah's New Orleans Casino & Hotel, my gracious host, is one of the most beautiful properties I have ever visited. The glass box wall treatment coupled with the marble floors in the lobby welcomed visitors with a look of sophistication and refinement. I knew I was in for a memorable experience when my room was on the 13th Floor. Once I arrived, I had to look and see if there was a room 1313, and sure enough it was—I thought to myself, "only in New Orleans."

The city was alive with attendees for the New Orleans Film Festival. The opening night gala at Republic New Orleans was filled with notable native New Orleanians and participants of the film festival. Champagne and gastronomic delights were served by some of the city's award-winning chefs and restaurants including Luke's, Herbsaint and Cochon. Everything New Orleans cuisine is known for was there from Gumbo, Jambalaya, a whole roasted pig, to shrimp etouffe and grits—all were there for the sampling...and that we did!

After returning to the hotel from a night of partying, the spacious room was a welcomed sight. The stylishly-appointed standard room surpassed my expectations. Paintings from local artists were proudly displayed and added to the overall "welcome home" feel of the property. The hotel has completely been remodeled and the classic design of the property fits any taste.

The next afternoon I was treated to the most wonderful lunch at *Riche* inside Harrah's Hotel. Todd English, a world-renowned chef, Bon Appetit "Restaurateur of the Year" and honoree of the prestigious James Beard Foundation, presented us with a menu that was magnificent. My fellow journalists and I dined on Escargot Flatbread with Montrachet Goat Cheese & Garlic Butter; Riche Gumbo and Lobster Cheddar Melts. Every palate was satisfied!

After a few hours of walking through the wonderfully restored Fulton Street corridor with its swank bars and trendy gathering places it was time for yet another meal. This time we dined at Iron Chef Contender John Besh's *The Besh Steakhouse* inside Harrah's Casino. With the backdrop of George Rodrigue's Blue Dog artwork we were served the most flavorful and succulent lobster tails and Kobe Beef all served from his immaculate open kitchen.

Leaving that wonderful dinner, it was now time to check out some the 100 plus movies of the New Orleans Film Festival. We saw the most brilliantly dysfunctional family in Sidney Lumet's *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman, Marisa Tomei and Ethan Hawke.

Later, we had the pleasure of checking out Lolis Eric Elie's incredibly moving documentary *Faubourg Tremé*. It's a film about the enduring history, legacy and the unyielding faith of this incredible New Orleans neighborhood after being ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

The hospitality of Harrah's and the city of New Orleans is unmatched. Just when you think that there is nothing left new to do the hotel and city unveiled another hidden gem: The *Bambu Restaurant* inside Harrah's Casino. We dined on some of the most mouth-watering creations including Cantonese Barbecued Duck and Garlic Lobster.

**Capping off the evening, we took a wonderful limousine ride to Kevin Kelly's Houmas House Plantation and Garden. About an hour's drive from New Orleans, this antebellum estate houses some of the most exquisite gardens and landscaping. With oak trees dating back more than 500 years, this Crown Jewel of Louisiana's River Road was an amazing slice of uncovered history.**

On our final full day in New Orleans we were the guests of *Brennan's Restaurant* in the heart of the French Quarter. Seated at the best table in the house overlooking the garden, we were served by an impeccable staff and treated to a breakfast feast fit for a queen. No trip to Brennan's would be complete with sampling its trademark Bananas' Foster. Flames and all...we were not disappointed!

Four days for the best accommodations that anyone could ask for—coupled with some of the best culinary delights in the world—New Orleans may be a lil' bruised, but baby it ain't broken...so come on back now ya' hear!