



A trip to New Orleans is like going back to the Old World with its mystifying charms and allures of its colorful history intertwined with the rich diversity of its heritage.

I have long been dreaming to go to the Deep South, until one day last summer, we just decided at the spur of the moment to book a flight with my wife and her best friend and college chum to the Crescent City.

So, finally, here we are at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, ready and willing to be captivated by the charms of this Southern city.

The first thing I noticed around town while riding from the airport to our downtown hotel is the sign NOLA posted everywhere.

I thought it was the name of a local political candidate until I was reminded that it is the acronym for New Orleans LA.

On our first morning at the Homewood Suites by Hilton situated along Poydras Avenue, we were greeted with the irresistible aroma of breakfast.

Hmm.

The sky was bathing in the sun and the still blooming impatiens are immersed in the 70-degree weather.

Our first task was to confer with the concierge staff, and the gentleman at hand named Eugene, was very friendly and accommodating to us.

“Where are you from?” he asked us.

“From New York,” we all chimed in.

“Oh, I love New York. There are so many things to eat over there in N.Y., as compared to here, fish here, fish there and seafood everywhere. And, and you know what? I love Filipino adobo,” we all laughed.

The shuttle van soon picked us up for a city tour.

The first stop was the site hit hard by Hurricane Katrina which is the 9th Ward district of the city.

I could see that there are still places that have not yet recovered from the devastations.

We were told that 80% of the city was flooded.

Katrina was the most destructive storm to hit the U.S., and the costliest, causing \$108 billion in damage.

Our next stop was at the Faubourg Treme, locally known as the home of jazz and the birthplace of civil rights in the South.

It was located on the north side of the French Square.

Luckily for us, there was an event going on at that time, called the Gumbo Festival which was being held there only one week-end a year.

Gumbo is a stew that originated in Louisiana, consisting of a strongly-flavored stock, meat or shellfish, a thickener (sometimes okra) and a trinity of celery, bell peppers and onions.

Then we had jambalaya, a Creole dish of Spanish and French influence, quite similar to Spanish paella.

Gumbo and jambalaya are emblematic of Louisiana as examples of the melting-pot nature of Louisiana cooking.

For last night's dinner, my lovely wife tried to make one, and it's good.

For the rest of the week we were left on our own devices, mainly walking, and streetcars aka trolleys, the last one costing only \$1.25 or \$3 for unlimited 24-hour ride.

In New Orleans, all roads converged at the French Quarter, at the heart of which is the famed Bourbon Street, which is lined up with 18th century architecture, bars, ghostly haunts, art galleries and overflowing with restaurants and night clubs, as well as street performers.

Before the trip, we were reminded by our son not to miss the French beignet.

So we stopped by at the crowded Café du Monde and waited for our authentic French café au lait coupled with freshly made beignets.

From here we proceeded to the original French Market which was still on the same site when New Orleans was still part of France.

Then, we walked to the nearby imposing St. Louis Cathedral, the oldest Catholic cathedral in the U.S.

Adjacent to the Cathedral is the Cabildo right in front of the historic Jackson Square, named after Gen. Andrew Jackson, hero of the Battle of New Orleans against the British and later becoming the 7th president of the U.S. and founder of the Democratic Party.

The Cabildo was the site of the Louisiana Purchase transfers from France to the U.S. some 828,000 square miles of territory west of the Mississippi River, thus doubling the size of the U.S.

The entire area bought for only \$15 million is bigger than the combined areas of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal altogether.

At the World War II Museum, we were ushered inside a building which was converted into a life-sized submarine USS Tang.

We were divided into groups of twos, each group assigned different tasks.

The assignment for me and my wife was to control the levers of the Ballast Tanks which are responsible for floating and sinking the submarine.

It was explained to us that this submarine was the most successful submarine of the U.S., destroying at least 33 enemy ships.

However, in Formosa Straits, while on patrol, she fired at the enemies.

But its last remaining torpedo, broached and boomeranged towards itself thus the explosion killed all crew members but nine survivors.

At the museum of The Road to Berlin there were various exhibits tracing the valiant gallantry of the U.S. military against the forces of Germany.

Each one of us was given a Dog Tag which when pressed against a computer-activated screen will show the life story of a soldier in war and his life story in peace time.

The Pacific Campaign is a 4D cinematic experience narrated by Tom Hanks.

It was as if we were in the midst of the actual shootings, machine guns and grenades, smokes and smells of gun powders and all.

When the atomic bomb was dropped the whole building shook up, as in an earthquake, and a terrifying burst of white lights blinded us all momentarily, then the deadly silence of a complete destruction.

New Orleans, pronounced locally as N'awlins, is a beautiful city with beautiful people and proud history.

Walking at Bourbon Street, in the French Quarter, is like walking in the past, with old brick walls, brick pavements, balconies with hanging gardens, and verandas, unchanged by the ever-changing world.

Canal Street divides the city into two, the French Quarter and the American Quarter.

We love them both — and, surely, the memories of this week-long vacation will always stay in our hearts.

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