New Orleans attracts international visitors

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New Orleans — A 30-ride amusement park, a four-story World War II museum, a casino with 100,000 square feet of gambling space, and a multi-purpose arena are just a few of the newest attractions awaiting visitors to New Orleans.

The French admittance to the expression "Laissez les bons temps rouler!" if you're looking to "let the good times roll" look no farther than New Orleans.

Like its variety of nicknames — The Crescent City, The Big Easy, City That Care Forgot — New Orleans offers a variety of sights, sounds and tastes to visitors and locals alike.

New Orleans earned the label of "The Crescent City" because the Mighty Mississippi River winds in a crescent-shaped direction as it rolls past the city.

From a replica of a 19th-century paddlewheeler on the Mississippi to a colorful Mardi Gras float on historic St. Charles Avenue, the good times are always rolling in New Orleans, particularly in the French Quarter, home of Bourbon Street with its jazz clubs, bars, restaurants and 24-hour street party.

Bourbon Street's frivolity reaches a fever pitch during Mardi Gras, the culmination of 12 straight days of parades leading up to Ash Wednesday, the official start of the Carnival season. But the French Quarter is much more than its most famous, or infamous, street. It offers some of the best dining (Antoine's, Brennan's and Commander's Palace, to name a few), drinking (try a "Hurricane" at Pat O'Brien's) and lodging (the famed Windsor Court Hotel) anywhere.

And the Quarter also is home to Jackson Square, dedicated to Gen. Andrew Jackson, the American hero of the Battle of New Orleans who became the country's seventh president. Jackson Square faces St. Louis Cathedral, one of the oldest cathedrals in the country. It is flanked by the Cabildo, where the Louisiana Purchase was signed in 1803, and by the Presbytere Museum.

Adjacent to Jackson Square are gift shops and Café du Monde, home of the square, powdered-sugar-dusted doughnuts called beignets. They are traditionally served with café au lait, a mixture of chicory coffee and boiling milk. Jackson Square also is inhabited by various street performers and musicians, as well as sidewalk artists and magicians.

But just as the French Quarter is more than Bourbon Street and Jackson Square, New Orleans is much more than the Quarter.

The downtown riverfront, which got a well-deserved facelift following the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans, features the Aquarium of the Americas, the Riverwalk Marketplace (the former site of the World's Fair pavilions) and the massive Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, built for the fair and renamed after the city's first black mayor. Next to the aquarium is the 354-seat Entergy IMAX Theater.

Adjacent to the aquarium, sitting at the foot of Canal and Poydras streets, is the mammoth Harrah's New Orleans Casino, which opened in October 1999. The new New Orleans Arena, which sits next to the much larger Louisiana Superdome, opened the same month as the casino. The arena is home to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, an annual event featuring some of the world's top musical acts.

The city's largest and oldest park is the 1,500-acre City Park, with four 18-hole golf courses, more than three dozen tennis courts, children's theme park Storyland with its antique carousel and miniature trains, and the seven-acre Botanical Gardens.

Visitors to Jackson Square enjoy live music from early morning to late evening.