

Chapter 1

Discovering the Best of Post-Katrina New Orleans

In This Chapter

- ▶ The best hotels
- ▶ The best restaurants
- ▶ The best museums
- ▶ The best clubs
- ▶ The best romantic experiences

When revising my “Best Of” list for this edition, I was pleasantly surprised to find that most of my favorites survived or returned after rebuilding, though there were a few that didn’t make it. The hip Hotel Monaco — which gave my Catahoula dog, Desoto, the V.I. P(uppy) treatment a couple years back — closed its doors for good. French Quarter restaurant Bella Luna, with its lovely view of the Mississippi, is no more. Long-time family-owned seafood restaurants Sid-Mar’s, Weaver’s, and Bruning’s — all in my neighborhood — were flooded beyond repair. And one of my favorite hangouts, Plantation Coffeehouse, is likely not coming back because the landlord isn’t cooperating with the owner (who knows his customers would give anything for just one more sip of their famous iced coffees). Of course, if you travel beyond the usual tourist areas of the city, you’ll find that every flooded neighborhood lost many favorite and popular places. But locals (myself included) are focused on what survived and what is to come.

For more information on the hotels, restaurants, clubs, museums, and romantic spots noted in this chapter, look for the Best of the Best icon throughout the book.

The Best Hotels

- ✓ For historic charm, the **Hotel Monteleone** boasts quite a history as the oldest and largest hotel in the French Quarter. **Maison Dupuy** carries the distinction of once being home to the world’s first cotton press. See Chapter 10.

- ✓ For guaranteed pampering, you have two great options in the Central Business District. Old-line **Le Pavillon** offers everything from complimentary hors d'oeuvres to shoeshines. **International House** (built in 1906 to accommodate the world's first trade center) exemplifies New Orleans's talent for adapting older buildings from their original use (or a state of outright neglect) into unique lodging. See Chapter 10.
- ✓ **The Ritz-Carlton** is happily slated to reopen just as we go to print. The hotel is an ambitious renovation of a one-time New Orleans institution, the Maison Blanche department store, and signifies a return to Canal Street's glory days. See Chapter 10.
- ✓ Smaller but equally impressive is the recently renovated **Block-Keller House**, which gives a taste of how Mid-City will look as the Canal streetcar works its restoration magic down the line. See Chapter 10.

The Best Restaurants

- ✓ For Cajun and Creole, try Emeril Lagasse's flagship restaurant, **Emeril's**, where you can taste what he calls "*new* New Orleans cuisine." Or if you're a traditionalist, try **Antoine's**, **Arnaud's**, or Paul Prudhomme's **K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen**. See Chapter 11.
- ✓ Dine at one of first-rate restaurants from the city's dining dynasty, the Brennan Family, including **Bacco** and **Brennan's**, both located in the French Quarter. Their Garden District jewel, **Commander's Palace**, reopened in 2006 to great fanfare. See Chapter 11.
- ✓ Stroll and nosh: Eat a greasy, roast-beef po' boy from **Elizabeth's**, an overstuffed muffuletta from **Central Grocery**, a plateful of shucked oysters from **Acme Oyster House**, a hamburger from **Port of Call** or **Clover Grill**, and a breakfast of *beignets* — a tasty fried doughnut — at **Café du Monde**. See Chapter 11.

The Best Museums

- ✓ To discover more about its New Orleans's origins, and the city's storied (and often sordid) past, visit the **Cabildo**, an entertaining museum focusing on life in early Louisiana and the site where the Louisiana Purchase was sold to the United States in 1803. See Chapter 12.
- ✓ Go to the **Chalmette Battlefield National Park**, which marks the site of the Battle of New Orleans, part of the War of 1812. The park also contains a cemetery for Civil War soldiers. See Chapter 12.

- ✔ Ride the **Canal Streetcar** to Mid-City's **New Orleans Museum of Art**, which boasts beauty inside and out with its extraordinary **Besthoff Sculpture Garden**. Both attractions have rebounded from the storm thanks to the support of art lovers worldwide. See Chapter 12.

The Best Clubs

- ✔ Get a taste of modern-day brass bands getting funky at down-and-dirty hangouts **Donna's Bar & Grill** and **Funky Butt**. See Chapter 17.
- ✔ Catch live jazz at local clubs **Snug Harbor** and **Sweet Lorraine's**. Enjoy R&B at hallowed halls such as **Tipitina's** and the **Maple Leaf**. See Chapter 17.
- ✔ Jam to cajun and *zydeco* tunes (popular music of southern Louisiana that combines French, Caribbean, and blues music — with guitar, washboard, and accordion) at the **Maple Leaf** or at the world's most musical bowling alley and celebrity haunt, **Mid City Lanes Rock 'n' Bowl**. See Chapter 17.

The Best Romantic Experiences

- ✔ Stroll along the lush scenery of the **Garden District** and the rolling expanse of water and parkway at the **Moonwalk**. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ Take your love on a **carriage ride** through the French Quarter or a relaxing **riverboat cruise** along the gently rolling Mississippi. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ Reserve a dinner for two at always cozy **Court of Two Sisters** and **Feelings Café**. For details, see Chapter 11.