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Don't like Jazz Fest? We have some ideas for you

Sue Strachan APR 26, 2018 - 11:30 AM

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World-renowned art galleries line Julia Street in the Warehouse District. On the first Saturday of the month, they have coordinated openings. On the evening of Sat. May 5, is "Jammin' on Julia."

Shhh, I won't tell your secret - that you don't like to go to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival presented by Shell. Or as avid festers will quickly correct you and say, Jazz Fest. This

year the dates are April 27 to 29 and May 3 to May 6 at the New Orleans Fair Grounds Race Course.

I will say I am a half contrarian: I don't feel like my year has been complete without going to Jazz Fest at least one day, but definitely not the second Saturday when the crowds are too big (in my opinion).

Talking about the crowds, I remember the years when I could get up close to the Acura Stage (then the Ray-Ban stage) without a hassle. (My first Jazz Fest was 1984.)

Some people complain about the ticket price and the number of non-local acts. But then again, it's an affordable way to see the likes of Stevie Wonder, who played last year.

This is the third year I have done this Jazz Fest haters list (2015 and 2016, then I took a break in 2017), and there are some new attractions, and of course, familiar favorites for the Jazz Fest contrarians.

Music fests of a different sort

Jazz Fest falls in the midst of Young Leadership Council's Wednesday in the Square 12-week concert series. Located at Lafayette Square in the Central Business District (CBD), each Wednesday features different musicians or bands. On April 25, The Deslondes opened for Big Sam's Funky Nation; May 2, Trumpet Mafia opens for Amanda Shaw. Music starts at 5 p.m., with the main act starting at 6:30 p.m. Food and drink is available for purchase, and there is an arts market on site. BTW: Admission is free.

Now in its 15th year, NOizeFest is another Jazz Fest alternative. Always the last Sunday of Jazz Fest, this year, May 6, NOizeFest features locals performing music, dance and anything else that may strike their fancy. The festival is kid-friendly, and free with food and drink. Starting at 11 a.m. and going to about 11 p.m., the festival's location is the Esplanade Arthouse, the corner of Esplanade and Claiborne avenues.

Not in New Orleans

Because you are a Jazz Fest contrarian doesn't mean you can't head to another festival or other attractions that are only a few hours away.

Depending on when you get in town, try Festival International de Louisiane, April 25-29, in Lafayette, or the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, May 4-6. While it may be hard now to find a hotel room in either city (or the surrounding areas), an overnight stay in a hotel in Baton Rouge keeps the drive time down (New Orleans to Lafayette and Breaux Bridge is 2 to 2 1/2 hours, if you don't get caught in traffic; Lafayette to Baton Rouge is 45 minutes or so.)

Quick day trips are also popular, with Avery Island, Global Wildlife Center, canoeing and kayaking in Mississippi and much more within a two-hour or so drive from New Orleans. Be sure to check out our "25 must-take day trips from New Orleans."

Food, glorious food

You didn't get home until dawn because the band you wanted to see didn't start until 3 a.m. Alas, you woke up hungry and tired and in no mood for the inevitable lines at breakfast/brunch spots. Or, you want to sample some of the city's amazing restaurants.

For this I turned to the experts -- the NOLA.com/Times-Picayune food and dining team, who have compiled a number of handy lists that will keep you feasting pre-or post-fest (or not feasting).

Below are some suggestions from restaurant critic and features writer Brett Anderson: New Orleans Top 10 Restaurants for 2018; 9 Best Crab Cakes in New Orleans; 10 Best Barbecue Restaurants in New Orleans.

New Orleans Top 10 restaurants for 2018

9 Best Crab Cakes in New Orleans

10 Best Barbecue Restaurants in New Orleans

Some more great food information from NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune food writers and editors Ann Maloney and Todd Price: What's Up with the Jazz Fest 2018 Food Line Up; 11 Places to Eat Now in New Orleans: April 2018; Ma Momma's House wins Red Bean Madness; 11 Best Restaurants for Fried Chicken in New Orleans; and 11 Best Places for Take-Out Fried Chicken in New Orleans.

11 Places to Eat Now in New Orleans: April 2018

What's Up with the Jazz Fest 2018 Food Line Up

Ma Momma's House wins Red Bean Madness

11 Best Restaurants for Fried Chicken in New Orleans

11 Best Places for Take-Out Fried Chicken in New Orleans

The Art Lover

Though parking in Mid-City near the Jazz Fest can be difficult, New Orleans Museum of Art is far enough away to not get too crowded. Among its exhibitions with a nod to Jazz Fest is "Lee Friedlander: American Musicians." It is a companion to "Lee Friedlander in Louisiana," which is opening April 27.

The Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden, adjacent NOMA, showcases sculpture by Henry Moore, Robert Indiana, Deborah Butterfield, Pierre August Renoir, among others. (Admission is free, too!)

The French Quarter is home to a number of museums: Louisiana State Museum (Cabildo, Presbytere, 1850 House, Madame John's Legacy and the New Orleans Jazz Museum in the Old

U.S. Mint), the Historic New Orleans Collection, and Hermann-Grima/Gallier Historic Houses. If you are looking for art to buy, there are a number of art galleries to peruse, or visit the artists who show their work in Jackson Square.

Outside of the French Quarter in the Lower Ninth Ward is the House of Dance and Feathers, Ronald Lewis' collection of Mardi Gras Indian suits, and other unique items. (Lewis' museum is by appointment only; during Jazz Fest, he can only give tours the second weekend.)

On the way to the House of Dance and Feathers, a visit to the art galleries on St. Claude Avenue. While Jazz Fest visitors will miss the galleries' second Saturday coordinated openings, this is the place to check out the city's cutting-edge art scene.

The New Orleans Arts District (located within the Warehouse District) is a hub of world-class art galleries, eateries, and museums, including the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, among its exhibitions is "The Whole Drum Will Sound: Women in Southern Abstraction" and

the Contemporary Arts Center, which offers art, dance and music programs. The area is also home to the National World War II Museum.

The art galleries in NOAD have coordinated openings the first Saturday of each month. On May 5, they are doing a special Jammin' on Julia, 6 p.m. - 11 p.m. that will include music, public performances and more.

The Youngest Contrarians

Jazz Fest has lots of family-friendly activities, including a Kids Area that covers music, food and lots of interactive fun. But not all kids want to go every day to Jazz Fest, so here's a look at other kid-friendly options. The Audubon Institute operates the **Aquarium of the Americas, Entergy Giant Screen Theater**, the **Audubon Insectarium**, all located on or near Canal Street; and **Audubon Zoo**, which is Uptown. (The Kids Zoo-to-Do is April 27.) Also, downtown on Julia Street, take the little ones to the Louisiana Children's Museum.

In Mid-City, check out City Park's Storyland or the **New Orleans Museum of Art's "Friday Night at NOMA,"** featuring movie screenings,

music, free art activities (for kids and young-at-heart), a cash bar and, of course, the art.

The Shopper

The dedicated shopper can find a wonderful variety to peruse at Jazz Fest craft areas.

Beyond the Fair Grounds, there are a lot of options, I will summarize by neighborhood.

French Quarter offers clothing, jewelry, antiques and art; The Shops at Canal Place is high-end (Tiffany & Co.) and funky (Anthropologie); and The Outlet Collection at Riverwalk (Neiman Marcus is an anchor). Then, there is Magazine Street: You just need to pick which stretch you want to tackle, Both offer lots of home furnishings and clothing boutiques, with plenty of restaurants and bars where you can stop and refuel. More shopping and eating can be found along Freret and Oak streets.

Finally, Lakeside Shopping Center, which is anchored by Dillard's and Macy's, is a good spot for the families with teenagers in tow.

The Sports Fanatic

The NFL Draft is April 26 to 28. The Kentucky Derby is Saturday, May 5, and as of press time, the Fair Grounds (AKA the racetrack) will not be showing the race in the clubhouse.

While many bars in New Orleans could be considered sports bars, there are those that specialize in it: Manning's (you know, named after that family of quarterbacks), Walk-Ons and American Sports Saloon, which is teaming up with Goorin Bros. Hat Shop for a Kentucky Derby Hat Contest Party on May 5. Harrah's Casino, while not a sports bar, is a good spot for the sports fanatic who also likes to gamble.

For the golfer in the group, the Zurich Classic is April 23 - April 29 at TPC Louisiana on the West Bank.

Happy 300th Birthday New Orleans!

While the big celebrations took place over the weekend of April 20, there are still things to do to honor the city's tricentennial, including concerts: Trombone Shorty and Orleans Avenue's Treme Threauxdown, April 28, and the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Closing and Tricentennial Fireworks Show, May 6.

The Great Outdoors

It's hot, but not too hot ... yet. So it's your last chance to enjoy the outdoors before the heat and mosquitos drive you back inside. Try the area's state and national parks such as Jean Lafitte National Historical Park on the West Bank, and Fontainebleau and Fairview-Riverside state parks on the Northshore. Woodlands Conservancy on the West Bank offers some lovely nature trails. Swamp tours, yes, the ones you send your visiting friends to, but you have never gone on one, well, it's time to go.

Because, what's the point of being a contrarian all the time?

This is by no means a complete list, so please list any suggestions for the Jazz Fest contrarian in the comments section.

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