

## Where to Stay

This section

outlines the major urban and suburban districts within 90 miles of New Orleans. Outside the Mardi Gras season, these neighborhoods are within 90 minutes driving time. However, during Mardi Gras, with the influx of tourists, sharing the roads with locals from surrounding areas and the occasional foggy driving conditions from dusk until dawn, traffic congestion is likely to occur that can considerably add to your driving time into the city. The New Orleans metropolitan area is not very efficient in terms of public transportation. The main reason is jurisdictional, as its surrounding suburbs are located in different parishes (counties) who do not share the same resources. Taxi fares can get very expensive, especially when coupled with the added time on the road due to traffic. Renting a car is an option if your only lodging options are further away, but remember that "special event" parking during Mardi Gras can be equally as expensive. Towing companies are on 24 hour standby during Mardi Gras. Out of state license plates and car rental company decals are a dead giveaway for the unfamiliar tourist who is illegally parked. Also, you should know that local law enforcement is on heightened alert for drivers under the influence during this time.

One interesting

aspect of the local vernacular is the manner in which directions are given when told by a native New Orleanian. Compass directions of N, S, E, and W are seldom used. A look at a map of the Crescent City (named for the crescent shaped bend of the River) clearly shows that its planning and growth were defined by its geography. Swamps and marshes limit further development to the east and west, Lake Pontchartrain restricts its expansion to the north and the Mississippi River with its serpentine path defines the interesting grid-work of its streets. Knowing the approximate whereabouts of the Lake (north), the River (south- more or less), Uptown (west), and Downtown (east) will greatly reduce confusion when you are lost and ask for help. When told to meet someone on the downtown, riverside corner of St. Charles Ave. and Napoleon Ave., they mean the southeast corner; closest to the River and closest to Downtown. You may also hear, "Keep heading uptown and it will be on the lakeside of the street." This means, travel in the opposite direction of Downtown/French Quarter and look for it on your right, to the north where the Lake is located. Knowing direction the River flows is important when discerning upriver from downriver. In New Orleans, the Mississippi flows from west to east, or uptown towards downtown.