It's the birthplace of jazz... the home of Zydeco... the muse for many a musical master. It's New Orleans, Louisiana, where more than three centuries of music history make it a mecca for aficionados from around the globe. From the inspirational historic sites that pay homage to the legends of yesteryear, to the countless live-music venues that showcase the sounds of the now, New Orleans croons sweet melodies for visitors 24 hours a day.

**Day 1: The Beat Is On**

Morning: Your Crescent City song best begins with beignets (New Orleans-style doughnuts) and café au lait (half chicory-infused coffee, half steamed milk) on the open-air patio at Café Du Monde, where funky street performers clue you in to the city’s rhythm. Then it’s time for a formal introduction: Visit New Orleans’ 17 historic neighborhoods on a city tour, former homes and hangouts of musicians like Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory and King Oliver.

Afternoon: Lunch on Jambalaya at a French Quarter eatery, then walk towards St. Louis Cathedral and Jackson Square. There you’ll catch a horse-and-carriage ride, led by an eccentric New Orleans character who’ll show you the heart and soul of the city. If you prefer to establish your own tempo, follow the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau’s self-guided walking tour or set out on your own and let the treasures of the Quarter unfold unplanned.

Evening: Tonight it’s traditional Creole fare for dinner with live Zydeco music on the side for an evening that’s distinctly Louisiana. When dinner’s done, you know where you’ll be headed: straight for Preservation Hall, the city’s premier jazz music venue. It’s everything you hoped it would be.

**Day 2: Razzamata-Jazz**

Morning: The ambiance is relaxed elegance at an all-you-can-eat jazz brunch featuring everything from mimosas to duck l’orange to bread pudding; get a table on the patio to dine near the band. Then head off to the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. A downloadable audio walking tour (available at nps.gov/jazz) takes you from the park to 11 other significant musical heritage sites— including Congo Square, where Creole music took its shape.

Afternoon: After the tour, a Muffaletta sandwich from Central Grocery will fuel you up for a visit to Tremé, an historic African-American neighborhood where much of New Orleans’ music has roots. Tremé’s Backstreet Cultural Museum details such traditions as jazz funerals, Mardi Gras Indians and second line parades; special exhibits on Louis Armstrong, Jellyroll Morton, Fats Domino and other local legends will inspire greatness in you.

Evening: The tone is set for dinner at Palm Court Jazz Café, where the jazz den attracts impromptu performances from local stars. Afterwards, hop a cab to Snug Harbor in the Faubourg Marigny, and you might just see Charmaine Neville or Ellis Marsalis take to the stage.

**Day 3: New Orleans Rocks**

Morning: Re-energize with a cup ‘o joe and muffin from a nearby coffee shop, then head over to Blaine Kern’s Mardi Gras World. There you’ll immerse yourself in sequins and sparkle with a warehouse tour featuring carnival’s outrageous costumes and parade floats.

Afternoon: Board the St. Charles Streetcar for a relaxing ride Uptown through the picturesque Garden District, or head straight to Magazine Street, one of the funkiest strips of antique shops, boutiques, restaurants, bars and cafes in the country. Lunch at a neighborhood Po-Boy Shop is gumbo and “dressed” Po-Boy sandwiches, then it’s time to pound the pavement in search of souvenirs—you’ll likely spend hours rummaging the racks of vintage records for hard-to-find jazz recordings.

Evening: Get in tune with Uptown tonight, starting at Mid-City Lanes Rock ’N Bowl, an unlikely—but amazing—music venue where the sounds of Kermit Ruffins and other Big Easy stars will accompany your strikes and spares. Have an order of Red Beans ‘N Rice, then head out to see who’s playing on Frenchmen Street.

**Day 4: Music Appreciation**

Morning: Sleep in a bit this morning—then treat yourself to an indulgent gospel brunch (Sundays only). When you’ve had your fill of live gospel music, grits and crawdads, head to WWOZ’s headquarters for a behind-the-scenes tour. The listener-supported radio station airs a superlative playlist of blues, jazz, Zydeco, Cajun, gospel and more.

Afternoon: A praline is a tasty snack to pack for your tour of New Orleans’ Cities of the Dead, ornate above-ground cemeteries where some of the Big Easy’s greatest music legends—Louis Prima, Buddy Bolden, Jessie Hill and Al Hirt—lie. When the tour lets you off back in the Quarter, make a beeline to the French Market to look for used CDs and music memorabilia among the vendors’ wares.

Evening: You need not go far for dinner tonight: Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville Café, for cheeseburgers (and more) is just steps from the market. You’ll want to stick around to hear the featured local bands of the night, but finish off the evening with a bang: at the bars and live music venues of Bourbon Street.

**Day 5: A Standing Ovation**

Morning: Stroll into a French Quarter café for breakfast, then visit one of city’s other great attractions: the New Orleans Museum of Art in City Park, National WWII Museum, Louisiana State Museum, Pharmacy Museum, Audubon Aquarium of the Americas or Audubon Zoo, to name a few.

Afternoon: Dress to impress for lunch today—you can’t leave the city without dining at Emeril’s, Brennan’s, K-Paul’s or Commander’s Palace (where the Turtle Soup is a must-have.) Then enjoy the afternoon at your leisure: Revisit some stores in the Quarter or check out a few funky voodoo shops.

Evening: As the sun sets, board the Steamboat Natchez or Creole Queen for a jazz dinner and cruise of the Mississippi River. Soak in the views during the two-hour ride, and after disembarking head to the House of Blues. You’ll enjoy a cocktail and (schedule permitting) catch a concert by the likes of Eric Clapton or Better Than Ezra. Don’t leave early: The rockin’ late-night dance parties start at midnight and feature everything from swing to salsa to Cajun—but you’ll be singing the blues when it’s time to leave.