

New Orleans cuisine is a fusion of cultures

Restaurant tour starts with culinary roots steeped deep in tradition

By Kami L. Rice
FOR THE TENNESSEAN

In New Orleans, food and people go together. The city's traditional cuisine tells the story of the myriad cultures New Orleans' residents have thrown into its cooking pot from its beginning. Not every city's history is so embodied in its food, but New Orleans' cuisine showcases how the city has retained a distinctive identity despite the varied people and cultures that have influenced it. New Orleans has made an art form of absorbing new traditions without losing itself. Instead, the influx of newness has enriched the city's culture, as seen in its food.

Courtesy of its colonial history and strategic location at the mouth of the Mississippi River, New Orleans represented a multi-cultural America before the city even belonged to the United States. Here, French, Spanish, Native American and African influences have mixed together, seasoned by all the other nationalities that have wandered in smaller doses into the city over its centuries.

As Chef Kevin Belton of Lil' Dizzy's Cafe explained, the result is Louisiana cooking. "Everybody pretty much took what they know from mother and grandmother and just added to it. When you look at a Louisiana recipe, things that you don't like, don't do it; things you like, add more." There's something magical about a recipe that everyone can make their own.

'Food is rooted in family'

A tour of New Orleans' favorite Creole restaurants takes you from the French Quarter and the Cen-

» TOUR, 16D



After a night out on the town, treat yourself to a breakfast of Eggs Hussarde at Brennan's Restaurant in New Orleans. The delectable dish was conceived by the Brennan family.

SUBMITTED

respected authority on Creole cooking. She and her husband, Dooky Jr., took over his parents' sandwich shop in 1946 and turned it into a fine dining restaurant that continues to be a family affair. Grandson Edgar "Dooky" Chase IV has growing responsibility in the kitchen now that he's back from studying at France's Le Cordon Bleu. Other grandsons run the dining room, and myriad relatives cover additional restaurant duties. In addition to excellent food, the dining room boasts an impressive collection of

meat omelets, hot sausage and grits. Shrimp grillades and crawfish pies are among the fare available later in the day. Chef Kevin Belton runs the kitchen.

Two Sisters Kitchen

Fourth Ward
223 N. Derbigny St.
504-524-0056

Ketchup bottles and paper place mats printed with a map of Louisiana adorn the tables at Two Sisters Kitchen, a homey Fourth Ward neighborhood restaurant. Years ago Chef

Kerry Seaton likes walking in her great-grandmother's shadow and working to maintain the restaurant's reputation for tasty Creole cuisine. She also enjoys expanding the menu with selections such as chicken fried pork chops and cheesecake. Hurricane Katrina left behind four feet of water and mold in Willie Mae's, and the community worked together to get the restaurant open again. Willie Mae's is only open for lunch, partly as a courtesy to neighbors who need to park on the area streets in the evenings.

Culture spices up Crescent City

» TOUR FROM 15D

tral Business District to the city's various wards. It also takes you deep into the family connections and neighborhood identities that make this city tick.

From one restaurant kitchen to another, it is clear that strangers are still welcomed into the city's never-full melting pot. Eat a bowl of gumbo and you've basically been adopted into the family.

Food here is not only about food, it's also about who you're cooking for and eating with.

"It's not so much what's on the table as who's at the table," said Belton. His favorite food to make? "What people like." Of course.

The food is rooted in family. These Creole restaurants are family businesses that serve the food people eat at home.

IF YOU GO

Here are some additional sources for more information on the New Orleans food scene:

www.nomenu.com

www.blackenedout.com

www.facebook.com/pages/New-Orleans-LA/

[Blackened-Out/114009475819](https://www.instagram.com/blackened-out/)

twitter.com/blackenedout

Wayne Baquet, owner of Li'l Dizzy's Cafe, said much of his menu comes from his wife's recipes.

Chef Doris Finister of Two Sisters Kitchen learned her famous shrimp and okra dish from her aunt, who fixed it on Sundays.

Chef Kerry Seaton grew up helping out at the restaurant, Willie Mae's Scotch House, that she's taken over from her great-grandmother. Belton grew up cooking with his mom.

As you begin a tour of New Orleans restaurants, it's helpful to note the dif-

ference between the Louisiana culinary terms Creole and Cajun. Creole refers to children born in a new colony to foreign parents, Belton said, and it includes Creoles of color and white Creoles.

Creole culture and food was born out of the mixing together of people and their cultures.

Cajun refers to people of French descent who came to Louisiana from Canada, settled the land outside New Orleans, and largely kept to themselves, retaining their language and food traditions.

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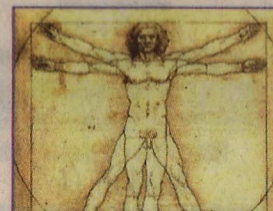
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Proceeds from the JDRF items will go to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. So while you're getting a great deal you're also giving back to a wonderful local charity.



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Therapist Christine Ackerson



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from Spell's Dance
& Theatre Shop



"Back Roads of
Tennessee" by local artist
Wendy Leonard.



Ingredients wait to be added to Chef Kevin Belton's gumbo at the New Orleans School of Cooking.

KAMI L. RICE / FOR THE TENNESSEAN

Savor the flavors of New Orleans

Brennan's Restaurant
French Quarter
417 Royal St., New Orleans
504-525-9711
www.brennansneworleans.com

Though it also serves dinner, Brennan's, the most upscale restaurant on this tour, is best known for its leisurely breakfasts that

African-American art. Recovery from Hurricane Katrina has taken time, but the restaurant has regular lunch hours now. From specialty dishes such as shrimp clemenceau to delicious Creole favorites such as jambalaya, macaroni and cheese and fried chicken, Dooky Chase's delivers.

Lil' Dizzy's Cafe

Dorothy "Doris" Finister and her husband bought Two Sisters Kitchen from the two sisters who opened the eatery. When the sisters retired, they asked Finister to keep the restaurant's name because it would bring good luck. Many of the patrons likely feel they are lucky when they dig into their meal, judging by a dining room full of locals as

The New Orleans School of Cooking

French Quarter
524 St. Louis St.
1-800-237-4841
www.neworleansschoolofcooking.com

In addition to opportunities to eat, New Orleans also boasts opportunities to learn to make your own

Five fun places where kids can play, explore

By Lynn O'Rourke Hayes
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Before your children are old enough to be bogged down with homework and commitments to sports teams, take time to explore. Here are five ideas that appeal to the junior set.

1. Duck march, Peabody Hotel, Memphis, Tenn.

Book the Ducky Day Family Package where children will be able to assist the Duckmaster in marching the hotel's five resident mallard ducks through the lobby. As part of this 77-year-old tradition, kids will become honorary Duckmasters, complete with their own Duckmaster cane. Kids love everything about this quacky tradition. A family of three pays \$340 per night; family of four, \$395.

Contact: 1-901-529-4000; www.peabody-memphis.com

2. Children's Museum, Houston.

The museum has an exhibit that will help even the youngest children learn about personal responsibility. By participating in Kidropolis, kids become part of a sophisticated, simulated economy where they earn and spend money, vote and even run the government. Kidropolis provides a unique, realistic setting for exploring what it means to work and interact with others in a

swim in a salt lagoon and get acquainted with native animals such as the monk seal. Kids learn lei-making and how to play the ukulele. Wildlife handlers will manage an introduction to the resident parrots twice a week. Kids can have their photo taken with a colorful bird perched on their arm.

Contact: 1-808-240-6436; www.grandhyattkauai.com

4. A.C. Gilbert's Discovery Village, Salem, Ore.

This hands-on children's museum appeals to those who remember A.C. Gilbert's Erector Set and numerous other inventions. The museum has stimulating educational and interactive exhibits. Also nearby is the Enchanted Forest, a story-book theme park that includes a fairytale village, haunted house, western mining town and log-flume ride. Kids also will love Salem's Riverfront Carousel that includes 42 hand-carved wooden horses and two "Oregon Trail" wagons.

Contact: 1-800-874-7000; www.travelsalem.com

5. American Girl fun, Alpharetta, Ga.

This town, 22 miles north of Atlanta, is home to the only American Girl Boutique and Bistro in the Southeast. Check into one of three hotels offering packages for young fans of the historically focused American Girl line of dolls.

From its appealing French Quarter architecture outside to its white tablecloths and excellent, friendly, bow-tie-wearing servers inside, Brennan's wins your heart even before you take a bite of its delectable French and Creole dishes. Owned by Pip, Jimmy and Ted Brennan, Brennan's was founded by their late father in 1946 and has given the world such original dishes as Bananas Foster and Eggs Hussarde. Other specialties include New Orleans turtle soup and oysters Rockefeller. Executive Chef Lazone Randolph now helms the kitchen after beginning his Brennan's career in 1965 fresh out of high school.

Dooky Chase Restaurant

Sixth Ward
2301 Orleans Ave.
504-821-0535 or
504-821-0600

Chef Leah Chase, the matriarch of Dooky Chase's, is a nationally respected authority on Creole cooking. She and her husband, Dooky Jr., took over his parents' sandwich shop in 1946 and turned it into a fine dining restaurant that continues to be a family affair. Grandson Edgar "Dooky" Chase IV has growing responsibility in the kitchen now that he's back from studying at France's Le Cordon Bleu. Other grandsons run the dining room, and myriad relatives cover additional restaurant duties. In addition to excellent food, the dining room boasts an impressive collection of

1500 Esplanade Ave.
504-569-8997
Central Business District
610 Poydras St.
504-212-5656

Li'l Dizzy's began as a 7th Ward neighborhood cafe that continued the long line of Baquet family restaurants launched in the early 1940s. Two years ago, Wayne Baquet opened a second Li'l Dizzy's location in the Whitney Bank Building in New Orleans' Central Business District. The walls of the laid-back neighborhood cafe are covered with photos of luminaries, including President George W. Bush, who have dined there. The Central Business District location offers an upscale yet comfortable setting that includes a private dining room option in the former bank vault and a teller counter turned bar. While their ambiance is different, both locations share the same delicious, authentic Creole fare. Brunch includes dishes such as jambalaya omelets, crab meat omelets, hot sausage and grits. Shrimp grillades and crawfish pies are among the fare available later in the day. Chef Kevin Belton runs the kitchen.

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Ketchup bottles and paper place mats printed with a map of Louisiana adorn the tables at Two Sisters Kitchen, a homey Fourth Ward neighborhood restaurant. Years ago Chef

the recommendation of their airport shuttle driver. The family members and staff working in the tiny kitchen whip out meals all day, including Finister's shrimp and okra specialty. Breakfast includes golden pancakes, delicious oniony hash browns and tasty grits.

Willie Mae's Scotch House

Sixth Ward
2401 Saint Ann St.
504-822-9503

Known for its fried chicken, Willie Mae's Scotch House also serves delicious catfish, pork chops and red beans and rice from its corner in a Sixth Ward neighborhood. Willie Mae Seaton opened the establishment as a bar in 1957 and added the restaurant in 1972. She handed the restaurant's reins over to great-granddaughter Kerry Seaton when, in her 90s, she retired post-Katrina. Twenty-nine-year-old Kerry Seaton likes walking in her great-grandmother's shadow and working to maintain the restaurant's reputation for tasty Creole cuisine. She also enjoys expanding the menu with selections such as chicken fried pork chops and cheesecake. Hurricane Katrina left behind four feet of water and mold in Willie Mae's, and the community worked together to get the restaurant open again. Willie Mae's is only open for lunch, partly as a courtesy to neighbors who need to park on the area streets in the evenings.

you won't go into withdrawal when you return home. The New Orleans School of Cooking offers classes on cooking New Orleans specialties, taught by chefs who are experts in Louisiana cooking. In addition to learning recipes and technique, you will leave your class with a better understanding of Louisiana history and a few tall tales as souvenirs.

this and other family-friendly attractions. Contact: 1-713-522-1138; www.cmhouston.org/kidtropolis; www.citypass.com/Houston

3. Hawaiian holiday, Kauai. Many hotel camps for kids offer an opportunity for mom and dad to have a day for themselves. At Camp Hyatt on Kauai, kids ages 3 to 12 will learn about Hawaiian culture,

Expect extras such as cookies and milk delivered to the room, pink linens and a bed for the doll. Also nearby: Cooler Family Skate Center, the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta and Zoo Atlanta.

Contact: 1-678-297-2811; www.awesomeal-phareta.com (click on "Where to Stay" then "American Girl packages")



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