

# Cruise from New Orleans to Mexico

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SPECIAL WRITERS

**D**o you want to take a cruise, see the world, eat exotic foods, drink, shop, and soak up the rays... and you're on a budget? New Orleans is just the place for you.

New Orleans is a lively port city with fascinating history, culture, architecture, food, music, steamboats, and oh yeah...cruise ships. Done right, you can do everything you want and not break the bank.

## Value

Commodore Cruise's motto is "The best value in the Caribbean," and they mean it. Rates for the 5-day cruise start at \$369 (plus port charges of \$90); the 7-day cruise starts at \$479 (plus port charges of \$120). Shore excursions are not included in the price of the cruise. Tours range from \$28 to \$79. We cruised from New Orleans to Mexico on the Enchanted Capri - ate, gambled, played, shopped, and sunned for 5 days. The Enchanted Capri is half-owned by the Isle of Capri casino chain, located in Southern states, which means that the casino is sizable compared to other ships. Drinks are on-the-house while gambling. Dress is casual on Commodore.

## Excursions

We stopped at Playa del Carmen to discharge passengers for shore excursion to an EcoPark at Xcaret. Then on to Cozumel and Progreso (the port for Merida). Most shore excursions on Cozumel involved snorkeling and visiting pristine white sand beaches; at Progreso the choices included visits to either of two important archeological sites (Mayan ruins) at Uxmal and Chichen-Itza.

Commodore has three small ships, carrying only 500 to 750 passengers each, with one crew member for every two passengers. The result - great service. Cruises are from five to seven days with itineraries to the Caribbean and a combination of

## If you go

■ For information and reservations on any Commodore Cruise Ship, call (800) 237-5361 or visit their Web site, [www.commodorecruise.com](http://www.commodorecruise.com)



**Jazzy:** Musicians perform in front of a boat on the Mississippi River.

■ A passport or birth certificate is required as proof of U.S. citizenship.

■ Opt for the shore excursion to the Tulum Ruins and snorkeling at Playa Del Carmen instead of Cozumel.

■ Commodore's Enchanted Isle offers youth programs for three different age groups of children at no extra charge. Plan a wedding and reception while the vessel is docked in New Orleans.

■ Call (800) 684-3183 for a "Free Good Times Guide to New Orleans," with over \$2,500 in coupons or visit their Web site, [www.new-orleansonline.com](http://www.new-orleansonline.com)

■ Check out Preservation Hall in the French Quarter where \$4 gets you some of the best jazz in the city.

■ Public transportation (buses and trolleys) save money. The St. Charles Avenue Trolley is one of the oldest continuously operating street railways offering a view of beautiful mansions of the Garden District and Carrollton Avenue.

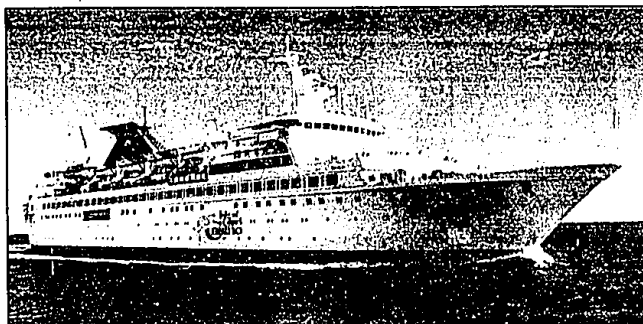
■ Your best bet is to stay in hotels/motels at the perimeter of the French Quarter. They are quieter and reasonably priced; most include a continental breakfast. Check rates at the Ambassador Hotel, Comfort Suites, Best Western Parc St. Charles, and Chateau Dupre. Motels in the suburb of Metairie offer free shuttle service to the French Quarter.

Caribbean and Mexico, Key West or Central America (Belize and Honduras). Cabins are small and not very glamorous - but remember, you spend little time there and this is a bargain cruise. Inside cabins are more spacious but are without pot-holes. The few bedroom suites, the lounge, and movie theater are glitzy. For a budget cruise, the variety and excellent quality of the meals surprised us. Diner entrees included filet mignon, prime rib and lobster tails. You can literally eat from 6 a.m. until midnight.

This is a fun ship with great group games and first class entertainment in the lounge. You can spend your casino winnings overseas in upscale shops geared to American tastes and expectations, or wait to treat yourself in New Orleans.

## Extraordinary experience

Leave the ship by 9 a.m. when the cruise ship docks in New Orleans and you are ready to start on another extraordinary experience. New Orleans is geared to tourists. There's something for everybody. The French Quarter is an area of about 90 square blocks. It contains many historical buildings, such as The Cabildo (the Louisiana State Museum), the Presbytere, and the Old U.S. Mint. These buildings house exhibits like the History of Jazz and Mardi Gras. Walk the narrow streets and enjoy the variety of enchanting 1800s architecture, charming courtyards and elegant antique shops. Delight in the music that abounds on the streets, luxuriate in cafe au lait and beignets at the Cafe du Monde or gamble at Harrah's.



**Cruising:** Enchanted Capri is one of Commodore Cruise Line's ships.

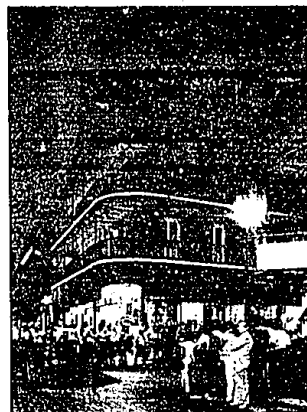
New Orleans is famous for its eateries and unique foods, jazz, riverboats, Mardi Gras, art galleries, elegant antique shops with fine silver jewelry and trendy boutiques. For a taste of New Orleans try Arnaud's, Tujagues, Court of Two Sisters, Gallatoire's, The Gumbo Shop, and Ralph & Kacoo's.

There's a first class, easy-to-get-around aquarium with many huge floor-to-ceiling tanks and adjacent IMAX Theater. The Audubon Zoo is easy to cover without too much walking. The exhibits are unusual and the grounds are imaginative, particularly the Louisiana Swamp and white alligators.

A short free ferry ride takes you to Mardi Gras World where you get insights into how those fabulous parade floats are made, as well as seeing completed floats. You can also try on flamboyant headpieces and costumes, so bring your camera.

The New Orleans Art Museum in City Park deserves the attention of art lovers. It has one of the finest collections of French painting, American artists, decorative artists and a Faberge collection.

Unique, food, family fun, tours, nightlife, and inescapable history emanating from most every



**Historical:** Buildings on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter have ornamental wrought iron railings.

street and shop - New Orleans has it all. Visit, and join the ranks of people who rave about this most unusual port city.

Norma and Wendy Schonwetter are Farmington residents. Tell us about your trip.

Send stories, with photographs, for consideration on our Travel page to Keely Wygonik, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150 or e-mail stories to [kwygonik@ke.com](mailto:kwygonik@ke.com).

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