

First Audio Self-Guided Tour of Hurricane Katrina's Impact on New Orleans to be released on Second Anniversary of Disaster

Katrina survivor, New Orleans businesswoman bounces back, produces "Hurricane Katrina: Devastation & Progress and Her Lessons for Us All," a story by locals about locals, proceeds benefit rebuilding organizations.

(New Orleans, LA) August 24, 2007 – Inspired by her passion for her city and her long experience in the tourism industry, seventh-generation New Orleanian Pamela Pipes has released the first self-guided audio tour of post-Katrina New Orleans. "Hurricane Katrina: Devastation & Progress and Her Lessons for Us All" is designed for visitors to New Orleans who want to witness the effects of the nation's most damaging natural and man-made disaster as well as the rebuilding efforts. Using the two-CD set, drivers can visit all the key sites.

"You just can't understand what happened unless you see it for yourself," says Pipes, who was uprooted by Hurricane Katrina, returning to her beloved home city just weeks after the storm. Her tourism company, New Orleans A La Carde, which stocked New Orleans and surrounding areas with tourist attraction materials, was swamped in the deluge, though she has since revived it. She has since turned Katrina's devastation into an opportunity to give back to a community that gave her so much.

Pipes' new business, Tours BaYou, presents self-guided audio tours that lead visitors through Katrina's wake to experience its aftermath firsthand. During the tours, visitors will see and hear personal stories behind the most affected neighborhoods, the science underlying coastal erosion and restoration, and local tales of heroism and help. Narrators lead tourists (and residents) through places including the Lower Ninth Ward, Gentilly, Lakeview, the Musicians Village and the five major levee breaks, sharing their stories at these sites.

"Part of rebuilding New Orleans includes reaching out to people who care, want to hear our message and want to help," she said. "It's important to bring people to the heart of this historic event, so they will understand what happened here and the importance of our city to the nation. The tour is also designed to encourage people to ask the right questions of their leaders. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires and terrorism can happen anywhere – we must all know how to be prepared."

Among the narrators, all of whom are civic leaders, are New Orleans musician Charmaine Neville; Women of the Storm founder, Anne Milling; and King Milling, chairman of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Coastal Restoration.

The two disc CD titled "Hurricane Katrina: Devastation & Progress and Her Lessons for Us All" covers 50 miles in three to four hours; listeners can also choose one- and two-hour options, returning to complete the tour at a more convenient time. It is available for purchase or download at www.alanet.com as well as stores throughout the New Orleans area. A portion of the proceeds will go to benefit organizations that are working to rebuild New Orleans.

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Pamela Pipes installing her makeshift street signs throughout New Orleans to replace those still missing.

After Katrina, New Orleans not so Big, anything but Easy



by Virginie Montet

Sat Oct 27, 1:55 PM ET

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans is still licking its wounds but efforts are being made to bring back the tourists that once made the Big Easy a major draw.

But one enterprising resident, Pamela Pipes, has released the first audio guide to the disaster and its aftermath.

"When Katrina hit, I was out of business, I was in exile. I slept in 16 beds before I came back. My home was not flooded, but (I had) no phone, no electricity for six months. There were no women in the city, mostly men," recalls Pipes, a seventh-generation New Orleans resident.

More than two years on, much of the sultry city famed for its jazz and Creole cooking still lies abandoned after seas whipped up by the hurricane breached its levees on August 29, 2005.

While parts of the city, such as the famous French Quarter, survived thanks to their slightly higher elevation, much has been left to rot.

Pipes has now produced "Hurricane Katrina: Self-guided tour - witness devastation and progress and learn her lessons for all of us" as part of a bid to entice the tourists back.

"I wanted to be a witness so the people know what happened," Pipes told AFP, noting: "It's not an easy tour. I've sold thousands of them, and people are doing it."

New Orleans expects six million visitors in 2007, almost twice the number who came in 2006 but still well below the 10-million-a-year before the disaster.

Some 80 percent of the city was left uninhabitable by Katrina and thousands of Louisiana families are still living in cramped government-supplied trailers.

Billions of dollars in federal aid remains wrapped up in bureaucratic red tape and blame is flying in all directions. The musicians and artists who made the jazz mecca unlike any other place in the country are struggling with exorbitant rents, rising utilities costs, high insurance, spiking property taxes and violent crime.

A recent government study found that mental illness has doubled among Gulf Coast residents and there is a surge in the number of people considering suicide. New Orleans, which still has only 275,000 residents, has one of the highest per capita murder rates in the United States.

Some 1,600 people were killed, and almost half the city's residents who fled did not come back. Even more than two years on, tour "buses are not allowed in (the devastated) Lower 9th Ward, it doesn't look right," explained Pipes.

On her anecdote-packed tour, one stop is in front of an abandoned house, where curious visitors can see the opening in the roof through which its desperate owners fled for help.

On the facades of homes, writing in blood red paint by rescue workers remains as clear as the day it was written, including the date authorities passed by and the number of bodies they found.

Further on, Pipes voice, to the strains of dramatic music, indicates the high water lines on porch pillars well over the height of the average person.

Putting together the tour was not easy, Pipes says.

"It's not like doing a tour of colonial Williamsburg where everything has been the same for hundreds of years. When I started to

do the tour, every day something changed. I would write about the pumps and then the next day the pumps were destroyed because they didn't work. It was like a moving target," she recalled.

The commentary tells a tale focusing on a engineering fault in the design of the levees and the US federal government's sluggish response.

It details the city's geography, topography, canals, elevation and the location of levees. It takes visitors to the spots where the levees burst.

Some locations are familiar, like the Superdome, the huge stadium shown on television which took in thousands of refugees, or a blue boat used to rescue locals.

For some streets, Pipes had to put up new street signs so people on her tour would not get lost.

"I went to a sign shop. I needed 30 street signs. I paid with my own money. I didn't want my visitors to get lost. You know, this is a citizen driven recovery. The citizens are doing what has to be done. We are fighting together to get back," she said.

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The Boston Globe

REAL DEALS

Big Easy wants tourists to come marching in

By Richard P. Carpenter, Globe Correspondent | September 9, 2007

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans's troubles are hardly at an end, but tourism has come marching back. The sounds of zydeco, jazz, rock, and so many other kinds of music pulse from the clubs on bustling Bourbon Street and, indeed, throughout much of the city. Diners spill powdered sugar on their clothes from the beignets at Café du Monde. The drama and terror of one of history's greatest conflicts is captured at the National World War II Museum. The Carnival Fantasy sails out of the new Erato Street Cruise Terminal, with other cruise ships soon to follow. And the Bananas Foster at Brennan's is as addictive as ever.

The sparkle is back on the tourist trail as the city's recovery continues. Much work remains and some popular spots have yet to return, while others may never do so. But tourist dollars are helping, according to the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau. Tourism generates \$5 billion in visitor spending and creates 85,000 jobs, the bureau says.

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New Orleans has many fine restaurants - Arnaud's, Broussard's, Luke, Muriel's, Bourbon House, GW Fins, the Besh Steakhouse, and the Court of Two Sisters among them. But budget-minded travelers may find two of them especially rewarding. The Gumbo Shop on St. Peter Street offers a true taste of New Orleans called the Complete Creole Dinner for \$19.99, with choices including seafood okra gumbo, crawfish etouffee, and praline sundae. Meanwhile, Mother's on Poydras Street presents down-home cooking at reasonable prices. A breakfast of eggs and grits, for example, costs just \$4.50.

Visit gumboshop.com and mothersrestaurant.net.

The Royal Sonesta Hotel New Orleans on Bourbon Street has a three-night Streetcar Named Desire package for \$399 a person, including accommodations; breakfast one morning from room service or in the hotel's Begue's Restaurant; hurricane cocktails and souvenir glasses at Pat O'Brien's; a choice of a swamp, plantation, or city tour; one lunch at the hotel's Desire restaurant; dinner one evening at Arnaud's or Begue's; and his and her Mardi Gras masks.

Call 800-766-3782 or visit sonesta.com/royalneworleans.

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The tour is available for purchase or download at alanet.com for \$19.95 and at stores in the New Orleans area.

For those who prefer a guide, Tours by Isabelle offers a Post-Katrina City Tour for \$58 a person that visits both the city's most famous sites, from the French Quarter to Bayou St. John, and the hurricane-affected areas.

Visit toursbyisabelle.com or call 877-665-8687.

The city allows gaming, and at Harrah's New Orleans Hotel & Casino, a Dusk till Dawn package begins at \$199 a night and features accommodations in a luxury room plus breakfast for two at Riche, Todd English's brasserie. Those who book online at least 14 days in advance can save up to 20 percent.

Visit harrahs.com or call 504-533-6000.

A New Orleans Power Pass includes admission to 30 attractions, including the war museum and Garden District Walking Tour, plus discounts at other spots, and is available for one, two, three, or five consecutive days, with prices for adults from \$55 to \$127. The same company also offers a Meal Ticket, good for breakfast, lunch, and dinner at eight well-known restaurants with prices from \$45 to \$191.

Go to visiticket.com or call 800-490-9330.

Some say that ghosts haunt many places in the Crescent City. With Ghost Expeditions, participants can join in three-hour field investigations combining scientific methods and psychic exercises, directed by a Ghost Expeditions researcher, or conduct their own "freestyle" ghost hunts or paranormal investigations. The cost is \$75 per participant for guided expeditions and \$26 per hour for freestyle expeditions.

Visit ghostexpeditions.com.

Because New Orleans is a 24-hour city, the Convention & Visitors Bureau has launched 24NOLA, an interactive website and planning tool, with visitor suggestions that are not always found in guidebooks.

Visit foreverneworleans.com/24.

When not included, hotel taxes, airport fees, and port charges can add significantly to the price of a trip. Most prices quoted are for double occupancy; solo travelers will usually pay more. Offers are subject to availability and there may be blackout dates. Richard P. Carpenter can be reached at carpenter@globe.com.



Disaster leaves behind a tale of two cities

By Sheila McNulty in New Orleans

Financial Times

Updated: 10:42 p.m. CT Aug 28, 2007

Rachelle Blue snuggles her son, DJ, on an overstuffed sofa in her newly renovated home. Fountains flow into the swimming pool outside the picture window behind her.

It is hard to believe that two years ago Hurricane Katrina forced a wall of water over the nearby levee, leaving 10 feet of water in here for three weeks until the city drained.

But step outside and reminders are everywhere. The once bustling middle-class Lakeview neighbourhood remains mostly empty. Across the street a home is filled with debris untouched since the hurricane.

"What I hate about living here right now is that house; you never know what is going to come out of that house," Ms Blue said. "This is why the neighbourhood is not coming back as fast as it could. You look across the street and it is a reminder."

Such reminders are in every neighbourhood hit hard by the storm. Yet New Orleans's metropolitan area is seven times the size of Manhattan, so not every parish flooded.

Airport passengers are down only 10 per cent, hotel rooms down 17 per cent and restaurants down 23 per cent compared with before Katrina. But the neighbourhoods tell a different story.

"The truth is it's a tale of two cities," said Peter Ricchiuti, assistant dean at Tulane University business school. "The university area and the French Quarter are fine. Six blocks in the other direction it looks like the storm hit

yesterday."

He is not exaggerating. A five-hour drive reveals streets deserted for block after block.

Some "Stop" signs remain bent to the ground. Every few yards a stairway leads nowhere – the homes having been swept away. Here a gate stands with a mangled house behind it; there, a row of houses with holes hatched through roofs reveal how families escaped as the water reached attics.

The red paint markings by rescue squads who went from house to house after waters receded remain on tens of thousands of homes. One shows three sets – the first by teams who found nothing, and the third revealing the discovery of three bodies trapped in the rafters.

Amid this haunting debris is a rare find – Stewart's Diner, which Kim Stewart opened last year in time for President George W. Bush to visit during his trip to the city. Yet this is not trumpeted, as many hold Mr Bush – and all other levels of government – responsible for the slow assistance given since the hurricane.

"I'm not going to put all of the blame on him, just some of the blame," Ms Stewart says. She has yet to get a dime from the government, despite almost \$7bn in federal assistance to rebuild homes, schools and infrastructure. The big-ticket items, such as the stadium and convention centre, have been taken care of, but of the 181,608 who applied for funds to rebuild homes, only 40,433 have closed.

"The biggest issue hindering us is housing," said Mark Drennan, president of GNO, an economic development agency. "There are still tens of thousands of homeowners without the money to fund renovations."

Ms Stewart used savings to reopen her restaurant. Yet only 20 per cent of the neighbourhood around her is repopulated, so business is slow: "We just felt if we made the restaurant, it would encourage somebody else to make a move."

Others have the same idea; a few blocks away a man paints his newly renovated home bright yellow on an otherwise abandoned street.

"This is a citizen-led recovery," said Pamela Pipes.

This week Ms Pipes launched a self-guided tour of Katrina's destruction, but realised people could not follow it with many street signs still missing. She hired a sign painter to make street signs and spent Sunday with a carpenter hanging them up.

Residents know another hurricane could devastate the city again; only 20 per cent of levees are as high as they should be, and the government admits they would not protect against a Category 5 hurricane. Indeed, one levee that has for years stood unfinished because of government infighting about who should fund it.

Nonetheless, some people refuse to give up on the city.

"People are trying to come back and put their houses back together," said Harold Augustine, who mans a volunteer tool-lending and general assistance effort in the Lower Ninth Ward.

"They're doing anything and everything to survive. But it will never be the same again."

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Why Stay?

New Orleanians tell CityBusiness why they're not giving up on the city

by April Capochino



Enlarge photo

When talking about Hurricane Katrina and the madness that followed, Pamela Pipes' eyes water, her voice cracks a bit and she grows frustrated.

"It's emotional," said Pipes, wiping tears from her eyes before they have a chance to fall down her cheeks. "What can I say?"

It's hard for someone like Pipes not to shed tears when talking about the strife of her city. The 53-year-old mother of two is a seventh-generation New Orleanian, a graduate of Louis S. McGehee School and an entrepreneur.

But her A la Carde business was hard hit by the storm.

A la Carde consisted of boxes of business cards for tourist hot spots across the city. She developed marketing strategies for clients, including Audubon Zoo and Grayline Tours.

After the storm, many boxes were destroyed and about half her clients were no longer in business. She had to redo everything.

"I could've started several businesses faster in other cities than what it's taken me to stabilize this one," said Pipes, who is also a member of the Women of the Storm group and Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans.

When asked why she would stay, she paused a moment and then answered, "Do you leave or do you fight for a place that has nourished you for so many years? This place has made me who I am. It's only fair that I give them what they've given me. It's payback time."

— April Capochino

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