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January 2022 ISSUE

Christmas in New Orleans by George Darnell



December 13 -18, 2021

Nine couples from Lake Frederick had a Christmas Season adventure in New Orleans:

1. George and Michelle Darnell
2. Frank Hall and Christine Chu
3. Thomas and Linda Carroll
4. Robert and Kay Ross
5. Jason and Rene Bush
6. Stephen and Dolores Skordinski
7. Gregory Payonk and Louise Liddle
8. Gary and Phyllis Ford
9. James and Terri Katzenberger

Our adventure began on Monday, Dec 13, about 7:30 p.m., boarding an Amtrak Crescent train in Manassas, VA. The station has been restored to its 1914 look with wooden bench seats in the waiting room and modern restrooms. It serves Virginia Railway Express (VRE) commuter rail as well as Amtrak passengers. Just before our train arrived, we were treated to a performance by the Bull Run Cloggers on the platform.



Some of us travelled in coach, others in roomettes, and some in full rooms. Meals were included for sleeper car passengers, but not coach. Because of Covid restrictions, the dining car was not operating; there was only two club cars with snack bar service. Meals could be served in your room or taken at tables in the club car. They were generous and on a par with airline food. Bar drinks were available and complimentary wine or beer could be ordered with dinner. Rooms and roomettes had their own sinks and toilets. Masks had to be worn except in your room. Each car had an attendant to help with

UPCOMING EVENTS

Next Meeting
Monday, January 10, 2022
Rachel's Kitchen
11:30 a.m.
Potluck
Please Bring a Dish to Share!

luggage, serve meals, and make beds for sleeping. Getting into the upper berth was a bit of a challenge for some of us, but webbing kept us from falling out. The engineer blew the whistle at every railroad crossing all night long. After a while, that and the rocking of the train did not matter. Sleep came anyway.



Freight trains have precedence on rail lines, and we encountered several delays getting to New Orleans. The last delay was caused by a helicopter crash on the bridge across the lake into New Orleans. So, rather than the scheduled arrival of 9 p.m. Tuesday, we finally arrived at 2 a.m. Wednesday. Amtrak provided compensation in the form of a credit toward future travel to sleeper car passengers who requested it. We were able to take taxis to our Wyndham New Orleans French Quarter Hotel and were in our rooms by 3 a.m. We had alerted the hotel by phone of the train delay. Some of our rooms had views of the Mississippi River and French Quarter.

Three nights stay in a standard double room was included in our Amtrak vacation package.

After a brief sleep, we started our tours of the city on Wednesday. Our vacation package included vouchers for several sites and excursions that we booked in advance of our arrival. Michelle and I chose a van tour of the city in the morning and were joined by Robert and Kay Ross and Jason and Rene Bush. Our guide, a graduate of Loyola whose family lived in New Orleans for generations, drove us through all sections of the city, pointing out points of interest and stopping at a cemetery and the city park to walk around. Orleans for generations, drove us through all sections of the city, pointing out points of interest and stopping at a cemetery and the city park to walk around.





In the afternoon we were joined by Greg and Louise for a cooking class in the French Quarter. After listening to another history of New Orleans and its styles of cooking, we sampled Creole (red sauce) and Cajun (brown sauce) dishes with Abita beer or iced tea. Michelle did a little kitchen shopping before we walked to our hotel.



That evening we walked across Canal Street all lighted for Christmas on our way to the St. Charles Streetcar for a round-trip through the Garden District. We passed Tulane and Loyola Universities and enjoyed the Christmas lights along the way. Others enjoyed the lights of the French Quarter and hotel lobbies.





On Thursday morning, we cancelled a planned walking tour of the homes in Garden District. Instead, we took a cab to Café Du Monde for coffee and beignets. After enjoying some people-watching, we strolled to the park next door between the river and Jackson Square to enjoy the balmy Spring-like morning before taking a carriage ride through the French Quarter.

Michelle was concerned about being able to climb into the carriage, but our woman driver, a Tulane graduate whose mule was skittish around water, steadied the carriage and helped Michelle into it. Our ride was delightful as our driver told us the history of the French Quarter and pointed out notable homes and hotels.



A Mississippi River Paddle Wheeler excursion was our choice for Thursday afternoon. The walk from Jackson Square to the boat dock was longer than we expected. Michelle flagged down a riverside park maintenance man in a John Deere cart and asked if he could give us a ride to the dock. He did so and refused to take a tip: New Orleans hospitality!



We took seats on the outside aft deck by the paddlewheel and listened to our narrator give us yet another history of New Orleans, including the famous Battle of New Orleans. He was a West Point graduate and a retired lawyer. His resonate baritone voice captured our attention.

He pointed out several sights along the river, including a Navy cargo ship, as we “paddled” our way to the Battle of New Orleans National Park. Food and drink were available in the galley. So, we decided to have some Red Beans and Rice while others explored the park.



On the way back to New Orleans, our narrator told us the tragic story of how Hurricane Katrina had devastated the city and thousands of lives. He pointed out blue tarps provided by FEMA that still covered some roofs. The city is still recovering from Katrina, the recent Hurricane IDA, and the loss of tourism during the pandemic. Restaurants were requiring proof of vaccination and not seating anyone after 8 p.m.

Others in our group chose to feed marshmallows to alligators on a Bayou and Swamp Cruise, or visit the World War II Museum and other attractions.





We came together Thursday night for an included dinner at Tujague's historic restaurant in the French Quarter. Dinner was superb and we had time to catch up on what each couple had done in New Orleans.

The pictures in this report are just the highlights of what we experienced.

Michelle flagged down a pedicab after dinner and he pedaled us back to our hotel.

On Friday morning we gathered in the VIP lounge of Amtrak's Union Station to await boarding of the Northbound Crescent Train. The station was bright and clean. We continued to swap stories over complimentary coffee before boarding. The trip home was uneventful, and we were only 1.5 hours late arriving in Manassas Saturday afternoon. Trains do not pass through the best parts of our towns, cities, and countryside, but the ride through Danville, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Orange, and Culpeper to Manassas was very pleasant. The attendants helped us with our luggage as we deboarded the train.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Gary and Lynda Clark of Classy Cowboy Vans for making extraordinary efforts to ensure we had round trip transportation from Lake Frederick to the Manassas Train Station. We also thank the lodge for letting us park our cars by the tennis courts for this trip.



Calendar of Trips Planned for 2022

- Jan 28—Mt Jackson for Shenandoah Caverns, Route 11 Chips, Caverns, Route 11 Chips, Meems Bottom Covered Bridge, Winery at Kindred Point; \$35 pp for van; 8 min-14 max
- Feb 14—Valentine's Day Wine and Cheese Party in Rachel's Kitchen; details TBA
- Mar 17—St. Patrick's Pub Crawl
- Mar 23—Battle of Kernstown with lunch
- Apr 9-26—Panama Canal Cruise on Holland America; 18 days/ 17 nights; from \$3539 pp double plus R/T airfare TBA. Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Apr 28—Apple Blossom Parade
- Apr 28-30—Richmond, VA Tour
- May 14—Royal Caribbean 5-day Cruise from Baltimore to Bermuda
- May—Vint Hills Farm for Cold War Museum, Brewery, Winery, and Lunch
- Jun 5-8—Niagara Falls Moments to Remember; 4 days/3 nights; \$719 pp double, \$929 single, R/T coach - Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- July —Exploring the Northern Neck: Lee Family Estate, Tangier Island, Steamboat Museum, Wineries, Tides Inn for two nights
- Jul 19-21—Great Smoky Mountain Memories: Dollywood, Titanic Museum & Hatfield & McCoy Dinner Feud; 3 days/2 nights; \$659 pp double, \$889 single R/T coach - Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Aug —Gettysburg & Wine tours
- Aug 1-13—The Best of Alaska: Klondike, Denali & Glacier Bay Cruise & Train Tour; 13 days/12 nights; from \$4742 plus airfare (TBA) - Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Sep — WV Panhandle Tour with overnight at the Bavarian Inn, Shepherdstown
- Sep 29— Oktoberfest Brewery Tour
- Oct 5-11—Iceland Land Tour R/T Dulles; 7 days/6 nights/7 meals; \$3999 pp double/ \$4850 single incl airfare— Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Oct 19-21 Wonders of WV: Hawks Nest State Park & New River Gorge; 3 days/ 2 nights/ 5 meals/ RT Coach; \$609 pp double; \$809 single - Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Nov —11-day American Cruise Lines Chesapeake Bay American Revolution Steamboat Cruise R/T Baltimore
- Nov 25-28—A Country Christmas at Opryland Hotel, Nashville; 4 days/3 nights/2 meals; \$1169 pp double, \$1579 single, R/T coach - Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Nov 29-30 — Candlelight Christmas at Biltmore Estate & Grove Park Inn; 2 days/1 night/2 meals; \$529 pp double/\$609 single; R/T motor coach - Contact <https://www.shenandoahtours.com/>
- Dec 4-7—Christmas at the Greenbrier by Amtrak train R/T Manassas
- Dec 5 or 9 — Christmas at Union Station in DC by MARC train R/T from Charles Town

Please note: Shenandoah Tours fill quickly; make reservations early!

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