You can’t make the trip to New Orleans for NAESP’s Annual Convention and Exposition without checking out a few of the historic and cultural attractions that are within a short walk, or streetcar or cab ride, from the Morial Convention Center and the convention hotels. Here’s a taste of what you can explore between convention events.
Long acclaimed as one of the best urban parks in the country, Audubon Park was formerly the plantation of Étienne de Boré, the father of the granulated sugar industry in Louisiana. The 340-acre park was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the same architect who laid out New York’s Central Park, and was named for the famed Louisiana naturalist John James Audubon, who spent many years working in and around New Orleans. This property comprises miles of winding lagoons and trails, a public golf course, and the Audubon Zoological Park. One of the country’s top-ranked zoos, it offers an exotic mix of nearly 2,000 animals from around the globe, ranging from the unique white alligators to the extraordinary white tigers, innovative natural habitats, lush gardens and resting spots, a mystical Louisiana swamp, and “hands-on” animal encounters.

The French Quarter, also known as Vieux Carré, sits on a crescent in the Mississippi River. It is the city’s cultural hub, and within its limits, you'll find a mix of Spanish, French, Creole, and American architecture. Besides its obvious architectural distinction, the French Quarter offers visitors a plethora of different experiences. Browse the treasure trove at the French Market, shade yourself in Jackson Square, or munch on a muffuletta at Central Grocery.

Jackson Square is the virtual center of New Orleans, having been laid out in 1718 as the town square. Today, it is a beautifully landscaped park and resting spot, with the St. Louis Cathedral, the Cabildo, and the Presbytere forming an impressive backdrop. The square park is surrounded by a beautiful ironwork fence, on which artists often hang their works.

Faubourg Marigny, developed as New Orleans’ second suburb in 1806, is on the beaten path for those looking for great music, fine food, and an authentic, historic neighborhood. Weekends bring shoppers to independent galleries and rummage stores in lower Marigny, while the restaurants and jazz clubs of the Marigny Triangle draw people from everywhere.

The Garden District is a dynamic community grounded in a strong sense of tradition. Some of its homes are still known by the names of the families that built them more than a century ago, and official flags designating Mardi Gras Royalty are a common sight here during carnival season. Named for its spacious, showy gardens, the Garden District is noted for its elegant homes and stylish settings.

St. Charles Avenue has been described most aptly as “The Jewel of America’s Grand Avenues.” It is the most superb collection of great mansions of the South and offers visitors an opportunity to enjoy the lofty magnificence of 19th century New Orleans. A ride on the Saint Charles streetcar provides a unique way to enjoy the splendor of the avenue, from the statuesque monument at Lee Circle to its end in the old upriver town of Carrollton.

Like so many American urban centers, the Central Business District used to be a ghost town after work, but not anymore. Evenings now bring crowds to historic Lafayette Square for free concerts. The Orpheum, home to the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, and numerous smaller theaters and cabarets come to life for nighttime performances. The district also invites visitors to the Aquarium of the Americas, Harrah’s Casino, and great shopping at Canal Place.

Virtually the only section of New Orleans’ 1984 World’s Fair left standing is the Riverwalk Marketplace, a three-tiered enclosed mall that spans the riverfront from the Spanish Plaza to the Convention Center. This busy shopping mall contains more than 140 specialty shops, a food court, and an upper-story balcony/walk where you can view the constant flow of Mississippi River traffic and the occasional cruise ship that docks there.

The Warehouse District, better known today as the New Orleans Arts District, is a historic neighborhood filled with more than 25 art galleries, fine restaurants—including the original Emeril’s—and world-class museums. Among the main attractions are the Contemporary Arts Center and the National World War II Museum.

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