The Beauty of Bali—Exotic & Enchanting

by Nancy Bestor

For me, different vacations evoke different sensory memories. Often it’s taste (okay a lot of times it’s taste—because if you know me, you also know that food is my top priority). Case in point, my mom cooks a few dishes that immediately take me back to my visits to her home country of Croatia. Other times it’s smell. For example, certain laundry detergents remind me of Thailand. This sounds weird I know, but we had our laundry done a few times in Thailand—for less than $2 for a huge load—and I will always remember its wonderful aroma when it came back. I can’t name the laundry detergent here at home that reminds me of Thailand, maybe it’s not even detergent, but often the smell of clean laundry takes me back to the idyllic island of Koh Phi Phi.

That’s why I am certain that photos of beautiful scenery will always remind me of our recent trip to Bali. Bali is perhaps the most picturesque place we’ve ever visited, with vibrant green vistas of rice paddies everywhere we looked. Although the food was good, and our laundry smelled nice when we got it done, it’s the sights that will forever stay in my mind.

We spent two full weeks on this small Indonesian island, and with an inexpensive rental car were able to explore four unique destinations. The first was the southern town of Bingin Beach on the Bukit peninsula. As a world renowned surfers paradise, the Bukit peninsula is as laid back as you’d expect, and was the perfect first stop after traveling the nearly 24 hours from Medford, Oregon. Surfers

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A Home Away From Home
Booking a Vacation Rental

The hottest way to book travel lodging these days seems to be through private parties. While hotel rooms are still popular, more and more travelers are looking to book private homes, apartments or even a room in a house through websites like www.vrbo.com (Vacation Rentals by Owner), www.flipkey.com, or www.airbnb.com, to name just a few. Many of these organizations have been in the news lately, as cities around the US try to decide how to regulate these “businesses” that often operate in residential neighborhoods. We’ve booked several private homes and apartments on our travels around the world (and in the US), and although there are many horror stories to be found of fake or bad rentals, we’ve have nothing but good, and even great, experiences.

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Great New Products & Holiday Gift Ideas for the Traveler

by Ember Hood

If you’re looking for a great holiday gift for the traveler in your life, Travel Essentials has got you covered! Here are a few of our newest products available for gift giving, or even for yourself (we won’t tell!).

Briggs & Riley Transcend Luggage
The best value in luggage just got better! Briggs & Riley has redesigned its popular Transcend luggage collection, making them lighter than ever, increasing their capacities and giving them a style makeover. Among the 15 bags offered in the new Transcend line, you will find both two-wheeled uprights, four-wheeled “spinner” uprights, personal sized bags that securely sit on top of the rolling pieces, as well as a backpack, a toiletry kit, and more. Briggs & Riley’s Transcend luggage has been the best selling line at Travel Essentials for several years now, and this new design, with its lighter weight and improved functionality, is certain to

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The Beauty of Bali...

fly in from all over the world to ride the waves, and at Bingin Beach, we non-surfers were in the minority. Nevertheless, we were able to hang loose at Suara Ombak Cottages for $80 a night.

After a few days of rest and relaxation, we picked up a rental car (see page 7 for the fun details on this) and drove about three hours up and into the mountains of Bali, to the town of Munduk. When leaving Bingin Beach, we asked the hotel owner to suggest a route and any detours that would ensure we’d see some rice fields. He laughed and told us that we would get sick of seeing rice fields as they were so plentiful. He was half right. They were more than plentiful, but we never managed to tire of seeing them. Every time we turned a corner we ooh and ahh as yet another beautiful vista of rice fields, foothills and villages would open up before us and stretch as far as the eye could see. The crops were in various stages—some being harvested, some being planted, and others in the growing phase.

We found our hotel in Munduk (Manah Liang Bungalows, $60 for a two story family cottage) and when we walked in the man behind the desk said “Ibu Nancy?”—Ibu being the Indonesian word for Mother. Made (pronounced Ma-day and meaning “second born”) was the manager of the hotel. He welcomed us to Munduk, and suggested a trek that he could lead us on the next day through the surrounding villages and offering an up close view of the rice fields. Made’s trek was one of my favorite adventures on the island. He brought a walking stick for each of us, and proceeded to guide us for five hours throughout the area where he was raised. He showed us many plants with fruit and leaves that we were able to taste, including coffee beans, mangosteen, bananas, coconuts, mint, nutmeg, cacao, and even peppermint leaves that we chewed for good breath (which may have been a subtle hint after all the other tasty delights). We hiked to two waterfalls, and through lots of tiny villages, where Made, who is also a local schoolteacher, knows just about everybody. Along the way we came upon a small but colorful wedding procession for one of Made’s students.

Children in their homes along the trails waved and hollered hello as we passed. Finally we trekked to a rice field where two men were tilling one section, and four women were planting another. We sat right down on the terraces and watched the women work, while they looked up at us and smiled and laughed. It was a delightful day, and the cost for the four of us was 200,000 Indonesian rupiah, about $17.

From Munduk we moved on to yet another incredibly scenic Balinese location—Ubud. While many things in Ubud were memorable, the best was our lodging (Bali Harmony Villa, $199 per night). We rented a corner cottage on the outskirts of town through AirBnB that was surrounded by rice fields. It featured two walls of floor-to-ceiling glass doors that opened on to a wooden deck and offered a view of those rice fields that, once again, stretched as far as the eye could see. Men worked the fields all day long during our stay, ducks swam, quacked and waddled just beyond our deck, and boys played on the terraces, flying kites and having fun. We could open our windows and watch the show at any hour of the day or night, and that is exactly how we spent our time at the cottage.

It was hard to leave our exquisite spot each day, as the rice field views and the infinity pool that also looked out over the fields enticed us to stay in all day. But we did manage several adventures in the Ubud area, including a bicycle tour from Mount Batur, a visit to the Sacred Monkey Forest Sanctuary, and family massages (sign up for our monthly e-newsletter to read detailed stories about these experiences!). Another great side trip was our visit to Gunung Kawi, a beautiful temple in Tampaksiring, with ten statues fabulously carved into the cliffs.

I’m a sucker for a night market, so I was excited to see that the Ubud region offers a great one in Gianyar, just 30 minutes away. The market was very crowded with locals but almost completely devoid of tourists, so we were on show during our visit. Old and young Balinese folks enjoyed watching us point to, purchase, and eat a variety of delicious foods, including fried chicken, grilled corn, fried bananas, duck and veggies, and more.

Our last stay in Bali was on the east side of the island, in the sleepy fishing village of Amed. Our hotel, Life in Amed ($120 per night, two story family cottage), was right on the beach. Although it’s become more popular with tourists, the Amed region is still developing—telephones went in just 10 years ago, the internet is spotty at best, and the power regularly went out for several hours at a time during our visit. Amed is not easy to get to, as public transportation is difficult, and the roads regularly wash out in heavy rainstorms. It’s worth the trouble though, as it’s a great peek into the lives of the Balinese, where children play unattended in the ocean and fishermen return early in the morning with food for their families and the small local restaurants that border the beach.

—Nancy has decided if she ever needs to hide from the law, a rural Balinese fishing village might just be the ticket.

“Boy those French. They have a different word for everything.” —Steve Martin
A Home Away From Home...

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Our first private booking was an apartment in the Marais district of Paris. The French owners, who spoke almost no English, lived on the floor above us in the building. The rental was just as it was described online, the owners were charming, and the payment terms were casual. We didn’t have the full amount of euros in cash that, per the website, was due upon arrival, but it was no problem.

A few years ago we booked a home on the Russian River for a family reunion, and most recently we booked an unbelievably fantastic cottage in Ubud, on Bali. Not unlike hotels, the photos of private homes available for vacation rental can be deceiving; the Russian River home turned out to be a little bit tired and run down, and the photos didn’t show the broken screen doors and the less than perfect lumpy beds. Other times however, the photos don’t do a vacation rental justice, and that was our experience in Bali. It’s safe to say that everyone’s jaw hit the floor when we walked into our two-bedroom, corner cottage that was surrounded by picture perfect rice fields. Learning that our stay included breakfast cooked by two Indonesian women in our own cottage was the icing on the cake.

So how do you know what you’re getting into with a private vacation rental? How can you keep from getting scammed into sending money for a non-existent home? Here are some of our tips for making a private vacation rental work for you.

Number one? Research, research, research! If you find a place that looks good on one vacation rental website, look around the web. See if you can find other websites that list the same rental. If you know the name of the owner (and that information should always be included on the rental website), type the owner’s name into Google. Many vacation rental homes have names themselves.

Refundable damage deposit is wrongfully withheld. We purchased this insurance for our Russian River rental, because we were booking for a large number of people attending a family reunion. It’s one thing if our family of four gets displaced because of a bad booking, but we felt like we didn’t want to risk it for 14 people.

Pay your deposit in a manner that will give you some recourse if the rental does not work out as it should. Credit cards are always the best way to pay, followed by PayPal. Never wire money unless you’re 100% certain that your rental is legitimate. Once money is wired, it is gone forever.

Read the fine print on when and how to pay the remainder of your lodging costs. Some require all the money up front. Some, like our Paris apartment, want you to pay cash upon arrival. Sometimes owners prefer the money in their home currency, other times in US dollars. Also confirm the cancellation policy. Hotels often have more friendly cancellation policies than vacation rentals. This is another reason to consider insurance.

Communicate with the owner about any other quirks related to the rental. What are the cooking facilities like? Will linens be provided? And ask any other questions you might have. Booking directly with an owner can be advantageous. In our experience we’ve found them to be very helpful and full of locals-only knowledge. This is your chance to ask about restaurant recommendations and services like grocery stores and laundries that may be nearby.

When my family of four is traveling together, I love staying in vacation homes or apartments. It gives us more room to spread out and relax, and not be cramped into one hotel room or separated into two rooms. It also affords us the opportunity to cook breakfast in our home every morning and even to prepare some dinners with supplies and fresh ingredients from local markets. I also like the feeling of being part of the community where I am staying, and staying in a vacation rental makes me feel more like a local. And to top it off, particularly for a family, it’s often cheaper than a hotel.

Hotel rooms will always have their place, but vacation rentals have added a charming and intriguing variety to the world of travel. They are here to stay.

"Actually the best gift you could have given her was a lifetime of adventures.”
—LEWIS CARROLL, ALICE IN WONDERLAND
Great Holiday Gift Ideas for the Traveler

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be a big hit on your next vacation. From a stacking shopping tote ($149) to a 28” large rolling suitcase with two or four wheels ($449) the Transcend line offers a solution to every traveler’s needs. And, like all Briggs & Riley luggage, every Transcend bag comes with Briggs & Riley’s “Simple as That” Lifetime Warranty, so you can travel the world with confidence.

Solar Powered Lamp
Here’s a product that will bring light to your world! The new SunBell solar powered lamp and phone charger ($79.95) provides from 4-15 hours of light (depending on the brightness setting) after charging in the sun for 3-8 hours (depending on how much sun is available). The SunBell lantern can illuminate in three distinct ways—as a diffused light lantern, as a focused table lamp, or detached from the base as a portable flashlight. And, you can charge a phone with the handy USB charger. This is a great multi-use product!

RFID ScotteVests
For a long while ScotteVest has been the reigning champion of travel organization. And now they’ve outfitted their already excellent flagship travel vest with RFID protection and a “$1,000 Pickpocket Prevention Guarantee”. The interior, RFID-blocking pocket will protect both your passport and credit card data from being surreptitiously scanned by identity thieves. And in its meticulously designed and organized pockets, you can store phones, cameras, water bottles, maps, documents, glasses, change, and more! Some sizes (medium and bigger) even boast an iPad specific pocket! When you don’t have a lot of packing space, the ScotteVest is like wearing an extra carry-on bag, with everything at your fingertips when you need it. Available in both men’s and women’s sizes, the new ScotteVest RFID ($135) is the best way to carry your small to medium sized items and keep them safe, organized and accessible.

Personal Fan
The Personal Folding 3-Speed Fan ($12.95) is a compact travel fan for the adventurer who might be running just a little hot (Nancy can’t be the only woman having hot flashes). You can wear it around your neck, or fold it open and set it on a nearby table or nightstand. Its soft plastic blades are no threat to either yours or your children’s fingers, and it runs on 4 long-lasting and easy-to-find AA batteries. Perfect for the road, this handy fan can go anywhere and provide you with your own personal cooling breeze.

Hydro Flask Bottles
Hydro Flask Bottles are amazing. They are double-walled, vacuum-sealed, and keep your hot drinks hot for up to 12 hours, and your cold drinks cold for up to 24 hours. If you put a handful of ice cubes in your water in the morning, they’ll still be there for thirst-quenching refreshment at lunch time. Hot coffee will stay hot coffee all day long, ready whenever you are. Hydro-Flask’s food-grade stainless steel interior is non-porous, making it easy to clean and resistant to residual flavors from yesterday’s coffee. And every Hydro Flask carries a lifetime warranty, so you’ll always be set for hot and cold beverages.

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Great Holiday Gift Ideas for the Traveler

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Just don’t let your friends borrow it. They may not give it back (sizes 18-40 ounce, from $27.95 to $38.95).

Magnetic Travel Games
Magnetic GoGames ($11.95) provide great, low-tech entertainment when you’re on the road, in a hotel, or even in your own home! Each game (checkers, chess, hangman, sudoku, bingo and more!) features magnetic pieces and a magnetic playing surface that keeps the game stable even on the bumpiest flights or in the roughest seas. Just zip the game closed when you’re done or need to take a break, and the pieces will stay right where you left them. Each Magnetic Travel Game is five-and-a-quarter inches square, and about one-inch deep, so toss it in your purse or backpack, and take the fun from these classic games with you!

Self-Inflating Lumbar & Seat Pillow
Therm-a-Rest’s portable, self-inflating pillows offer lots of cushion, but don’t take up lots of space. Both the Inflatable Lite Seat ($29.95) and the Inflatable Lumbar Pillow ($35) roll up small to tuck into that last corner of your bag. Then, when comfort calls, simply open its patented self-inflating valve and watch in amazement as your Therm-a-Rest pillow inflates itself, providing instant relief for your back, your bottom, or both!

Compression Socks/Sleeves
When sitting and enduring the long hours of international air travel, the risk of lower leg swelling and blood clots increases. TravelSox Compression Socks ($29.95) and Fresh Legs Compression Sleeves ($39.95) are both excellent ways to combat this — their gradual compression stimulates blood flow in your legs, and the increased circulation reduces swelling and cuts down on the odds of a blood clot forming. Comfortable and stylish, TravelSox offer a full sock with a smooth toe-seam. Or, if you prefer to wear your own socks or sandals, Fresh Legs Compression sleeves simply cover your calves from the ankle to the bottom of the knee. With either method of compression, you’ll have comfortable protection and peace of mind.

Inflatable Bottle Pouch
Would you like to bring home an expensive bottle of Cabernet Franc from your next trip to the Loire Valley? Unfortunately these days you’ll have to risk packing it into your checked baggage for the flight home. But that’s where the Inflatable Bottle Pouch ($9.95) comes in. Two easy-to-inflate valves and a leak-proof seal work together to provide a perfect protective cushion for any standard wine or similarly sized bottle. And since it rolls up small when you’re not using it, you can pack it in your suitcase just in case you find that perfect vintage on your next excursion to the wine country.

Oregon Hiking Books
The Pacific Northwest is a fantastic place to enjoy all that mother nature has to offer. But with a seemingly countless number of beautiful rivers, forests and beaches, sometimes it can be hard to decide just where to go. “Hiking Waterfalls in Oregon” ($21.95) is a full-color guidebook featuring 64 of the best waterfall hikes in the Beaver State and rating each by difficulty. Or, if you’re looking for something a little tamer, “The Creaky Knees Guide: The 80 Best Easy Hikes in Oregon” ($16.95) will show you the easiest routes to a host of beautiful places.

“You can’t understand a city without using its public transportation system.” — EROL OZAN
Lovers of food, drink and music.....New Orleans beckons. It has certainly beckoned Bob and I—repeatedly. Although we’ve been to New Orleans a few times (in our, ahem, younger days), on previous occasions we’ve stayed with family friends and attended the Jazz Festival, and we’ve never really spent much time exploring the city strictly as tourists. Recently we decided a long fall weekend would be the perfect time to return and walk the streets to uncover everything the city has to offer. And boy, does it have a lot to offer—with everything from intriguing history and alluring architecture to fantastic food and equally fantastic music. The city has a wonderful feel and our four-day visit went by quickly. Although just about everything felt like a highlight, what follows is the best of the best.

We arrived on a hot and humid afternoon and immediately after checking in to the Omni Royale Hotel, in the heart of the French Quarter, we hit the streets. The questions we asked ourselves were: Should we walk to the highly regarded Cochon Butcher for an early afternoon snack of house made meats, terrines and sausages? Should we walk to Armstrong Park for a free concert? And, because it is perfectly legal to walk around with an alcoholic beverage out on the streets. One morning we rode the St. Charles Streetcar ($1.25 each) to the Garden District, where we took a self-guided walking tour of the neighborhood. Following the directions in Frommer’s Easy Guide to New Orleans ($12.95), we got the scoop on about two-dozen historic homes. Most were owned at one time or another by famous politicians, actors, musicians and authors. Some have been used as settings for popular books. Many also had compelling architectural.

We thoroughly enjoyed Cochon’s delectable charcuterie plate that included prosciutto, chorizo, terrine, duck confit, and more. We also shared a spectacular pulled pork sandwich. The side dishes and extras (house made pickles and potato sauce, spicy mustard and pickled vegetables) were just as good as the main dishes. We fought over every bite, but were both perfectly satisfied at the end of our meal. Our marriage has thus survived yet another clash (at least until the next time we try to share a plate of great food). From here we moseyed on over to Armstrong Park on the edge of the Quarter for its free weekly Jazz in the Park concert. The sound system wasn’t working, but the All For One Brass Band didn’t need amplification to get everybody up and moving. Their music rang out loud, clear, and funky!

New Orleans is one of the few cities in the US where you can legally consume an alcoholic beverage out on the streets. It seemed a shame to miss out on this rare opportunity, so we grabbed a couple of mojitos in go cups from a bar on Bourbon Street.

We stopped off at Marie Laveau’s House of Voodoo on Bourbon Street, and check out the Boutique du Vampyre, but it was just a block away, the streets are lit by dignified gas lanterns, understated restaurants offer both down-home and high-end dining, and it can even be eerily quiet. These are the streets that fascinate me. Sure, I had to stop in to Marie Laveau’s House of Voodoo on Bourbon Street, and check out the Boutique du Vampyre, but it was

into their “gentlemen’s” clubs. But just a few times (in our, ahem, younger days), on previous occasions we’ve stayed with family friends and attended the Jazz Festival, and we’ve never really spent much time exploring the city strictly as tourists. Recently we decided a long fall weekend would be the perfect time to return and walk the streets to uncover everything the city has to offer. And boy, does it have a lot to offer—with everything from intriguing history and alluring architecture to fantastic food and equally fantastic music. The city has a wonderful feel and our four-day visit went by quickly. Although just about everything felt like a highlight, what follows is the best of the best.

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into their “gentlemen’s” clubs. But just a
Renting a car in the US & Europe can be a time consuming process. When picking up a car, you must sign the rental agreement in multiple locations, initial in several more spots, show your valid driver’s license, accept or decline insurance, and then closely inspect the vehicle and perhaps even take pictures to record dents, scratches or bumps that are already there, and not your liability. Finally, you’ve got to make sure you return the car to a previously agreed upon location with a full tank of gas, and in the exact same condition as when you picked it up. We’re all fairly used to this process and for the most part OK with it, because we understand that we’ve been entrusted with a vehicle worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Renting a car in Bali though is a wee bit different. On our recent visit we decided on the spur of the moment (once we were already on the island) that having our own car would be handy. With our iPad and the hotel’s wireless service, we looked at the prices of online Balinese rental car agencies, but before booking something for $50 a day, we asked the American owner of our hotel if he had a recommendation. Renting a car is easy, he told us. He would make a call to a local guy who rented cars at a cost of $20 a day, told us. He would make a call to a local guy who rented cars at a cost of $20 a day, and the same person would meet us two weeks later at the airport to pick up the car. We didn’t have enough cash to pay the entire sum, but we could pay a deposit and take the car, then come back the next day and pay the balance. It sounded easy, a little bit too easy actually. But our hotel’s owner had lived in Bali and owned his hotel for almost 20 years, so we figured he knew more about it than we did, and we decided to trust him.

It was just as easy as promised. Andy, from the car & motorbike rental shop, picked Bob up on a motorcycle, and 45 minutes later Bob returned with a Toyota SUV. Bob did not show his driver’s license (neither the American one nor the International Driver’s Permit), or a credit card. The one page handwritten “contract” seemed more for our sake than for theirs. Bob paid about two thirds of the money owed and shook Andy’s hand telling him he would be back tomorrow with the balance—a true handshake deal. Andy told us to call or text him on the day we were returning the car to the airport, and someone would be there to meet us.

The car worked out perfectly, and Bob drove on the “wrong” side of the road without incident for two whole weeks. He said it was easier to drive on the other side in Bali than in Britain because there were always so many cars out that you couldn’t forget to stay on the correct side. It was harder for Bob to get used to operating the stick shift with his left hand, and a couple of times he even got into the passenger side of the car before realizing his mistake! Initially, we didn’t listen to the radio, and even tried not to talk, so he could focus on getting used to it all. He never once drifted to the wrong side though, and there were never even any close calls.

Road rules appear to be very relaxed in Bali. Cars stop whenever and wherever they want to. There are few intersections with stoplights or stop signs, and while some intersections have roundabouts that work the way one would expect, other intersections have roundabouts that operate in a completely different manner. Pedestrians, cyclists, cows, chickens and dogs all cross the road in front of your car at random times, and cars honk their horns not to tell you to get out of the way, but to just let you know they are there, or passing, or turning. We had to drive over partially washed out roads several times on the eastern coast, and another time while we pulled over to the side of the road for a huge Balinese traditional procession of some sort to pass us by we became a sideshow attraction—apparently a family of four caucasians in a car is not a common site in the mountains of Bali. It was always an adventure when we were in the car, especially when we were stopped by the Balinese police (you can read about our brush with the law in the August issue of our monthly email newsletter).

When we returned the car at the end of our vacation, we phoned Andy and told him we were 10 minutes away from the airport. We wondered how we would find the guy, whose name we did not know, or how he would find us, but when we pulled in, there stood an Indonesian man, waving at us to bring the car to the curb (again apparently, not too many caucasians in a rental car in Bali). We pulled up, handed him the keys, gathered our luggage, and walked in to catch our flight. We didn’t exchange names, or paperwork, or money, we just said thank you and goodbye.

“"If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine. It is lethal.” —PAULO COELHO

Email us at service@travelessentials.com to sign up for our monthly newsletter!
Ain’t No City Like New Orleans.....

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Lafayette Cemetery, one of New Orleans oldest.

Alas, there were not enough meal times for all the extraordinary food we wanted to sample during our short stay. Highlights included shrimp and alligator sausage cheesecake at Jaques-Imo’s (an Anthony Bourdain recommended restaurant), chargrilled oysters on the half-shell at Acme Oyster House, smoking hot yet succulent barbecue from Blue Oak Barbecue, gourmet Snowballs (Big Easy natives will tell you, they’re not snow cones and they’re not shave ice: they are snowballs.) at Piety Street Snowballs, and of course beignets and coffee from Cafe du Monde. We hit Cafe du Monde for beignets three times in four days—for breakfast, for a mid-afternoon snack, and for a last night, late night nosh on the way home from the clubs.

And of course I can’t forget the music. We saw great live New Orleans jazz, funk, brass band music and more in the clubs on Frenchman Street, at Chickie Wah Wah on Canal Street, at the Louisiana State Museum’s Old US Mint, and especially on the streets themselves. We were amazed at the high quality of street musicians in both the French Quarter and on Frenchman Street. The hands down street musician winner is Doreen Ketchens. Also referred to as “Queen Clarinet” and “Lady Louie”, Doreen has played Lincoln Center, represented New Orleans by performing in Africa, Europe, Asia and South America, and played for four US presidents. She and her band, which includes her husband Lawrence on the sousaphone, are most often found on the corner of St. Peter and Royal, which is just where Bob and I caught her late one morning wailing on her clarinet.

New Orleans has much to offer. We had so much fun and experienced so many great things over our four days that I can’t write about them all here. And I’m certain we only saw a small slice of its offerings. That’s okay though, because New Orleans will surely call us again. And I know we’ll answer.

Notes:
The Omni Royal Hotel ($175 per night) on St. Louis Street in the French Quarter is a great location from which to explore the city.

We taxied from the airport for $30, cheaper than the $20 per person shuttle. There was no need to rent a car, we could walk or take the streetcar wherever we wanted to go.

We took one guided tour during our stay, the Haunted History tour of the French Quarter ($20 each). It was great fun, and interesting too. More on this in a future monthly email newsletter (email us at service@travelessentials.com to sign up!).