

New Orleans!

On January 31 we headed out for a trip to New Orleans, never knowing how much fun we could have. Our first stop in New Orleans was Mardi Gras World where we would experience the magic of the parades. We started off with lunch followed by a short film explaining Mardi Gras and its history. There, everyone was able to try on some of the costumes before being given a taste of the famous King Cake. Bev Hinds was lucky enough to find the baby in her piece!

We then had a step-on guide for our bus that took us on a super city tour. We learned about the different parts of the city including Katrina, the haunted history of their cemeteries and landmarks that have brought New Orleans to what it is today.

When we arrived at the wonderful Staybridge Suites downtown we were greeted by beads and a social hour. Everyone checked in and regrouped as we were treated with drinks and light meal before heading out on the town that evening. We visited Harrah's Casino, Preservation Hall, The Carousel Bar and Bourbon Street. After a late night we were up and ready to go again the next day. The chatter at breakfast went on and on where we had been and what there was yet to see. Scattering in all directions for the afternoon, the French Market, trolley rides, the St. Louis Cathedral and Cafe' Du Monde were taken in.

Donna, Jane, Diane and Marj took an adventure to the cooking school. They were treated to learning how to make the classic dishes of New Orleans and even got to feast on them.

That evening we arrived at the river walk to board the Creole Queen for a jazz dinner cruise down the Mississippi River. There we ate, listened to jazz, sang and even did the conga line to "*When The Saints Come Marching In*". There was even a live alligator on board that some held. The evening was amazing seeing the city lights at night. After our evening cruise the adventures continued as we again discovered the high spirits of the Big Easy. Breakfast was filled with the stories from the night before.

Our next venture would be to the WW II Museum. This gave an insight to the war that changed the world and honored those that gave so much. The movie "*Beyond All Boundaries*" in 4D by Tom Hanks was a true experience into what it took to make this country great. The mood was lightened by a fabulous luncheon buffet followed by a patriotic show with tunes being sung by the The Liberty Belles. Ray and Nils even made their way on stage to help the girls perform as laughter filled the room. We ended the day by refreshing at the social hour and got ready for the evening parades of Mardi Gras!

With all the beads and a late night Thursday we would be back on the road the next morning heading towards Mobile and the USS Alabama. We were served a lunch in the ship's wardroom before heading to the aircraft pavilion and submarine.

Arriving in Marianna, Florida, the bus ride got a little quieter. The last day heading home would be one more mystery surprise to finish the adventure. Stopping at the Russell Stover distribution center with Valentine's Day upon us proved to be a great choice. There were more candy, treats and laughs than the bus could hold.

We arrived back at RCR with a lot of new friendships and memories that we will have for a lifetime. As they say in New Orleans "Let The Good Times Roll" and I am here to tell you they certainly did. What will be next?

by Lori Lilly