

September 8, 2008

## Decadence

It was 2004, four years to be exact, since I was last in New Orleans for Labor Day weekend. This annual trip, which I had done three times, was by far my favorite weekend of the entire year. Hot steamy weather. Hot sexy people. Hot seductive go-go dancers. Hot sweaty dance floors. Need I say more? It's the ultimate decadent weekend!

Then along came Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina, the third strongest hurricane to make landfall in the United States, caused catastrophic damage in New Orleans when a number of levees in the city failed. Eighty percent of the city was flooded, and over 1,800 people lost their lives. Katrina has the dubious distinction of being the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history, causing \$81.2 billion in damage (2005 U.S. dollars).

Being on higher ground, the historic *Vieux Carré* ("old square" or French Quarter) was not flooded and emerged from the storm relatively undamaged. Regardless, I took a few years off from my annual pilgrimage.



"It's very nice George, but it's time to come out and start running the country."

## Hurricane Gustav

Fast-forward to 2008. My annual trip to New Orleans for Labor Day weekend was back on track! I booked an airline ticket and secured a hotel room months in advance. My friend Darryl was

staying in the same hotel, which was located on Bourbon Street near Jackson Square. We both had balconies overlooking Toulouse Street... perfect for throwing beads at passers-by.

As a big plus, my friend Brian from Toronto, who I met in Montreal in July, was going to join me in New Orleans for the weekend. It was his first trip to the city, so I was looking forward to showing him around.

Unfortunately, an ill-timed tropical storm named Gustav put a damper on our plans. The predicted trajectory showed Gustav making landfall as a category 3 hurricane on Labor Day morning, the final day of our trip. We closely followed the progress of the storm. With each passing day, things looked worse and worse.



As a natural disaster junkie, I admit that being in the path of a hurricane would be pretty damn cool... pending you're in a good location. New Orleans is NOT a good location. As the hurricane grew stronger and continued to target the city, I learned that an evacuation of New Orleans was a real possibility, and rightfully so.

After much discussion, Brian and I decided to cancel our trip. We made the right choice. Darryl still made the trek, bless his heart! We learned that our hotel closed on Saturday, and the city of New Orleans was evacuated on Sunday. Hurricane Gustav came ashore near New Orleans on Monday as predicted as a strong category 2 storm.



## Backyard Tourist

Brian and I decided to spend the weekend in San Francisco instead. One of the best things about living here is that this is one of the greatest cities in the world. It's not like living in Fresno or Boise or Wasilla. I have absolutely no guilty feelings when friends make the trek to San Francisco. There is plenty to see and do, and Brian and I were sure to have a blast!

In three days, we covered many of the major tourist attractions in the city. We had lunch at the [Ferry Building](#), walked along Fisherman's Wharf, and watched the sea lions at [Pier 39](#). We ate seafood on the waterfront and visited Ghiradelli Square for its famed chocolate. We explored a number of exciting neighborhoods including Chinatown, North Beach, the Castro, Fillmore, and Pacific Heights.





Brian and I had drinks at the [View Lounge of the Marriott Hotel](#), with beautiful views of the city (hence the clever name). The fog rolled in all around us, which is always a site to see, especially from 39 stories up. Aside from that cool evening, the weather was phenomenal!

We did a lot of walking, but managed to hop aboard a cable car for a block or two here and there. One of our favorite stops was the [Cable Car Museum](#), which is the operational center of the cable car system. This is a must-see for any new visitor to the city.



After three days, we were exhausted. But we still managed to go out dancing on Brian's last night here. It was a tons of fun as expected. It's San Francisco, after all! Even though he had an early flight the next morning, Brian insisted we stay until closing. We were among the last to leave the building at midnight. They practically had to kick us out!

Although it wasn't the New Orleans trip we were anticipating, we had a fantastic time. And I'm pleased to report that New Orleans survived the wrath of Hurricane Gustav. It looks like it'll be an active hurricane season this year, so we'll hope for the best for The Big Easy.

We'll also hope for better weather luck (say that 10 times fast!) next year during my favorite decadent weekend in my favorite southern city.