

# Big Easy Bound

BY DENNY GUGE

**T**he Big Easy is about to get even easier—to reach, that is. On May 3, America West launches service to New Orleans, with one daily nonstop flight from the airline's Phoenix hub.

"New Orleans is one of the world's great cities and an exciting addition to America West's portfolio of destinations," said Mike Smith, the airline's senior vice president of marketing and sales. "Whether it's business or pleasure, New Orleans is renowned for its hospitality and entertainment."

The new addition is the latest stage in America West's ongoing growth program. New Orleans becomes the fourth city to join the airline's route system this year. Service to Boise, Idaho, and Spokane, Washington, initiated in March, and flights to Hartford, Connecticut, began April 1.

Known as "The Big Easy" for its laid-back atmosphere, New Orleans is one of the nation's leading tourist destinations, hosting more than 9 million visitors annually. More than 1.5 million of those annual guests come to attend conventions, conferences and meetings of all sizes. Accommodating such gatherings are the city's 32,000-plus hotel rooms, ranging from charming cottages to major five-star hotels, most of which are within walking distance of convention facilities and the fabled French Quarter.

Nearly 200 years after Napoleon sold the city along with the rest of the Louisiana territory to the United States for \$15 million, New Orleans retains its Old World ambience. Its eclectic architecture, arts and cuisine reflect the rich multicultural mosaic of French, Spanish, African, Indian and other international influences that's uniquely New Orleans. There are opera, ballet and symphony seasons, live theater and galleries galore. The traditional jazz for which the city is famed can be heard every evening at Bourbon Street or Preservation Hall, but Zydeco, rock, rhythm and blues, gospel and country music also are prevalent. While famed Cajun and Creole culinary traditions are readily evident, every manner of cuisine can be found at a seemingly limitless selection of restaurants.

New Orleans also provides a diversity of diversions. Visitors can watch ships dock at the Port of New Orleans, try their luck on a Mississippi River casino riverboat or ride



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a streetcar down scenic St. Charles Avenue. City Park, one of the nation's largest and most picturesque public parks, is home to the New Orleans Botanical Gardens, golf, tennis, boating and the unique Storyland playground. Family-friendly attractions also include the Louisiana Children's Museum and the Aquarium of the Americas, both of which are rated among the top facilities of their kind in the country.

The French Quarter, the city's most famous neighborhood, is filled with unique courtyard homes, shops and restaurants. Street performers and live jazz bands enliven colorful Jackson Square. And walking tours showcase the historic sites in the Vieux Carré, one of the city's 10 National Historic Districts.

When it comes to large-scale celebrations, New Orleans is in a class by itself. Mardi Gras attracts some 4 million revelers during the three weeks leading up to Ash Wednesday, generating more than \$500 million each year. Other popular annual celebrations include the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and the French Quarter Festival. For sports lovers, the Louisiana Superdome hosts the New Orleans Saints football team and the Sugar Bowl college football game. The Super Bowl returns to the city for the ninth time in 2002, and the NCAA Men's Final Four basketball championship makes its fifth appearance there in 2003.

When America West arrives in New Orleans, travelers will have plenty of opportunities to learn the meaning of a favorite expression of The Big Easy: "*Laissez les bons temps rouler.*" In other words, let the good times roll.