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NEW ORLEANS' NEW SHINE

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LAUNCH SLIDESHOW

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10 reasons for tourists to revisit the Big Easy

Two-and-a-half years after Katrina, **New Orleans** gears up for the festive springtime season with a sense of guarded optimism. The streetcars are finally running, convention business has bounced back and residents are gradually returning. NOLA's buoyant spirit is more in evidence than its woes, and now's the perfect time to visit a city on the cusp of a comeback.

"We have more restaurants open than ever before," says Kelly Shultz, vice president of Communications for the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau. She's all smiles about a "fresher hotel product with \$400 million of refurbishments in the past two years, a cleaner French Quarter and festivals and celebrations to indulge your senses all year long."

See our slideshow of the New Orleans Rising.

To be sure, some things are better than ever. Store owners, cabbies and waiters are extra-friendly, welcoming tourists as partners in recovery. The pungent morning-after aroma of Bourbon Street has vanished. Since January 2007, local entrepreneur Sidney Torres, president of SDT Waste and Debris, has been handling trash removal and street cleaning in the French Quarter. His smartly dressed crew employs cutting-edge cleaning methods so that Sunday strollers inhale scents of lemon and eucalyptus instead of party swirl. Day and night, workers tidy the streets even when the trucks aren't rolling.

Hotels are also working hard to entice visitors. For a quintessential French Quarter experience, the glitzy **Royal Sonesta** provides an island of calm in a sea of activity. The tranquil courtyard, with its pool, outdoor bar and breezy cabanas, is the ideal spot to sip Sazeracs and lounge in the shade of tropical plants. Seafood-lovers pack the iconic Desire Oyster Bar overlooking Bourbon Street for its succulent shellfish and entertaining oyster shuckers. The sleek **Loews Hotel**, located in the Central Business District, offers a chic atmosphere along with a full-service spa and a standout contemporary Creole restaurant, Café Adelaide.

The eating scene is buzzing with news that Ruth's Chris will bring their sizzling steaks back to NOLA in a location

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