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Celebrate All Saints and Souls the New Orleans Way at This Unexpected Hotel Bar

From Voodoo rituals to honoring ancestors past, this hotel bar in New Orleans is the place to gather and take in the spirits this fall.

By **Staff Author** and **[Mariah Tyler](#)** | Published on October 14, 2022

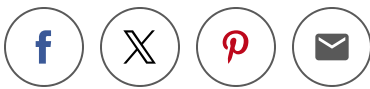


PHOTO: COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL HOUSE HOTEL

Tucked away in a historic Beaux-Arts building dating back to 1906, [International House Hotel](#) is an unexpected place to experience the ritual-based culture New Orleans is known for. Standing in the Central Business District, two blocks from the French Quarter, the boutique hotel is owned by Sean Cummings, who provides space for communities to gather while honoring the rituals locals have long celebrated. As a devoted supporter of

celebrations help guests get a sense of the city's rich culture, from Carnival to St. Joseph's Day to St. John's Eve, as the lobby is transformed with Creole art, music, and altars paying homage to saints and spirits.

The heart of the rituals happen left of the lobby at [Loa Bar](#), a craft cocktail venue that opened in 1998. A whimsical interior designed by [LM Pagano](#), influenced by the global cultures that formed the city, offers a spiritual ambiance complete with candlelight. "We call it the altar; I call it the sanctuary," Abigail Gullo, Loa Bar's creative director and resident cocktail genius, told *Travel + Leisure*. At its core, Loa Bar is "creating a space for the community to come in that's not work, it's not home," Gullo said. "It's that central place where the community can mingle with other people that aren't their family or their coworkers, because once we have that sense of community and understand each other better, it's just going to make us better humans."



PHOTO: COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL HOUSE HOTEL/LOA

Guests will find Voodoo rituals taking place in the lobby of International House and Loa Bar during holidays throughout the year. The events are not

describes Voodoo as "a song, a dance, a way of experiencing life and a philosophy." It formed out of the slave trade, she added, and "the forced encounter between Africans of different nations and European Catholics and Native people in both Haiti and here in Louisiana. All of those influences came together as a kind of gumbo."



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Glassman calls Voodoo "the resource that allowed people to endure slavery and to turn disempowerment into power," and believes its ceremonies are an opening of the door between the visible and invisible worlds. "Culture is a curative and a salve in troubled times and for people who are suffering," she said, touching on its ancestral significance to many locals. "Voodoo is, at the core, essential to New Orleans culture."



Sallie Ann Glassman presides over the St. John's Eve ritual at International House Hotel. The June 23 holiday is considered the most important feast day within New Orleans Voodoo. Celebrated with a large altar in the hotel lobby and a cleansing ritual that involves head washing. Participants wear all white with a headscarf that can get dirty, they also can bring an offering to Marie Laveau (statue picture). Marie Laveau is considered the Queen Mother of New Orleans Voodoo tradition. PHOTO: COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL HOUSE HOTEL

The link between the Catholic, Haitian Voodoo, Native American, and Mexican cultures of New Orleans today is ripe grounds for a unique celebration of All Hallows' Eve (Oct. 31), All Saints Day (Nov. 1), and All Souls Day (Nov. 2). The lobby is elaborately decorated with hundreds of candles, marigolds, and [cockscombs](#), and an equally lavish altar. Gullo invites guests to display photographs of deceased loved ones to honor their memories. Loa Bar will play host to these fall celebrations, offering a curated selection of cocktails inspired by the cultures tied to the holidays. The cocktail menu for the celebratory feast days include a frozen Mexican hot chocolate, a smoky mezcal with a bit of cinnamon and chili, an Irish whiskey coffee, and a C octel de Muerto, a fragrant drink combining anise, orange, and egg white with skull and crossbones etched in foam on top. And the piece de resistance, a show-stopping concoction, Reposado in Pace with you choice of mezcal or reposado tequila paired with a homemade pecan milk, pressed from local pecans. This drink's ashen color is meant to call to mind the centuries-old tradition in New Orleans of whitewashing tombs. The Reposado in Pace is



PHOTO: COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL HOUSE HOTEL

If not evident in the intentional cocktails, Gullo's love for spirits stems from her own ancestral lineage. Her great-grandfather, who was an early-20th-century bartender at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, taught 7-year-old Gullo to make a Manhattan. The passion for hospitality and pride for her adopted hometown, New Orleans, is noticeable in everything she's bringing to Loa Bar. "We love tradition here. We love ritual. We are connected to our past and so connected to the people that influenced us," she said. "I want this [bar] to be the center that brings the world to New Orleans and learns about the city and New Orleans culture".



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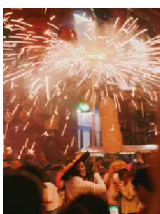
When this time of year calls for slowing down, turning inward, and looking to the past, cultural rituals can help guide us to a more mindful and communal way of living. New Orleans is the perfect destination to celebrate the ancestry of yore. The culture and history of the city is imperfect, but as Abigail says, “New Orleans is a place where people were not always brought here willingly, but they made something beautiful here. This is a hard place to live... but we love living here and we celebrate it every day”.

Whether you are gathering for a good cocktail with friends or strangers, or honoring your lost loved ones on an altar, it’s the ritual of these holidays that makes this time of year so special.

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