

DESPITE ECONOMY, MARDI GRAS POISED TO BE A SUCCESS



It seems that the sluggish economy doesn't stop people from smiling in New Orleans' French Quarter. The influx of visitors this year for Mardi Gras is anticipated to be between 700,000 and 800,000. That is at least as many as last year. Some credit the unexpected bump to the fact that Fat Tuesday falls on February 24 – three weeks later than last year – giving more visitors time to plan and budget for their trip after the generally pricey winter holidays. "Things are sort of buzzing down here right now, and it feels good," said Michael Valentino, a local hotel owner. "Didn't know what to expect this year, but it appears that interest is high and people are acting on that decision in order to make Carnival part of their travel plans." As of Thursday, Valentino's Place d'Armes Hotel was 96 percent book for Mardi Gras. But the city has not entirely escaped the economic downturn. Valentino has seen a decline in corporate and business bookings at his hotel, and there is less interest from visitors in off peak times. Bt that's not dampening the mood in New Orleans this week. "Interestingly, everybody wants to put all of the sad, pessimistic, negative news out of their minds and do something that's very normal for New Orleanians," said Daryl Fletchinger, owner of the retail store Mardi Gras Spot. "And that is put on the greatest free show on earth." Find a job in New Orleans at [Employment Crossing](#).