

Katrina Tour, Gray Lines Tours

Gray Lines Tours in New Orleans has been offering a narrated tour of the levee breaches and heavily flooded areas of the city since early 2006. This has been understandably somewhat controversial, but all of the feedback received so far by the local organizing committee has been positive. We have heard that the tours are sensitive and respectful, and go to lengths to respect the privacy of those rebuilding in the most heavily affected areas.

The tour is 3 hours, costs \$35, and departs every day at 9:00 am; 11:00 am; and 1:00 pm.

As of this writing (November 2007), the tour is definitely scheduled to continue through February 2008 and most likely beyond. We will post additional information as it becomes available. Attendees should contact Gray Line Tours directly to make a booking and arrange a pick up at their hotel ((800) 535-7786 or (504) 569-1401).

A short description of the tour and how it came about is posted below.

January 5, 2006 - Gray Line Tour Presents Katrina Impact

The city that turned ghost, vampire and voodoo tours into a multimillion-dollar industry and counts Halloween as one of its top tourism events now has another horror show to add to its roster: the Hurricane Katrina disaster tour.

On Jan. 4, Gray Line New Orleans will begin offering its "Hurricane Katrina: America's Worst Catastrophe!" tour.

But unlike freakish, otherworldly jaunts through the supernatural, Gray Line New Orleans' Katrina tour is aimed at garnering support for rebuilding the city.

"We just want to get the point across to the visitors, 'This is what happened, it's severe, it's going to take a while, and we need help from the federal government to rebuild,'" said Greg Hoffman, vice president and general manager of Gray Line New Orleans.

Hoffman, whose home was destroyed in Lakeview, initially thought a disaster tour would be in poor taste. He didn't want buses intruding upon families grappling with the new reality of their lives during visits to their flood-ravaged homes, he said in an interview in October.

But when several U.S. senators toured the devastation last month and stepped off the tour bus with new pledges of support for rebuilding New Orleans, Hoffman decided that Gray Line needed to put together a Katrina disaster tour.

"What made me change was the fact that many people from other states in Washington just were not supportive of the rebuilding effort until they came down here themselves and saw what happened," Hoffman said. "It was very hard and gut-wrenching for me, but we decided it would be a good thing to do. You've got to see it and believe it."

It's clear that there is a major interest in disaster tours among residents and tourists alike. On the Internet and in French Quarter shops, people are snapping up T-shirts that refer to the Katrina disaster or rebuilding. And stop by the 17th Street Canal breach anytime, and you'll see people gathered with cameras, snapping pictures of themselves in houses that were pummeled from their foundations by the powerful flow of water. Would-be tourists inquire about whether they will be able to see what happened to New Orleans when they come for the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

While the phenomenon caught many by surprise in New Orleans, it's not unlike what New York and Oklahoma City found after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

To balance the privacy concerns of locals, Gray Line's disaster tour will drive residents through areas such as Lakeview and Gentilly using 25-passenger minibuses. It will stick to main streets, and won't let tourists get off the bus to take pictures, but Gray Line will pass around a binder with pictures of the storm and its destruction.

Onboard tour guides will describe what it was like that Friday before the storm when the National Hurricane Center forecast suddenly changed track, and people began scrambling to figure out how to protect their homes and get out of town.

Tour guides will also talk about the importance of New Orleans' port and oil industry, its seafood industry, and the importance of coastal wetlands protection. Riders on the tour will be able to allocate \$3 from the tour fee to a New Orleans area charity.

"We hope it will encourage people to come to New Orleans, to support New Orleans," Hoffman said.

*From The Times-Picayune (Friday, December 09, 2005)
By Rebecca Mowbray, business writer*

HURRICANE KATRINA " AMERICA 'S WORST CATASTROPHE"

An eyewitness account of the events surrounding the most devastating natural disaster on American soil:

- Learn the history of the original city, the French Quarter, and why it was built at this particular location along the Mississippi River.
- Drive past an actual levee that "breached" and see the resulting devastation that displaced hundreds of thousands of U.S. residents.
- The direct connection between America 's disappearing coastal wetlands, oil & gas pipelines, levee protection and hurricane destruction will be explained.
- Your tour guide will give a "local's" chronology of events leading up to Hurricane Katrina and the days immediately following the disaster.
- You'll be amazed at the volume and variety of products "offloaded" in the multimodal port of New Orleans, the second largest port in the country, and then distributed to your hometown.
- Did you know that 30% of the seafood (fish, crabs, shrimp, oysters, and crawfish) harvested in the lower 48 states comes from the coastal wetlands in South Louisiana?
- After this tour, you'll have a better understanding of events pre and post Katrina and the "Rebirth of New Orleans"!

Hurricane Katrina Tour	
Tour Information	
Tour Length:	3 hours
Departure Times:	9:00 am and 1:00 pm Daily
Departs From:	Gray Line Ticket Office
Cost:	Adult: \$35.00 Child: \$28.00 Group: N/A
\$3.00 will be donated to a non-profit organization of your choice (1 of 5) that has been directly affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.	
Reservations are recommended by 5pm on the day prior to the tour departure. For schedule information after June 30, 2006, please call (800) 535-7786 or (504) 569-1401.	