Three Inaugural Drink and Food Festivals Seem Here to Stay in NOLA

by Bryan D., NOLA Drinks

New Orleans – For a city that knows how to do drink and food festivals, with one, seemingly happening every week, this past weekend may have been one of the biggest. No less than three events took place, all of which were first-timers in town, beginning last Thursday with Top Taco New Orleans. Following that was the new Orleans Bourbon Festival, almost surprising we hadn’t had one of these before, on Friday and Saturday. The icing on the cake, or should I say garnish on the drink was The Bloody Mary Festival on Sunday afternoon.

With all that drink and food to take in, it was certainly a palatable delight. Though, it was also a challenge to cover it all. Bravely, we stepped up. Top Taco New Orleans, which took place at Spanish Plaza, was a tremendous success and a complete sell-out. The event raised over $20,000 for the terrific organization, One Year NOLA, that helps foster children and families in need.

Shane Richmond, proprietor of Eyedog’s Nuchi’s Tacos, organized the event and worked for months to pull it all together. He had some help from friends who started the concept in Denver a couple years ago and they were on hand to help out.

Top Taco NOLA featured live music, agave distillers (Tequila and Mezcal) based cocktails, and, of course, tacos. It was also a competition where both judges and attendees selected the winning drinks and tacos. The categories, for which there were judges’ selections and people’s choice picks, were traditional taco, creative taco, traditional margarita, and creative cocktail.

Over 40 restaurants, some were paired with bars while others did it themselves, participated. In many instances, breeds of Tequila and Mezcal served as sponsors and suppliers. The food and drink presentation as well as the booths themselves, were terrific. Many had music, creative décor, and interesting characters providing hospitality. The event also utilized the Creole Queen Riverboat as a VIP area and there was also a stage featuring live music all evening long.

I had the distinct pleasure of serving as one of the cocktail judges for the event, and was surprised at the quality drink and food across the board. Many restaurants were ones you might expect, meaning Mexican and Latin cuisine focused spots, such as Abraham’s Flying Burrito, and MxDo. Others, were, perhaps, more surprising – Hinerman’s, Palmo, and Bayou Burger. There were too many highlights to list. But, you can see the winners here.

Up next in the trio of NOLA festival fun was the New Orleans Bourbon Festival. This was a multi-day event that actually kicked off on Thursday with various Bourbon paired dinner parties taking place around town. The event, which concluded on Sunday with an awards brunch, was organized by serious Bourbon enthusiast, Tracy Napouf, he is a well-connected guy in the bourbon world and it showed with the folks and brands he pulled in to participate. The New Orleans Bourbon Festival also hosted a charity component with proceeds benefiting St. Michael Special School.

The heart of the event was a two-night grand tasting on Friday and Saturday evening that took place at the Sugar Mill across from the Morial Convention Center. The tastings featured numerous Bourbon producers ranging from the big boys — Heaven Hill, Jim Beam — to small craft producers such as Wilderness Trail Distilling and Boone County Distillery, for a list of the bayou of Bourbons, check here.