

CATCHING SNOBALLS IN JULY

Ten Great Places where the ice is nice.

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ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE**

When it comes to New Orleans' magnificent obsession with food, some things just aren't cut and dried. What goes into the perfect gumbo? How much mayonnaise is too much on a roast beef po-boy? When is a cup of chicory coffee too strong?

But in other culinary areas, there's no debate.

Take the classic New Orleans snowball.

No self-respecting New Orleanian would put his or her stamp of approval on any paper cup that wasn't filled with finely crushed ice shavings that were soft to the tongue's touch. Large chunks that bring pain to the teeth are a no-no.

Syrup must be applied generously. A few chops with the spoon always should produce enough liquid to deliver through the straw—down to the last mouthful. Barren pockets of ice untouched by fruit-flavored or chocolate or nectar cream juice are unforgivable.

The syrup also must retain its potency after the ice has begun to melt. A pull through the straw that sends a washed-out slurp is sure to bring unhappiness.

Many people prefer their snowballs straight up. But for those who want to indulge—and for whom calories are not a problem—most stands offer toppings ranging from nuts and crushed pineapple to soft ice cream. And there's always that old standard, sweetened condensed milk.

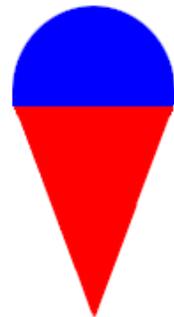
But a snowball is more than the sum of ice and syrup and toppings. It's a summer evening pastime, a cooling leftover from the days before air conditioning and frozen yogurt. It's a family outing. And snowballs are cheap. They usually start at around 50 cents each (more for chocolate and cream flavors).

Even with toppings, it would be hard for a person who's eaten in the past week to consume more than \$1.50 or so worth of snowball at one sitting.

To really know the snowball experience, forget take-out. Pack the kids in the car and let them debate for however long it takes whether wild cherry or spearmint or chocolate is better. Get your snowball and enjoy it on the stand's bench, or a tree stump, or the hood of your car.

Where to do it? It depends on whom you talk to. There must be 10,000 stands in the New Orleans metropolitan area; it's hard to turn a corner without finding one. Most are adequate, some a cut above, a few sublime.

Here, compiled by The Times-Picayune staff are 10 of the best. The list is subjective and the order alphabetical. Like all matters of taste, one person's swamp water is another's Dom Perignon.



Hansen's Sno-Bliz, 4801 Tchoupitoulas St. *Open 3-9 p.m. Tuesday – Friday and Sunday. Closed Monday and Saturday.*

"There are no shortcuts to quality" is the motto of Ernest and Mary Hansen's little corner-store stand at the corner of Bordeaux Street. That includes what is probably the softest, smottiest ice in town, fresh homemade syrups and snowballs, personal service and lots of conversation.

It's a neighborhood place, and while Ernest fills the cup with ice (stopping three times for Mary to pour syrup down deep), Mary asks about health and school and children and parents.
Parking on the street, plenty of seating, plenty of atmosphere.



Jim's Snoball Stand, 1838 7th St., Slidell. *Open noon-9 p.m. seven days.*

The specialty of the house at this stand near the corner of Gause Boulevard is the authentic chocolate syrup, made with Hershey's chocolate. And a delicious way to eat the chocolate syrup is in a chocolate snowball topped with vanilla ice cream and crowned with a chocolate-covered cherry. As the ice cream melts, it blends with the chocolate snoball.

When to eat the chocolate-covered cherry is a matter of choice.

There is no seating at the snoball stand, and parking is adequate but limited.



Kotter's, 116 Marigny Ave., Mandeville. *Open 10:30 a.m. – 9 p.m., seven days*

The biggest selling point of Kotter's is its view of the Mandeville lakefront.

Kotter's specialties are cream flavors. Cream ice cream and cream coconut with condensed milk is a sweet combination that's quite rich. Butterscotch and cream chocolate topped with condensed milk tastes like a chocolate butterscotch ice milk sundae.

The stand has generous outdoor patio seating beneath the shade of two centuries-old moss-laden oak trees. A rope swing hangs nearby. Parking is available, and the stand is wheelchair accessible.



Mr. Snowman, U.S. 90 at Oak Lane, Luling. *Open 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. daily.*

This stand, a favorite among Luling residents that also gets a lot of highway traffic, was begun 11 years ago by Jerry Matherne and now is operated by his son Shane. In that time, the Mathernes have tried out more than 100 flavors. They settled on 14 proven favorites.

It's easy to see why strawberry is the best seller by a 3-to-1 margin over any other flavor here. It's an absolute delight—not too sweet, not too tart. Another great flavor is watermelon—fruity, but on the subtle side.

Parking is adequate in a lot on the side and at the front of the stand. Seating is plentiful, at five umbrella-shaded tables on the patio and in an indoor dining room.



Pandora's Ice Box, 901 N. Carrollton Ave. *Open 11 a.m. – 10 p.m. weekdays, 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. Saturday, noon – 10 p.m. Sunday.*

Lots of flavors, some of them exotic, make this stand at the corner of Dumaine Street a neighborhood favorite in the Mid-City area around City Park. Wedding cake and pink lemonade are recommended.

Parking is on the street, pretty much catch as catch can.



Snoball Lab, Maple Street near Carrollton. *Open noon – 10:30 p.m. Sunday – Thursday; noon – 11 p.m. Friday; 11 a.m. – 11 p.m. Saturday.*

All-natural "juice balls" are the specialty at this stand across Maple Street from the Riverbend shopping center, and they include such flavors as apple, papaya, mango and raspberry. The flavors are fresh and not too sweet.

Though there's no seating except for a couple of nearby stoops, Riverbend is a great area for walking around and window-shopping with your snowball. Also, a neutral-ground park about half

a block away on Dublin Street has plenty of benches. There's parking on the street and across the street at the shopping center.

Except for the home-built machine used by one operator, every one of the Top 10 snoball shops uses the SnoWizard SnoBall machine.



Sno-Balls, Harrison Avenue off Marconi. *Open 11:30 a.m. – 9 p.m. daily.*

This stand across from the City Park ball field is a haven for the Little League and other ballplayers—so much so that it sometimes doesn't open when rainy weather cancels a game. It's a basic, no-frills stand, with all the traditional flavors; its chocolate is a light, milk chocolate. The ambiance here is familiar, and its Lakeview devotees, as well as a few downtown types, swear by it.

There's plenty of parking in the shell lot around the stand.



Sno-Wizard, 4001 Magazine St. *Open noon – 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; noon – 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.*

Forty regular flavors and 13 "convivial cream concoctions" run the gamut from amaretto, cantaloupe, kiwi, butterscotch and tangerine to such fancier titles as pralines and cream, melipone (Mexican vanilla cream) and pina colada.

The signature item at this stand on the corner of Constantinople is "apple pie," a foundation of ice cream-flavored ice topped with a slice of the pie and a mound of soft vanilla ice cream sprinkled with cinnamon and capped with a cherry, costing \$2.15.

There's plenty of parking and seating for nine at three tables just outside the service window.



The Snowball Stand, 4608 W. Esplanade Ave. *Open noon – 11 p.m. daily.*

The ice is quality and they don't skimp on the syrup, which is imported from Williams'-Plum Street stand in New Orleans.

There are 43 flavors at this premiere suburban stand near Clearview, including the tasty orchid cream vanilla and Grasshopper, an unusual crème de menthe flavored recipe.

Parking is plentiful, although there's no place to sit other than the hood of your car.



Williams'-Plum Street, 1300 Burdette St. *Open noon – 9 p.m. daily.*

This is the granddaddy of New Orleans snowball stands. Its most faithful customers are the people who grew up eating snowballs under the lights on the two-sided benches still out in front on Plum Street.

Williams' has all the expected flavors, and a few originals. Rocket 88, a bluish bubble-gum flavor, is a favorite of children. But real snowball aficionados judge a stand by its chocolate, and that's where Williams' is head and shoulders above the rest. It's dark, creamy, chocolatey and very rich; it might not have as many calories as a double hot fudge sundae, but don't bet on it.

Parking is on the street.