

# Travel

LouisianaLife

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## Exploring the state by 5 regions

### Plus:

- Touring Louisiana Highways
- Culinary Adventures
- Into the Woods: The Kisatchie Forest
- On the Antique Beat
- A Web Guide to Events

SPECIAL EDITION



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TERRI FENSEL PHOTOGRAPH

# A Lark in the Forest

Discovering the Kisatchie by Shannon Hurst Lane

**K**isatchie National Forest is more than 600,000 acres of land spread across seven parishes in Louisiana. It is managed by the U.S. Forest Service and is divided into five ranger districts. The hidden bayous with bald cypress groves, old-growth pine trees and a world of natural beauty entice nature- and outdoor-lovers of all ages.

Visitors can load up their camping gear and plan to stay awhile at Kisatchie, or they can choose to visit for the day. Lace up the hiking boots, grab a fishing pole, or hop on a bike, and enjoy all of the natural areas Kisatchie National Forest has to offer.

## HISTORY

The Kisatchie National Forest is named after a tribe of Kichai Indians of the Caddoan Confederacy. This tribe called themselves "Kisatchie." In the 1800s, 85 percent of Louisiana was covered in virgin forest, with most of the timber pure stands of magnificent yellow pine. It was considered a lumberman's dream.

These forests allowed Louisiana to be a front-runner in timber production during the early 1900s. But the quick-cutting of forests left behind stump-ridden lands, and Louisiana found itself devoid of resources just as the Great Depression gripped the nation. Few people saw a future for Louisiana within the timber industry. As sawmills began closing, Louisianians felt the Depression long before "Black Tuesday" occurred.

Fortunately, the Forest Service acquired some of the land from the defunct Gulf Lumber Co., which was once the largest sawmill west of the Mississippi. This, however, was only a small portion of the land that the 78 abandoned sawmills of Louisiana had available. In 1928, the Kisatchie Purchase Unit opened headquarters in Alexandria. The next year, Catahoula was named as the forest's first ranger district. It became a National Forest in

1930 and is Louisiana's only National Forest. Today it is considered to be a forester's dream and provides recreation to the public, as well as a renewed outlook on timber production.

## CALCASIEU DISTRICT

The Calcasieu District is located on Highway 28 West, 2 miles east of Gardner and 10 miles west of Alexandria. It is divided into two units, the Evangeline Unit and the Vernon Unit.

The Calcasieu Ranger District manages two trails, the Claiborne and Enduro trails. Both trails allow a variety of recreation experiences within an area that is actively managed to restore native environments. The trails are available for ATV, motorcycle and equestrian use. Hiking and biking are allowed on these trails, but use extreme caution as they are used primarily by motorized vehicles and riders on horseback.

The Enduro Trail offers unique savannah views of open long-leaf pine. The Claiborne Trail offers historic significance, as it is where more than 500,000 troops trained for World War II and was the third largest city in Louisiana during those war years.

## *Evangeline Unit*

This unit offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities just 20 minutes from Alexandria. It is easily accessible from major highways yet gives a special feeling of being in the middle of nowhere. It is perfect for solitary bird-watching in the undeveloped sections or family reunions in the more developed areas. Kincaid Lake provides an area to escape the summer heat with a swim, or take a hike in the fall to witness the colorful leaves changing. This is also a great place for a winter campfire or gazing at wildflowers during the temperate spring months.

**Camping:** Three campgrounds at Kincaid Lake, two campgrounds at Valentine Lake, the Claiborne Trails Camp, the Evangeline Camp, the Amus Melder Camp and the Boy Scout Camp

## A LARK IN THE FOREST

The Kisatchie, Louisiana's only National Forest, offers ample opportunities for fishing, camping, boating and outdoor recreation.

**Trails:** The Wild Azalea National Recreation Trail, the Claiborne Trails, the Kincaid Lake Trails, the Valentine Lake Trails, the Lamotte Creek Trail and the Indian Ridge Trail

**Boating:** Kincaid Lake Boat Ramp (all boats), Kincaid Lake West Ramp (all boats) and Valentine Lake (kayak and canoe only)

**Special Areas:** The Bayou Beouf Research Natural Area, and Castor Creek Scenic Area

### *Vernon Unit*

The Vernon Unit offers a wide variety of wildlife species and plants. This diverse ecosystem structure is visible through the bogs, creeks and scenic areas located throughout the forest. This area is a photographer's delight.

**Camping:** Fullerton Lake, Enduro Trailhead Camp and Hunter's Camp

**Trails:** Enduro Trails, Whiskey Chitto Recreation Trail, Big Branch Trail, Ol' Sarge Interpretive Trail, Turkey Pen Trail and Fullerton Mill Trail

**Boating:** Kayaks and canoes only at Fullerton Lake, Little Cypress Pond and Blue Hole

**Special Areas:** Cooter's Bog, Drake's Creek, Whiskey Chitto, Blue Hole Wildlife Viewing Structure and Longleaf Scenic Area

## CANEY DISTRICT

### *Caney Lakes Unit*

Caney Lakes Unit offers visitors two completely different lake types and the National Sugar Cane Recreation Trail. Both the Upper and Lower Caney Lakes, while distinctly different, offer beauty and recreation for all to enjoy.

**Camping:** Beaver Dam Campground, located on Upper Caney Lake, and the Turtle Slide Campground on Lower Caney Lakes Recreation Complex

**Trails:** Sugar Cane National Recreation Trail (located inside the Caney Lakes Recreation Center)

Hunter Camp and the Turkey Trot Hunter Camp

### *Corney Lake Unit*

The Corney Lake Unit is a 2,300-acre reservoir that has become a popular fishing area and waterfowl-hunting destination. It offers three boat launches in a variety: one modern (South Shore), one primitive (North Shore) and one new (Bayou). It is similar to the Middle Fork Unit, offering no fee areas, yet the lake facilities offer more modern fixtures.

**Camping:** Corney Lake North Shore Camp, Corney Lake South Shore Campground, Corney Lake Overflow Camp and the Sugar Creek Hunter Camp

**Boating:** Corney Lake South Shore Boat Launch, Corney Lake North Shore Boat Launch and the Bayou Boat Launch

## CATAHOULA DISTRICT

This area is located north of Pineville and is home to the original Louisiana State University site. The remains of Camp Livingston, a World War II-era U.S. Army installation, are located throughout most of this district. It was the epicenter of the famed Louisiana Maneuvers, which were war games that played a key role in the preparation of the U.S. military for World War II combat.

Camp Livingston was once known as Camp Tioga. The remains of the property are still there, including concrete streets, footings from many buildings, parking lots and a swimming pool.

**Trails:** Glen Emery Trail, Little Creek Trail and Hickman Trail

## KISATCHIE DISTRICT

The Kisatchie District is diverse in its activities, including nine scenic overlooks; 12 miles of wilderness hiking trails; canoeing over 20 miles down Kisatchie Bayou; 50 miles of multi-use trails; and a 17-mile scenic byway, complete with panoramic vistas. Special interest areas include the National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Area, which includes the Kisatchie Hills,

**Boating:** Caney Lake Boat Launch, Lower Caney Lake Boat Launch, South Shore Caney Lake Boat Launch

### *Middle Fork Unit*

Visitors to the Middle Fork Unit can enjoy seasonal hunting opportunities and forestlands that are pleasing to the eye. This unit offers very primitive camping. The camps are only maintained during hunting season, even though they are open year-round. Visitors should be aware that no water, restrooms or trash receptacles are available. There are no fee areas within the Middle Fork Unit.

**Camping:** The Bucktail



**Left:** With five ranger districts and a variety of campgrounds and hiking trails, the Kisatchie offers something for everyone.

and the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness Area, which is Louisiana's only designated wilderness area.

**Camping:** Cane Camp is a primitive camping area located near the Sandstone Trail in upland mixed forest with large oaks and pines. This is a designated horse camp that provides water and horse feeder poles. There are also restrooms and trash receptacles in this designated fee area.

Corral Camp is also a primitive camp located near the Sandstone Trail. Restrooms and trash receptacles are provided. This is a designated fee area.

Coyote Camp is located within the National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Preserve. This primitive camping area is also a designated hunter camp. Restrooms are available.

Custis Camp is similar to the Coyote Camp in that it is located in the National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Preserve and is a designated hunter camp with primitive camping.

Dogwood Campground includes restrooms, water and trash receptacles and also has room for trailers and campers.

Kisatchie Bayou Campground, located near the Kisatchie Bayou Recreation Complex, is nestled beneath large old-growth hardwoods. Tent pads are located upstream or downstream from the recreation area. This area is not designated for vehicle camping, and drinking water is not available. This is a designated fee area.

Lotus Camp is a primitive camping area on the edge of the Red Dirt National Wildlife Management Preserve. Water, trash receptacles and restrooms are provided. There is a spur trail that leads to the Sandstone Multi-use Trail for riders. It is a designated fee area.

Oak Camp is a designated horse camp located within the Red Dirt National Wildlife Preserve with a primitive camping area.

Reed Bluff Camp is a primitive camping area near the Red Dirt National Wildlife Preserve and provides restrooms and trash receptacles. It is designated for general camping.

**Trails:**

The Caroline Dormon Trail is a designated horse trail, although hikers and bikers are permitted. No motorized travel is allowed. Creek crossings, meadows and scenic views are available to all visitors of this trail. The trailhead begins on the Longleaf Scenic Byway. Forest Highway 59.

The Longleaf Scenic Byway is an auto tour trail along the Longleaf Trail Highway 59. A brochure is available, providing a

step-by-step walk-through of various points of interest and history along this area with a unique view of Louisiana scenery. The paved trail is 17 miles long and connects at the intersection of Louisiana Highway 117 at the west end to Louisiana Highway 119 at the east end.

Longleaf Vista Interpretive Trail is in the Longleaf Vista Day-Use Complex. Access is limited for some visitors due to the stair steps encountered along the way. Interpretive signs are placed along the trail to identify various plant life and trees native to the area. This trail is a 1.5-mile loop with beautiful views of the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness Area. Two separate spurs will delight hikers by leading them to a mesa with 360-degree views.

The Sandstone Trail offers 36 miles of riding trail, including the newly constructed crossover spur trail, which can help shorten a lengthy trip for some visitors. This trail requires a fee for those not traveling by foot. There are several camps along this trail: The Lotus, Corral and Coyote.

Kisatchie Hills Wilderness Trails: Backbone Trail is the main trail out the four wilderness hikes in the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness area. The complete trail is 7 miles long and is intersected by High Ridge, Turpentine Hill and Explorer Trails. The High Ridge Trail is 1.5 miles in length. It is a favorite for the photo opportunities of the scenery and landscape. Turpentine Hill Trail is located between the Caroline Dormon Trailhead and the entry road for the Longleaf Vista Recreation Area. There is a small grassy parking area at the trailhead. Be sure to fill out an entry form so the Forest Service can keep track of you in case you run into trouble. The shortest trail, The Explorer, connects to the Turpentine Hill Trail. It offers a scenic view area and unique sandstone outcroppings along the trail.

**WINN DISTRICT**

The Winn Ranger District is 164,000 acres located in Winn, Natchitoches and Grant parishes. Winn District, along with Catahoula District, are popular with hunters due to their close proximity to Winnfield. This is the site of natural springs, Gum Springs.

**Camping:** Gum Springs Horse Camp

**Boats:** Cloud Crossing Recreation Complex at Saline Bayou

**Trails:** Dogwood Interpretive Trail and Gum Springs Trail

**HUNTING**

Kisatchie National Forest is an exciting place for hunters. There are some rules that these sportsmen need to follow when hunting game so that Kisatchie can continue to be a safe environment for everyone. Hunters cannot shoot on or across a road or any right of way and must be alert for any people who may be around. A limit of one deer per day of the appropriate sex when the season is open is allowed. Hunting dogs are allowed, such as any bird-dog breed for waterfowl, quail, dove and woodcock. Squirrel-hunting allows any breed, but rabbit-hunters may only bring beagles that do not exceed 15 inches of shoulder width in size. Any other type of hunting dog is not allowed.

Remember that the Kisatchie is public land and hunters should be respectful of those who arrive first at a hunting spot. For complete information on hunting in Kisatchie National Forest, visit [www.fs.fed.us/r8/kisatchie/hunting/index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/kisatchie/hunting/index.html).





# Central Louisiana

by Shannon Hurst Lane

**C**entral Louisiana, also known as Cenla and, more recently, Crossroads, is a meeting of the northern and southern parts of Louisiana, a melting pot of the cultures that inhabit the area. Alexandria is the heart of Cenla, with highways and back roads meandering around the land, from the plains where American Indians once ruled to the tall majestic pine trees that whisper in the breeze.

This is an area steeped in tradition and a unique community spirit. The spirit of each small town embraces visitors with its quality of life and values. This helps make Cenla a perfect blend of heritage, tradition, culture, natural resources and innovation.

French, Spanish and English settlers made their own mark on the land of Cenla. Natchitoches is where the builders of the French Quarter drew inspiration for architecture and design. It is also the oldest permanent settlement in the state.

The cultural diversity of Cenla is full of rich history and small-town friendliness. American Indians are still active in their communities, teaching residents and visitors about their culture and traditions. Marksville, located in Avoyelles Parish, is home to one of the earliest American Indian civilizations yet discovered in the United States. The Tunica-Biloxi Tribe is located in this area, which also boasts Paragon Casino Resort, a museum and an anthropological conservation laboratory.

Toledo Bend, an outdoor paradise, was disputed property between Spain and the United States during the time after the Louisiana Purchase. This was no man's land, where bandits and outlaws ruled. Stories abound in Cenla, leaving legends that last through the centuries.



SONNY CARTER PHOTOGRAPH



In nearby Florien, Hodges Gardens State Park is a unique member of the state parks system. Hodges Gardens was initially opened to the public in 1956 by oil and gas businessman A. J. Hodges Sr. Hodges took an abandoned quarry and planned a scenic garden on the property. These 700 acres feature a formal rose garden, Japanese red maple trees and waterfalls among its scenic beauty.

Cenla is the land of *Steel Magnolias* and *All the Kings Men*. It is also the inspiration for *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. If you venture far enough off the beaten path, you'll be surprised by the meandering waterways and the old farmhouses, where living life off the land is still evident. Frogmore Cotton Plantation and Gins stands as a testament that what was old can still be new, with its computerized cotton gin and on-site tours of the old days.

During the Civil War, Union troops burned the city of Alexandria, but from the ashes came the touch of Victorian times in the area architecture. Years later, just before the United States entered into World War II, Gens. Patton, Marshall and Eisenhower mapped out war strategies during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

Central Louisiana is a gumbo pot where all parts of the state meet and collide with the residents who keep life going today. Music is an important part of the entire state of Louisiana, but the Cenla area has its own piece of music history, with its zydeco and rock 'n' roll roots. So stay awhile, and meet the people. See the sights. And enjoy the music that brings it all together for a symphony of the soul.

A visit to the back roads and small towns of Cenla is like finding a diamond in the rough.

Cenla offers many back roads that take you off the beaten path and into the heart of Louisiana. Discover all we have to offer by exploring the byways and scenery.

#### ROAD TRIP

##### *Attakapas-Coushatta Scenic Byway*

The Attakapas-Coushatta Scenic Byway follows a part of what was once the famed El Camino Real, which dates back to Spanish colonial times. Discover American Indian heritage, the 19th-century timber-industry heritage of Central Louisiana and World War II military history.

##### *Colonial Trails Scenic Byway*

In the years 1698 to 1850, settlers blazed the winding trails that created the frontier. They searched and found what became Louisiana's farms, towns and plantations. Journey through the Kisatchie National Forest and the Cajun prairies. Visit Marksville, home of the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe, or stop in Louisiana's oldest city, Natchitoches.

##### *Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway*

South of Natchitoches, this 17-mile stretch of scenic byway guides motorists through some of the most scenic parts of Kisatchie National Forest. This drive offers natural beauty, as well as access to several popular recreation spots in the Kisatchie Hills area. This byway traverses some of the most scenic spots within the 600,000-acre national forest.

##### *Toledo Bend Forest Scenic Byway*

Toledo Bend is a fun and exciting destination for the entire family. This 186,000-acre man-made reservoir is filled with bass, bream, catfish and crappie. Those who venture onto the Toledo Bend Scenic Highway will be transported back in time

by experiencing the villages of Fisher and Fort Jesup. This route is a history-lover's delight, with small towns and museums around every bend. This is also the perfect drive for outdoorsmen and water-sports enthusiasts.

### TOP DESTINATIONS

•A common occurrence in Cenla and throughout much of Louisiana is a celebration of community with festivals, fairs and farmers markets. Most festivals have a theme and occur annually. They are also unique to each community. These traditional gatherings stem from farming days, when members of communities lived too far away from each other to gather together very often. They planned festivals as a way to bring residents together, both in body and spirit.

•The Alexandria/Pineville area is the undisputed heart of Cenla, with rivers and highways bringing life into the rural parts of the area. It was once a trading post and was the center of river traffic, which still plays an integral part in Cenla economics. Even though it is the center of Cenla, the surrounding areas are sure to surprise and delight with unique history and heritage.

•The Alexandria Zoological Park is a family-friendly attraction that was founded in 1926. It encompasses 22 shady acres and includes more than 500 animals, including 20 endangered

country music is today. The museum is located at Rebel State Park, west of Natchitoches.

•Each August in Natchitoches Parish, the Cane River Zydeco Festival & Poker Run gets visitors' toes tappin' and feet stompin'. This style of music, indigenous to Louisiana, features accordions and washboards, also known as rubboards or *frottoir*. This festival dedicated to fast-tempo beats is not to be missed.

•Melrose Plantation, located 16 miles south of Natchitoches, offers a glimpse into yesteryear. It tells the remarkable story of how a slave woman gained her freedom and property to help her family become one of the wealthiest families of color in the nation at the turn of the 19th century. This is also the site where nationally recognized artist Clementine Hunter worked as a field hand and cook while recording Cane River life through primitive art. The plantation is open daily from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m., except for major holidays.

•Upriver, Natchitoches is the oldest permanent settlement in the state of Louisiana. The city was founded in 1714 to promote trade between the Spanish and Mexicans. This area was also made famous by the colorful politics of the Long brothers. The Louisiana Political Museum and Hall of Fame in Winnfield showcases memorabilia from the 1920s and '30s that calls to



**Facing page: Melrose Plantation, south of Natchitoches, is open daily for tours from noon to 4 p.m.**

**Below left: The African House at Melrose Plantation is a rare example of African architecture in Louisiana.**

**Below right: Nationally recognized artist Clementine Hunter recorded Cane River life through primitive art.**



species. It offers large viewing windows that provide a view into the natural habitat enclosures for tigers, lions and jaguars.

•Nearby Kent Plantation House is a classic example of French colonial architecture. It stands on the original land grant from the King of Spain to Pierre Baillio II. The home offers a glimpse of the French, Spanish and American cultures that have influenced Louisiana. It is also one of the oldest standing structures in the state.

•Ferriday, west of the Mississippi state line, is home to the Delta Music Museum. It showcases its musical heritage and also its famous musicians: Jerry Lee Lewis, Mickey Gilley and the late Pee Wee Whitaker, to name a few.

•The Louisiana Country Music Hall of Fame in Marthaville is a testament to the Anglo-Scotch-Irish settlers who came to the area. Their folk music and instruments are the roots of what

memory Huey Long's campaign slogan, "Every man a king."

Natchitoches is also home to Northwestern State University, which hosts the Louisiana Piano Series International. Chez des Amis, a charming bed-and-breakfast in the center of town, offers a romantic escape where many notable pianists have entertained on the property's baby grand.

Families can have fun in Natchitoches, also. Bayou Pierre Alligator Park allows visitors to explore the unique, mysterious and exciting world of the American alligator. It is set on 5 acres of an authentic Cajun countryside, complete with Cajun music, genuine Cajun cuisine and an abundance of fun.

•Zwolle is the site of numerous festivals relating to the timber industry that is prevalent in the Cenla area. The Zwolle Loggers & Forestry Festival recognizes agriculture as an impor-





Left: The Kate Chopin House in Cloutierville celebrates the author of *The Awakening*.

tant part of the economy and honors the oldest living logger each year. It is also their way of bringing the community together for socialization.

• Main Street in Cloutierville is home to numerous historic structures, including the Kate Chopin House. This house is a Creole-style home that celebrates Kate Chopin, author of *The Awakening*. She was unappreciated in her own time but is now regarded as one of the great American writers of the 19th century.

### SPORTS AND OUTDOORS

Cenla is a great choice for nature- and outdoor-lovers. Big Bend, southeast of Marksville, is where the Sarto Old Iron Bridge can be found. This steel-truss swinging bridge was built over Bayou des Glaises in 1916. Don't try to ride a bike over this bridge; it's for foot traffic only.

Campers and hikers will enjoy Kisatchie National Forest, where the Wild Azalea National Recreation Trail can be found. Nearby Kinkaid Lake provides a relaxing spot for a picnic and a swim. Another place of note is Indian Creek Lake and Recreation Area, which encompasses a 2,250-acre lake, 100 acres of recreation facilities and a 250-acre primitive campsite, all located in Alexander State Forest.

The popular fishing area of Toledo Bend was once a disputed strip of land between territories but is now one of the premier areas for fishing, hunting, birding, and canoeing in the state.

The area also offers hiking and golf.

Golf courses abound in Cenla, with Tamahka Trails in Marksville, OakWing in Alexandria and Cypress Bend near Toledo Bend. These three courses are part of the Audubon Golf Trail, but there are many other courses in Cenla that offer fast greens and plenty of game. Watch out for those water hazards!

### LODGING

#### High-End

The Palmoire is one of Alexandria's finest inns. The luxurious 1,200-thread-count sheets are just one of the special touches the Macklins provide for your stay. Lunch and dinner can be served by request. There are also spa services on property.

The PARC England is a boutique hotel with an adjoining restaurant, Bistro on the Bayou. This boutique hotel combines the ultimate in Louisiana charm and décor with modern amenities. Definitely on the upper end of Alexandria's lodging offerings, the Parc England is suitable for business or leisure.

Natchitoches' Levy-East House is by far one of the most elegant bed-and-breakfast homes in the South. The three-story Greek Revival house has been restored to capture the spirit of its time.

Paragon Casino Resort has recently completed a major renovation. The new guest rooms are decorated with fluffy bedding fit for royalty. The older rooms need updating, but they are clean, and the location is what makes this place stand out. The lobby houses a swamp setting with real alligators, a three-

screen movie theater and a few shops. There is also a full-service spa on-site, Spa la Vie; workout facilities; an indoor lagoon-style pool; and many activities for children, including an arcade and Kids Quest. Oh, and then there's the casino.

Cypress Bend Golf Resort & Conference Center on Toledo Bend Lake offers golf suites, fine dining, legendary fishing and relaxing spa facilities, not to mention a nationally recognized championship golf course that can stand on its own.

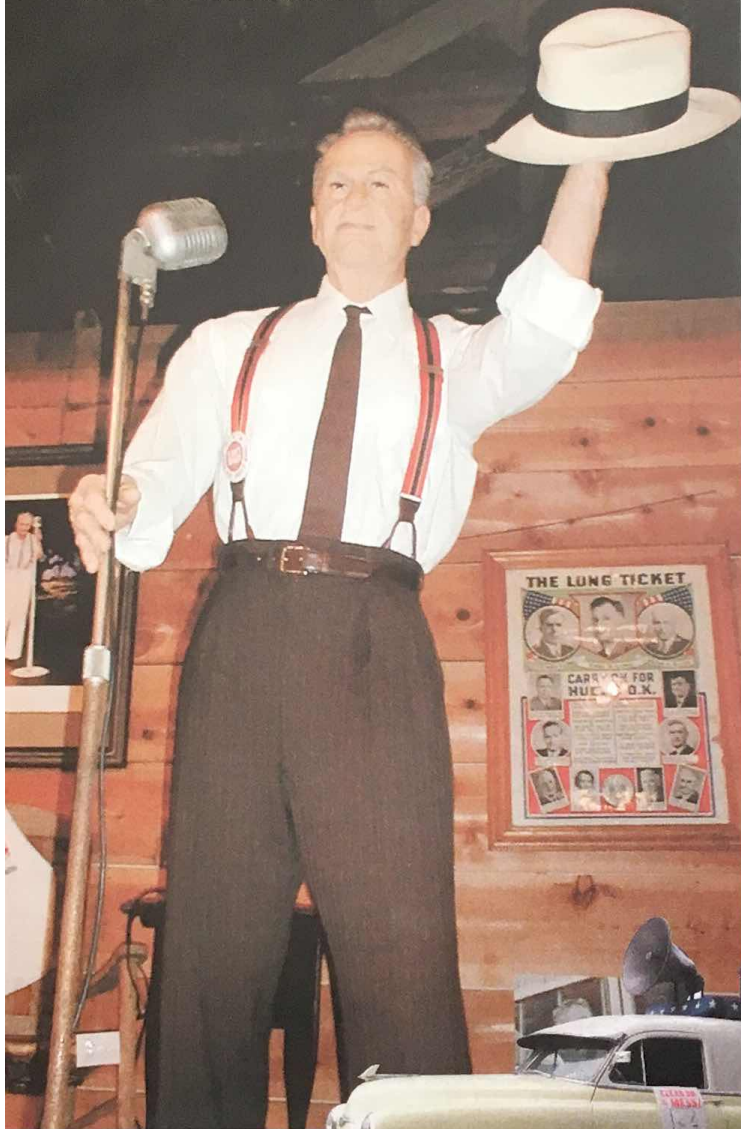
#### Bed-and-Breakfasts

Fairmont Plantation is Alexandria's circa 1869 plantation that offers an evening meal upon request. Inglewood Plantation is also located in the area and is considered Alexandria's best-kept secret. This property is located on 3,000 acres amongst ancient oak trees on a working plantation. Susan's Cottages has four private cabins that are cozy and filled with many amenities.

Leesville's Booker-Lewis House has nine guest rooms with luxurious and distinctive accommodations. The large, well-appointed rooms provide a welcome haven for weary travelers. It is located in Leesville's historic district and is loaded with character.

In Jonesville, Kirby House of Trinity Bed and Breakfast is a beautiful pre-Civil War home listed in the National Register. The home is furnished in antiques and offers three guest rooms in quiet seclusion.





Left: The Gov. Earl Long exhibit and a truck from the Louisiana Political Museum and Hall of Fame in Winnfield help tell the colorful story of Louisiana politics through campaign memorabilia.



Natchitoches is home to numerous bed-and-breakfasts. The Blessed House is a three-story raised Creole cottage circa 1836 and is located in the historic district. Cane River Cottage and Guesthouse is situated on beautiful Cane River Lake. Visitors can dock their boats at a private dock. This lodging is located 15 minutes from downtown. For total privacy, Log Cabin on Cane River offers a spectacular view of the river and downtown. This 1934 cabin is filled with modern amenities.

Lloyd Hall in Cheneyville is a 640-acre working sugar cane plantation where visitors can take a tour of the home, spend the night in one of the cottages or hunt down ghosts that roam the property.

**DINING**

The food of Central Louisiana can consist of a home-cooked meal with fluffy biscuits or an alligator jambalaya, but the food that Cenla is known for is pie.

Louisiana meat pies are a meal in themselves. These pies consists of a crust folded in half, stuffed with spicy meat and then baked or fried until the crust is flaky and brown. Mmmm! Don't miss the Meat Pie Festival in September when this delicious concoction is celebrated. The festival is held in Natchitoches, the place Oprah Winfrey declared the "best little town in the whole USA!"

*Ritzy*

Bistro on the Bayou is located at Alexandria's PARC England Hotel. The bistro serves fresh gulf seafood, prime steaks and pasta, all with that special Louisiana touch. Bistro on the Bayou offers a swanky retro atmosphere in what was once the officer's club of the former England Air Force Base.

Red River Grill is located across from the Courthouse Square in Marksville. Its seafood and steak entrees can be topped with various offerings. The appetizers include duck tenders or a mixed grill of game sausage (venison, wild boar, buffalo). There are also daily specials, such as the spicy crawfish roll with red pepper chipotle sauce.

The Cypress Dining Room at Cypress Bend Golf Resort provides diners with an exceptional view of the golf course, which spills onto Toledo Bend Lake.

*Down-Home*

Lecompte is home to Lea's Lunchroom, which was once featured on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*.

This diner has served international and domestic visitors since 1928. Just a hop, skip and jump off of Interstate 49, Lecompte is a perfect pit stop for any road trip. Baked ham sandwiches started out as its specialty, but its melt-in-your-mouth pies with tall, fluffy meringues are a feast for the taste buds.

Cajun Landing on Macarthur Drive in Alexandria may seem like a run-down hotel from the outside, but don't let looks deceive you. Diners are flocking from all over to taste its seafood crepes and the wonderful French bread. This place, which used to be a secret for the locals, is getting known in the culinary world.

Lasyone's Meat Pies of Natchitoches is the place to get an authentic Cajun cuisine experience. This family-owned and -operated establishment, with the aroma of spices cooking in the back, will make you feel like a long-lost relative.

Slough Daddy's Restaurant in Vidalia serves up soft-shell crab poor boys while diners gaze over the Mississippi River. This laid-back facility is run by a farmer-turned-restaurateur who serves great dishes on a river deck.

The Crossroads area of Louisiana is just that: Crossroads among cultures, among classes, among people and among traditions. Whether you are looking for that down-home meal in a funky, laid-back setting or a luxurious place to lay your head, the wild azaleas and other natural wonders are waiting to be discovered.





# Cajun Country

by Shannon Hurst Lane

# C

ajun Country has a spicy history. It was once the stomping grounds of infamous pirates, a haven for Acadian exiles and a place where American Indians could roam freely across the land, and it is home to the rich soil where TABASCO planted its seeds.

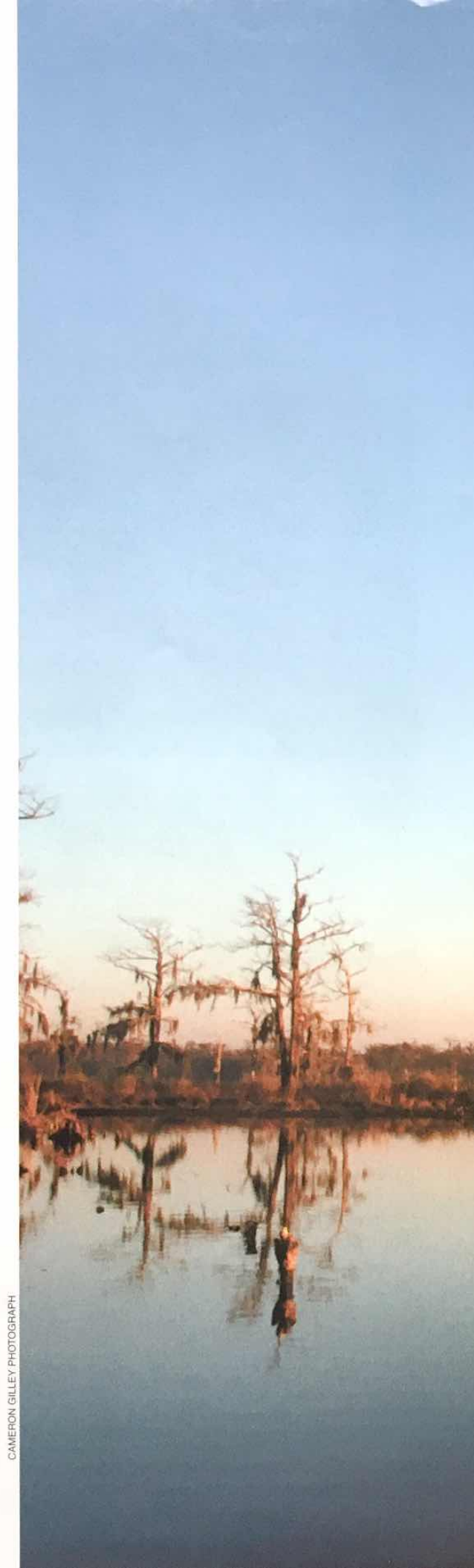
This area was first home to American Indians. Then the explorers came and brought their own cultures and people. One of the oldest European settlements in Louisiana was established in 1720 by the French government. What was once home to

the Opelousas Indians became *le Poste des Opelousas* and today is known as Cajun Country.

In the mid-1700s French-speaking Acadians were exiled by the British. They were forced to leave their homeland in Nova Scotia, Canada, and search for a new life. These exiles of *L'Acadie* settled in the fertile marshlands and prairies of South Louisiana. The people we now call Cajuns joined the American Indians and Creoles who inhabited this area. Through hard work and cooperation and with help from American Indians, the Cajuns and Creoles learned to survive and eventually flourish in South Louisiana.

The Louisiana Purchase infused the area with even more cultures and traditions, with settlements of English, Scottish, Irish and German people who have also contributed to the rich and colorful experience of this area.

When you step into Cajun Country, you step back in time. The scenic highways and byways lead visitors through what is seemingly another country. The Acadians blended their French ways with Catholic Spanish Louisiana, and remnants of their traditions and



CAMERON GILLEY PHOTOGRAPH



**Cajun Country is a diverse region with a spicy history that includes pirates and TABASCO sauce. Scenic highways and byways cut through the beautiful landscape of Cajun country, which is full of bayous and cypress trees.**

culture live on in small cafés and businesses where the inhabitants still speak a French patois today.

The music of Cajun Country is a mixture of different cultures and people whose traditions have survived the test of time. Festivals celebrate the lifestyle of Cajun Country, with locals and visitors two-stepping in the streets to the strains of the ti-fer and accordion of Cajun, zydeco and swamp pop music.

The food is loved the world over, and the people who cook the food are known for their hospitality and kindness to visitors.

With Cajun Country scattered throughout the swamps and bayous, nature and the outdoors play a major role in the lifestyle.

**ROAD TRIP**

*Zydeco Cajun Prairie Scenic Byway*

This scenic byway passes through the heart of Acadiana. This is where you will find French families whose ancestors came from Europe in the early 1700s. Discover the music, the food, the towns and the people as you pass through Grand Coteau, Sunset, Opelousas, Washington, Crowley, Eunice and on to the Ville Platte area.

*Jean Lafitte Scenic Byway*

This byway is also known as the Hug the Coast Highway. It crisscrosses through Acadiana and passes through marshlands and the Intracoastal Waterway, past crawfish ponds and sugar cane fields.

*Bayou Teche Scenic Byway*

This 125-mile route winds through three parishes: St. Mary, Iberia and St. Martin. The Bayou Teche Scenic Byway is home to two distinct cultures — the French-Cajun culture of the upper Teche area and the Anglo-Saxon culture of the lower Teche. It is also home to an incredibly beautiful natural landscape. As you travel the byway, you'll enjoy everything from moss-draped live oak trees along the banks of Bayou Teche to more than 100 historic properties, many on the National Register of Historic Places.

*Wetlands Cultural Trail*

Cypress trees and cypress knees are common as you pass by Laurel Valley sugar mill, with circa 1875 cabins and scenery unique to the wetlands.

**TOP DESTINATIONS**

•Allen Parish is considered the gateway into Cajun Country. Kinder and Oakdale offer a number of antiques shops and flea markets full of treasures waiting to be discovered. The Coushatta Indian Museum is located on tribal lands in Elton. The Coushatta tribe is mostly known for its

pine needle baskets, which are on display along with other tribal artifacts in the museum.

•The Cajun Coast in St. Mary Parish is a destination where you can wake up to the sun rising over oaks and cypress trees. You'll find everything from plantations to museums and golf courses to houseboats. This family-friendly atmosphere provides a relaxed setting for all visitors. The city of Franklin hosts the Harvest Moon Fest each autumn. The Acadiana Symphony Orchestra performs a free outdoor concert during this event. Franklin's Historic District is a must-see for those searching for the "old South."

•Morgan City, which has been on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program for more than 11 years, offers a riverfront area with shopping, dining and several attractions. The historical architecture of many of the churches gives visitors a glimpse into the late 1870s to early 1900s.

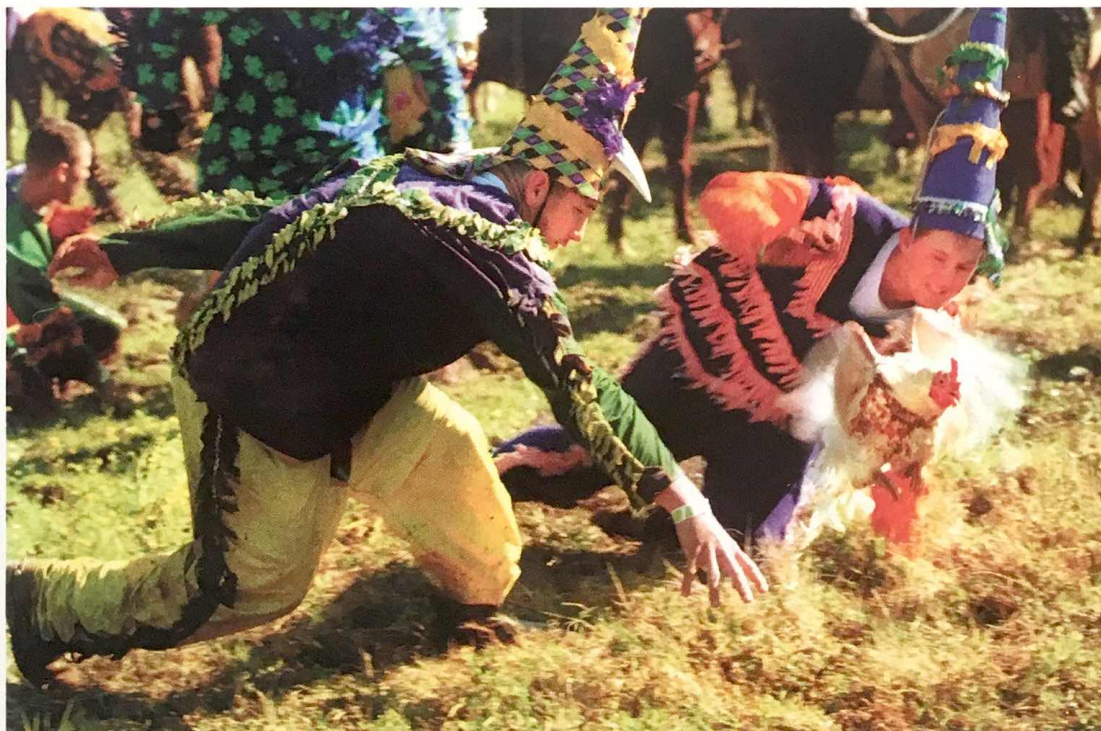
•Ville Platte in Evangeline Parish is known for its spices and seasonings. It is home to the famous Slap Ya Mama Seasoning; Kary's Roux, the original LaFleur roux mix; and Jack Miller's Bar-B-Que Sauce, which is still made by the Miller family.

•Each year in Mamou, the Mamou Cajun Music Festival celebrates traditional Cajun music and dancing. Mamou is also famous for the special way the residents celebrate Mardi Gras.

•Houma, located in Terrebonne Parish, is considered the heart of America's wetlands. Houma offers birding trails, exotic wildlife, Cajun dancing halls and exciting swamp tours.

•Napoleonville is located in the far eastern section of Cajun Country. Madewood Plantation House, the beauty of this town, is an antebellum mansion that is a National Historic Landmark. It has been featured in magazines all over the United States. The canopy beds, antiques and candlelight dinners are a pleasant find in Napoleonville.

•Lake Charles and Southwest Louisiana offer up spice and variety. From alligators to music with strains of the accordion to



legendary pirates (and treasure, of course) to pelicans, Lake Charles and the surrounding area host visitors with genuine hospitality and Southern charm. With more than 75 festivals and special events held every year, there's always something going on in Lake Charles.

Lake Charles' history has its beginning as a rowdy sawmill town. A legend that has been passed down from generation to generation is that the gentleman pirate Jean Lafitte used Lake Charles as a hideaway for some of his treasure. This legend is honored today with the celebration of Contraband Days each May. For two weeks the city of Lake Charles becomes a place where the skull and crossbones prevail and the mayor walks the plank. Many treasure-seekers have searched but have yet to find Lafitte's treasure.

- A true treasure can be won at one of Southwest Louisiana's many casinos. It has grown to a first-rate casino resort destination that offers great entertainment, fine dining and luxurious accommodations. If that isn't the treasure you're searching for, then visit downtown. Lake Charles' historic district is a shopaholic's delight. The newly renovated area is filled with a variety of antiques stores, boutiques and cottage shops.

- Outdoor fans are welcomed with open arms. The Creole Nature Trail All-American Road is fondly known as "Louisiana's Outback." Take a drive down this world-famous route, and discover unspoiled marshland and the rich and varied landscape of rice fields; prairies; timberlands; and the beautiful rivers and bayous that make Southwest Louisiana a destination full of culture, tradition and heritage.

- Lafayette is the heartbeat of Cajun Country with so much to offer. At Vermilionville, visitors step back in time when they enter the beautiful village nestled on the banks of Bayou Vermilion. The artisans and musicians re-create life in Southwest Louisiana between 1765 and 1890. Visit six restored original homes, part of 19 structures that are filled with artifacts

and living history. Vermilionville has festivities and programming throughout the year

- The Iberia area includes places such as New Iberia, Avery Island, Jefferson Island, Jeanerette, Loreauville and Delcambre. Iberians fondly dub their home "the hottest spot in Louisiana." The activities and attractions abound in this area, including the homes of many agriculture products unique to Louisiana.

- The Conrad Rice Mill in New Iberia is the oldest operating rice mill in America. A slide show telling the history of the Acadians is shown throughout the day, and the mill itself offers tours. The McIlhenny Co. TABASCO Factory and Country Store offers plant tours every 15 minutes. The store also offers a tasting bar of TABASCO-brand products that are sure to set your taste buds on fire. The Jungle Garden on Avery Island is near enough to the TABASCO Factory that visitors can calm their soul at the Buddha Temple and bird sanctuary after sampling the TABASCO products.

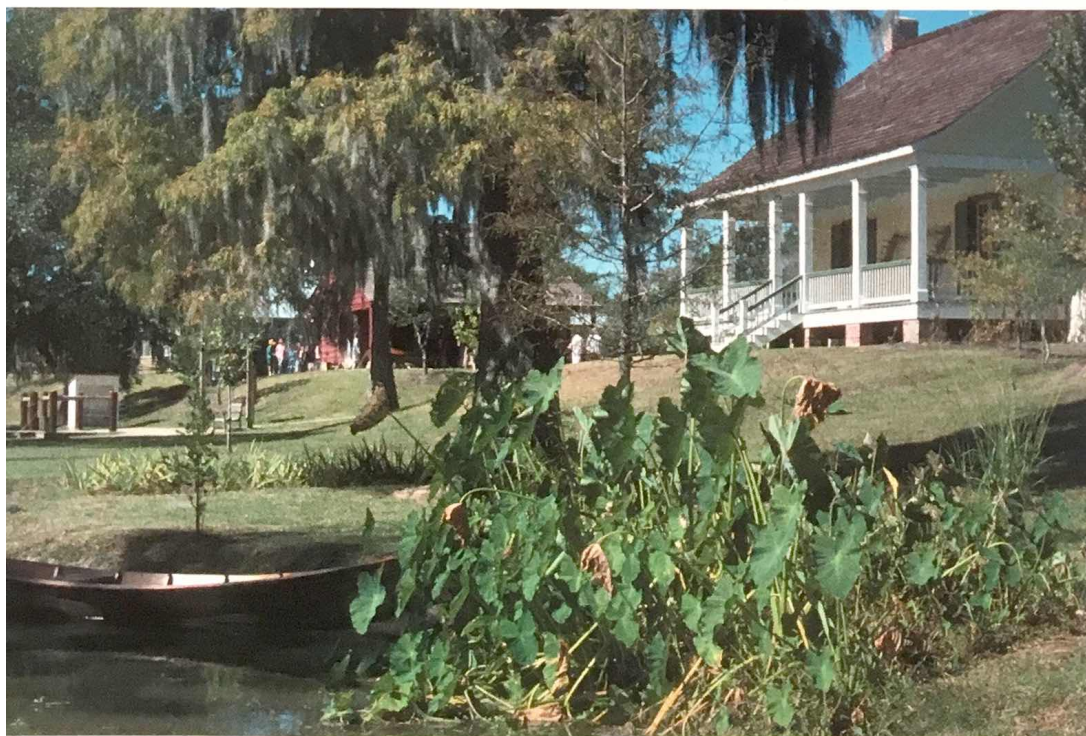
- Shadows on the Teche is a Southern plantation and garden tour located on Bayou Teche. This site is framed by live oaks covered with Spanish moss and houses a collection and family papers from four generations. They come together to present an authentic picture of life at Shadows on the Teche.

- Spanish Lake in New Iberia is an accessible place for everyone to enjoy. Bring a boat, or enjoy fishing off of one of the five wheelchair-accessible piers. Camping is allowed on site at the peninsula, and the custodian building offers snacks, ice and bait at a convenient location. It is open to the public year-round, and more than 240 species of birds have been spotted here. The lake is home to alligators, beavers and nutria, providing multiple opportunities to enjoy wildlife-watching.

- Morgan City boasts a tourist complex that features the industries and lifestyles of the early Cajun settlers of South Louisiana. The on-site Heritage Park features 3.5 acres of picnic grounds, a zoo with indigenous Louisiana creatures such as alligators and

black bears, a barnyard zoo and a gift shop.

- Those who wish to venture further into nature can paddle a canoe into Lake Palourde to watch more than 300 species of birds. Lake End Park and Campground provides overnight spots, a sandy beach and a mile-long walking trail, all helping you enjoy a unique encounter in Cajun Country.



**Facing page: The residents of Mamou celebrate Mardi Gras with a chicken chase.**

**Left: Vermilionville is a folklife park in Lafayette that re-creates life in Southwest Louisiana between 1765 and 1890.**



**Left: Cajun Country is a family-friendly destination full of fun, food and festivals.**

- You can watch the shrimp boats meander along the Atchafalaya River or observe locals passing by as you sit under stately oaks in Lawrence Park. The historic district offers delicious dining experiences, unique shops and museums to whet your appetite.

- In Crowley, which proudly proclaims itself the “Rice Capital of America,” everyone has a smile and a warm welcome. Visitors can start a down-home day in the South with a stop at the Grand Opera House or the vast historic district. The Grand Opera House, which is set to reopen soon, used to boast visitors such as Clark Gable, Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey and Huey Long. Crowley also has more than 200 buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.

But why does Crowley call itself the “Rice Capital of America”? It is because it mills more rice annually than all other rice-producing countries in the world combined. Take a drive down Mill Street to see the large quantity of rice mills. Or if you want to learn more about the industry, take a driving tour of the Rice Trail.

The top floor of Crowley’s City Hall is the oldest recording studio in Louisiana that has been in continuous existence. J.D. Miller Recording Studio is best known for its Cajun, zydeco, blues and country releases from various artists. Legends such as John Fogerty and Paul Simon have recorded tracks here. A video history can be seen in the lobby of the studio.

The pirate Jean Lafitte is honored in Eunice at Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve. Eunice is also home to the Cajun Music Hall of Fame and Museum, as well as the host of the World Championship Crawfish Étouffée Cook-Off that is celebrated each March.

- Washington is the premier Cajun Country destination for antique-lovers. The Old Schoolhouse Antique Mall and various other antiques shops provide a seemingly unlimited supply of window-shopping and browsing, and the historic homes provide an architectural and historic delight. The Washington Museum & Tourist Information Center can point visitors in the right direction. Don’t miss the Washington Catfish Festival in March.

## LODGING

### *High-end*

Coushatta Casino Resort, located 25 miles north of Lake Charles, offers luxurious accommodations and numerous restaurants for visitors to enjoy. The resort offers a gaming casino, a kids’ arcade, an RV park and a golf course. It is Louisiana’s largest land-based resort.

The Fairfax House, an elegant sugar cane plantation in Franklin, offers six magnificent rooms. Visitors are transported to a bygone era when they cross the threshold of this beautiful grande dame.

L’Auberge du Lac in Lake Charles is one of the premier casino resorts in Louisiana. The lavish accommodations, large selection of dining venues and relaxing spa show that there is more to this resort than slots and card games. This is not only an adult destination but also a resort that the entire family can enjoy, with the lazy river and other family offerings.

### *Bed-and-Breakfasts*

Aaah! T’Frere’s House Bed and Breakfast has been voted the No. 1 bed-and-breakfast in Acadiana. This eight-room lodging facility provides legendary hospitality and cuisine. Its mint juleps and Cajun canapés make visitors say, “Aaah!”

Maison d’Memoire in Rayne offers charming cottages just 15 minutes from Lafayette. These guesthouses are located in a country setting, providing a romantic escape for an anniversary or special event. A full breakfast is delivered in a covered basket at the cottage door each morning. The tranquility of the property makes it a perfect place to enjoy serenity in Cajun Country.

Grand Bayou Noir is one of Houma’s finest bed-and-breakfasts. The home is surrounded by 4 acres of beautiful old oak trees and boasts an elegance that not many in the area can match. Relax on one of the swings, or take an afternoon nap in a hammock.

Rip Van Winkle Gardens in New Iberia is set on a 25-acre semitropical paradise garden. Take a tour of the garden and cleanse your soul, or stay overnight in the Cook’s Cottage or Joseph Jefferson Servants’ Quarters, charming Acadian cottages furnished with handmade mahogany beds.



Left: Cajun Country, where French-speaking Acadians settled after being forced out of Nova Scotia in the mid-1700s, is a rich blend of many cultures and traditions.

#### *Off the beaten path*

Experience the Cajun Coast by staying in a houseboat. Cajun Houseboats and Rentals Inc. can help you slow down your pace with a stay on The Cajun Sunrise or The Cajun Gypsy. Take a guided swamp tour, or go solo on a canoe through the bayous.

Hackberry Rod and Gun isn't just a fishing charter service. Located in Cameron Parish, it offers condominium-style lodgings with luxury in mind. This lodge is perfect for hunters or fishermen who demand the best.

Ricky's Motel in Grand Isle has taken what nature destroyed and turned it into opportunity. The motel has cabins and rooms that face either the bay or the Gulf of Mexico. When Hurricane Katrina damaged a number of buildings, the owners made room for an RV park with a game room, a pier and a tackle shop.

Located on 30 acres, Wildlife Gardens Bed & Breakfast in Houma offers unique lodging experiences in one of four swamp cabins. Visitors can take a walking tour through the gardens, catch a swamp tour on a boat or feed baby alligators off of the cabin porch.

McGee's Landing can be found in Henderson on Henderson Levee Road. It offers Atchafalaya swamp tours and Cajun guest cabins, as well as a café and bar. Take an airboat ride to see alligators in their habitat, and then relax after the sun sets in a Cajun-style cabin.

#### **DINING**

##### *Ritz*

Snake River Grill at L'Auberge du Lac in Lake Charles is a renowned landmark that originated in Jackson Hole, Wyo. This fine dining establishment offers local Louisiana fare, as well as classic dishes from its original restaurant. The cornmeal-dusted Idaho trout is served topped with crawfish, scallions and corn cream. With dishes such as this, it is easy to understand how it

#### *Funky down-home*

Rita Mae's Kitchen in Morgan City serves genuine home-cooked meals on Federal Avenue. The funky little cottage with its black-and-white tile floor offers home-cooking away from home.

Located on Center Street in New Iberia, Duffy's Diner is a dining establishment where you can enjoy a taste of the '50s with a Louisiana twist. This retro diner dishes up stuffed shrimp, seafood poor boys, gumbo and baby back ribs. The entire family will enjoy the fun atmosphere of Duffy's.

Breaux Bridge is home to Mulate's, "the original Cajun restaurant," located on Mills Avenue and just 6 miles from Lafayette. Diners can two-step as they listen to live Cajun music.

Poppa's Restaurant in Jeanerette serves up savory jambalaya, seafood, poor boys and other Cajun specialties. It is closed on Mondays, but the rest of the week you can find various lunch and dinner specials.

Enjoy a delicious lunch and fresh frozen daiquiris at Pelicans on the Bayou. This grill and tavern is located in the historic district of New Iberia and offers a deck overlooking Bayou Teche. Take part in happy hour, and watch the boats and party barges come and go.

La Cuisine de Maman is located in Lafayette's Vermilionville folklife park. This friendly establishment serves authentic Cajun and Creole cuisine. Enjoy a home-style meal, or learn how to cook regional dishes yourself during one of its cooking classes.

#### **HUNTING AND FISHING**

Dry Creek Ranch in Ragley offers more than 1,500 acres of pine- and hardwood-covered hunting grounds. The property has cabins and private bedrooms for those wishing to stay a few days for a hunt or a photo safari. Rates are reasonable, and packages can be customized for visitors' needs.







# Plantation Country

by Shannon Hurst Lane

**P**lantation Country is a true melting pot of the South. The mighty Mississippi flows through the middle of Plantation Country, dividing the culture through the centuries. The romance of the area is evident in the harmony between past and present. In the 1700s and early 1800s, the Great River Road delivered French Creoles from New Orleans, hard-working German settlers and planters from England trying to make their fortunes. These settlers brought with them their customs and styles that make Louisiana the diverse area that it is today. The east side of the Mississippi is as different as the west side. The Felicianas are full of charming antebellum homes, bed-and-breakfasts and Civil War re-enactments.

Follow the Mississippi as it flows down through the heart of Plantation Country. Avenues of ancient oak trees grace the lawns of stately mansions that whisper of days gone by. Take a quiet walk in St. Francisville at Rosedown Plantation, where the gardens were uncovered and restored, providing a haven of solitude among the many roses.

The genteel manners and hospitality of Plantation Country are known the world over. Long ago, should you visit friends on a plantation and overstay your welcome, a pineapple was placed on your bed as a gentle reminder that it was time to leave. Unmarried male visitors were housed away from the main house (and unmarried ladies) in a *garçonnière*, a small building on the plantation grounds. Many stories were also passed down through the generations, such as at Laura Plantation, where the story of Br'er Rabbit, originally known as *Compair Lapin*, was born.

Plantation Country is full of larger-than-life legends and ghost stories that have been passed down through the centuries. The Creole Indies-style homes and English antebellum homes all have colorful stories of the families that once inhabited them. Old Man River is still important to trade, just as it was many years ago. The capital city of Baton Rouge is experiencing a rebirth of its own, from a downtown renaissance to its new role as the movie capital of the South.



CHERYL GERBER PHOTOGRAPH



**Oak Alley Plantation in Vacherie offers bed-and-breakfast accommodations in 19th-century cottages near the main house.**

Baton Rouge is full of the hustle and bustle that all cities offer. But Old Man River reminds us to re-evaluate our lives and slow down the pace. The Mississippi is the life of Plantation Country, offering a history that has told many stories through the centuries.

Baton Rouge means “red stick” and was once marked by American Indians with — you guessed it — a red stick. In later years, Baton Rouge became a hub of business for cotton growers and sugar cane farmers. The mighty Mississippi provided a convenient means to transport cargo to New Orleans. As time passed, plantation homes dotted the riverbanks and mansions were built and rebuilt as a testament to the wealthy landowners and the hard work of slaves and other plantation workers.

Plantation Country has long been a provider of necessary goods needed all over the world. What began as a red stick has grown into cities and communities all over the state. Yesterday’s crops of sugar cane and cotton have grown into oil refineries and other trades.

Today, visitors can stand on the levee in Baton Rouge and listen to the calliope play “The Entertainer” or close their eyes and inhale the scents and sounds that transport them back to the days of long ago. If the city is too busy, they can venture out and explore other areas of Plantation Country, where life is still slow and steady like the flow of the Mississippi.

North of Baton Rouge is a tale of two cities divided by a river: one French and one very much English. A 15-minute ferry ride across the river gives a better perspective of its greatness. On one side is St. Francisville, with its tall white columns and English gardens. A ferry ride away is New Roads, a distinctly French-influenced area with Creole-style plantations. Not even a half-mile divides these two towns, yet the difference is even evident in the residents’ accents.

The southern end of Plantation Country is the gateway to the New Orleans area. West Baton Rouge is connected to Plantation Country by two bridges in Baton Rouge. To the east is Livingston Parish, a place that locals call God’s Country due to all of the open farmland and rural housing. This is an area of pine tree plantations and hunting grounds. Hunting is a popular sport in Louisiana.

Plantation Country is also a fisherman’s haven, with the camps of Old River, Bayou Gauche and False River. Golf-lovers can hop onto the Audubon Golf Trail or make a visit to Zachary, home of Copper Mill Golf Course, one of *Golf Digest’s* Top New Courses in 2005. Race fans can stop by Baton Rouge Raceway on a Friday night, where the roar of engines can be heard miles away.

Families can enjoy the culture and entertainment offered around the area. Alligator Bayou takes you into the swamp where alligators and other creatures abound. The Baton Rouge Zoo is an inexpensive way to spend an afternoon. Nearby Blue Bayou Water Park and Dixie Landin’ Amusement Park offer rides such as Voodoo, the world’s largest dark BehemothBowl water slide, and the Ragin Cajun, a 14-foot steel roller coaster.

History comes to life at different times through the year. Port Hudson National Historic Site holds an annual re-enactment of The Battle of Port Hudson. In nearby Jackson, visitors can ride an old rail train, observe the Battle of Jackson Crossroads or stop in at Centenary Commemorative Area.

Livingston Parish and the surrounding area celebrate their German and Hungarian ties with Oktoberfest and Ponchatoula’s Strawberry Festival, which boasts award-winning strawberry wine. Point Coupee Parish’s “cut off point” is the oldest settlement in Plantation Country.

December is a magical time of the year in Plantation Country. During the first weekend of December, St. Francisville entertains visitors and residents with “Christmas in the Country,” where you can step back in time and walk through a lighted historic district complete with carolers. On Christmas Eve, Litcher’s Festival of the Bonfires on the Mississippi River lights the way for Papa Noel.

The music of Plantation Country is as diverse as its people. Teddy’s Juke Joint in Zachary serves up blues as well as soul food in an unassuming haunt of locals and blues-lovers. The Baton Rouge blues scene is still alive today, thanks to the efforts of Tabby Thomas, the late Johnny Adams and many others.

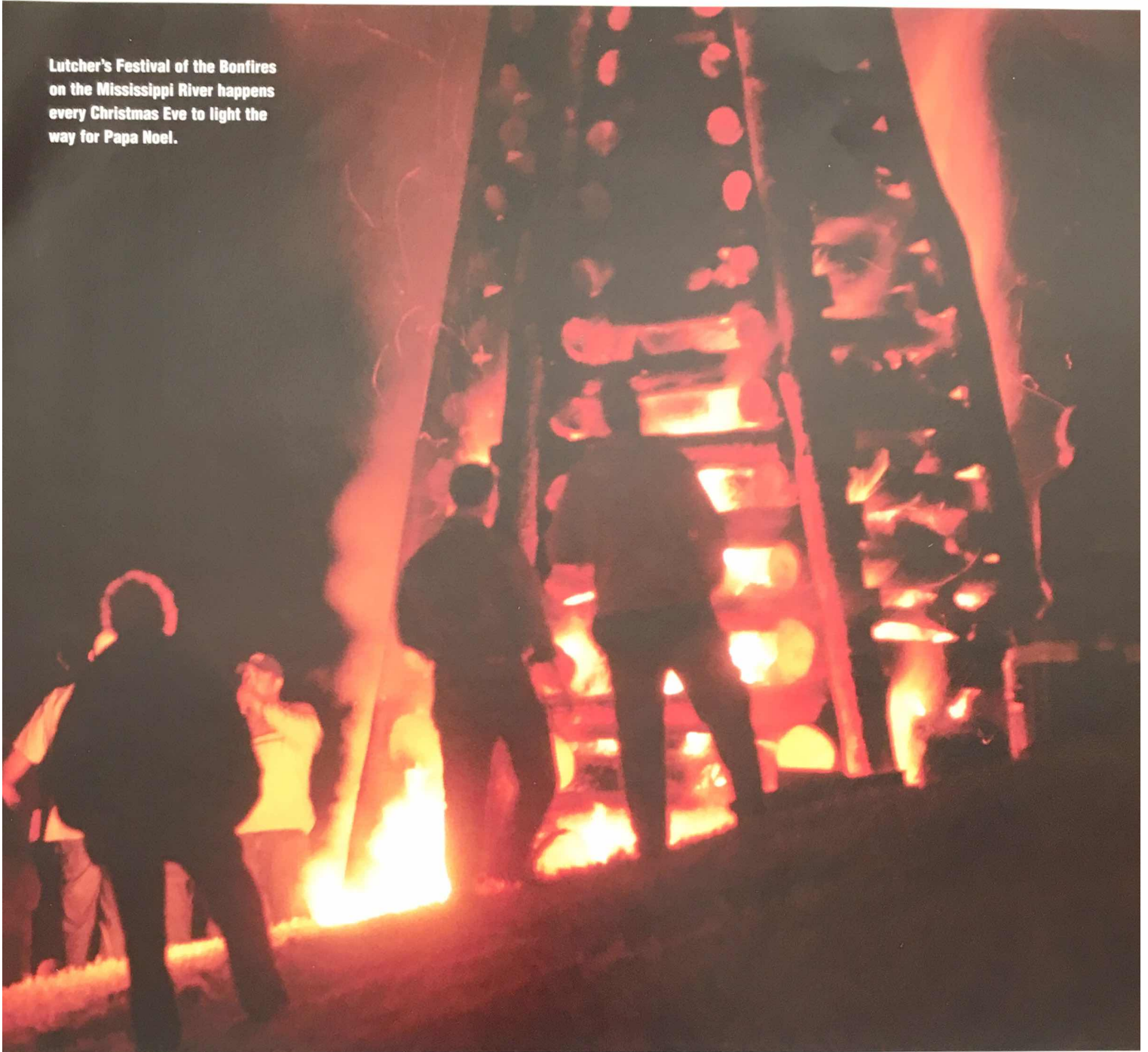
Zydeco and swamp pop can be heard at many gatherings and festivals throughout Plantation Country. The French, German, Hungarian and English influences are evident in the styles of a swamp waltz or a zydeco two-step.

John James Audubon created many of his wildlife sketches while he was a tutor at St. Francisville’s Oakley Plantation. These sketches brought nature to the lives of many around the world, and his name is synonymous today with nature and conservation. The Tunica Trace, in the same area, offers hiking and nature-watching.

Audubon also left his mark on the golf scene, where the Audubon Golf Trail includes 12 courses that are dedicated to protecting the environment and preserving the natural heritage of the game of golf. The Bluffs, an Arnold Palmer course developed before the Audubon Trail came along, is nestled into the lush landscape of Plantation Country. The park-style course blooms with azaleas on land that Audubon himself may have walked.



**Lutcher's Festival of the Bonfires on the Mississippi River happens every Christmas Eve to light the way for Papa Noel.**



If you are looking to get a glimpse of the wildlife that lives in the waters of Plantation Country, check out Alligator Bayou in Ascension Parish and take a guided cruise of the wild beauty of the Spanish Lake Basin. If you would rather forgo a boat ride in favor of walking through the swamps, Bluebonnet Swamp and Nature Center offers an affordable way for the entire family to experience the ecology of South Louisiana. Visitors and residents can bring the land into their homes with Henry Neubig's Louisiana Mud Painting Gallery. He brings to life the scenery of the real Louisiana.

Football season brings contemporary music as live bands play around campus during tailgating parties at Louisiana State University and Southern University. Legend has it that an earthquake occurred at Death Valley, the LSU stadium, when the exuberant cheering of Tiger fans registered a 3.1 on the Richter scale.

Livingston Parish is home to fabulous antiques shops. The downtown antique district of Denham Springs has gained a reputation as a hot area for antique-buyers, with nearly 30 antiques shops. A short drive down Interstate 12 brings antique-lovers to Tangipahoa Parish and the city of Ponchatoula. Shops and cafés line the downtown historic district where treasures are waiting to be found.

Nestled on the banks of False River, New Roads Main Street offers a low-key afternoon of window-shopping at the many boutiques and antique stores. Sit a spell at a coffee café, and listen to the lap of the water against the piers.

Plantation Country offers little scientists a chance to get hands-on experience. The Louisiana Arts and Science Center with the Irene Pennington Planetarium is downtown Baton Rouge's main attraction for families. Livingston Parish is one of the sites for the National Science Foundation's Laser

## PLANTATION COUNTRY

Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory, or LIGO. This prestigious research station, in collaboration with California Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and LSU, is at the cutting edge of gravitational physics research and laser technology. LIGO is dedicated to the detection of cosmic gravitational waves and the harnessing of these waves for scientific research.

The Louisiana State Penitentiary is located in Angola, north of St. Francisville. It is where “the world’s most dangerous rodeo” is held each Sunday in October. Visitors from all over the world flock to see the daring tricks and rough riders who entertain and wow the crowds. Prisoners not participating in the rodeo itself can be found selling their wares, from fine artwork to hand-carved wooden collectibles. The money made from the arts and crafts fair goes to inmates’ families or to a local charity.

Plantation Country has much to offer in the way of day trips. Pack a lunch for a romantic stop, or experience one of the country-style restaurants that can be found along the various scenic byways. Roll down the windows, and feel the breeze of Plantation Country pass you by.

### SCENIC BYWAYS

#### *River Road Scenic Byway*

Part of the Great River Road, Highway 65 follows the Mississippi River through countryside that offers sights typical of Louisiana’s Delta region — from past to present. The route starts in an area highly developed by the petroleum and chemical industries that play such a large role in modern Louisiana’s economy. As the road follows the Mississippi River downstream, you will encounter examples of river commerce, such as shipyards and the lock at Plaquemine. You may view them from the lock house museum and observation tower.

The road passes through a few small towns, remnants of a once-thriving area along the Mississippi River. Except for the river levees, the sparsely wooded terrain is flat. Visitors can also appreciate the historic quality of Louisiana’s rural communities and the hustle and bustle of cities such as New Orleans.

#### *Tunica Trace Scenic Byway*

This charming winding road passes through the Tunica Hills and ends at Louisiana’s famous state penitentiary at Angola. The name of the byway honors the aboriginal trail later used by Tunica Indians in this historic region.

### LODGING

#### *High-End*

The Cook Conference Center and Hotel is located on LSU’s campus on North Lakeshore Drive. This hotel is the ultimate Tiger fan’s place to stay. The tasteful muted tones of purple and gold grace this entire complex. A full Southern breakfast is complimentary, and there is also free Wi-Fi.

The Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center is located in the his-



**Above:** John James Audubon created many of his wildlife sketches while he was a tutor at Oakley Plantation in St. Francisville.

toric Heidelberg Hotel. This site was used as the State Capitol during the times of Gov. Huey Long. A secret tunnel was uncovered that leads to a building across the street and also to the Capitol Building. A private dining room is available that offers diners at The Kingfish a view of the tunnel entrance (which is now sealed off). The small size of the hotel rooms is offset by the charm of staying in this landmark.

Sheraton Baton Rouge Convention Center is conveniently located in downtown Baton Rouge with close proximity to the Mississippi River.

#### *Bed-and-Breakfast*

Baton Rouge’s The Stockade Bed and Breakfast surrounds visitors with elegant décor and comfortable amenities. It is located on historic Highland Road, close to the LSU campus, and offers six private rooms with baths.

Bittersweet Plantation Bed and Breakfast features two intimate suites, Bitter Suite and Suite Olive. It is located in Donaldsonville on Claiborne Avenue and is a restored 19th-century home decorated with period furniture and modern conveniences.

Jackson is home to Milbank Historic House. This 1836 Greek Revival inn once served as the banking house for the Clinton-Port Hudson Railroad.

St. Francisville is home to a number of bed-and-breakfasts. The Shadetree is a contemporary yet rustic cluster of intimate cabins that provide a setting for romance.

The nearby Myrtles Plantation offers overnight stays in one of America’s most haunted houses. Butler Greenwood Plantation has private cottages with historic charm on oak-shaded grounds.

Vacherie’s Oak Alley Plantation is a welcome respite for weary travelers. Stay overnight in 19th-century plantation cottages that are located near the antebellum mansion.



**Above:** Laura Plantation in Vacherie is where the story of Br'er Rabbit, originally known as *Compair Lapin*, was born and passed down through the generations.

Nottoway Plantation in White Castle is a place to experience luxury and Southern charm at one of America's 25 Top Inns

## DINING

In Louisiana, we don't eat to live; we live to eat. Nothing is truer in Plantation Country. A touch of old Acadia can be found in a backcountry snack of cracklins or a hot link of boudin. The Gonzales Jambalaya Festival will give you the best of the best of this traditional Louisiana dish. There is also a wide array of fine dining for those elegant evenings or special celebrations.

### *Ritzy*

Latil's Landing at Houmas House serves nouvelle Creole cuisine prepared by chef Jeremy Langlois and served on fine Limoges china. Reservations are strongly recommended for this intimate dining experience in the French house, built in 1770, which is now the rear wing of the mansion. The fine art is not just hanging on the walls but served on a plate, as well.

Varnedoe's at The Carriage House is one of St. Francisville's premier choices for fine dining. Located at The Myrtles Plantation, this upscale down-South style of dining pairs Southern home-style fare and opulent cuisine in each dish.

A Taste of Bavaria near Ponchatoula is a welcome respite from afternoon antique shopping. Step into this establishment, and you will feel as if you have stepped into Old Bavaria. Dress is casual, but the food is authentically German. The on-site bakery offers an array of German pastries each day, but they go fast.

Nottoway Plantation Restaurant offers elegant dining on the site of a plantation so big that it inspired the name White Castle for its hometown.

Satterfield's in New Roads has a lakefront setting at False River. This restaurant accepts casual attire and serves steaks as well as seafood.

Tsunami, a local favorite for sushi, offers the best view of the Mississippi River. This restaurant sits on the top floor of the LSU Museum of Art in downtown Baton Rouge.

### *Down-Home*

Don't judge a book by its cover. Fleur de Lis Pizza in Baton Rouge has been a popular meeting spot for generations. Residents claim that the rectangular-shaped pizza is the best around. The Round the World Pizza is a popular choice at this restaurant that doubles as a cocktail spot. Don't bring a credit card, as they only accept cash.

Boutin's on Bluebonnet Boulevard is Baton Rouge's authentic Cajun music and dining experience. The appetizer platter is the perfect introduction to casual Cajun cuisine. A bit pricey at \$32, it comes with enough grilled alligator, fried crawfish tails, bite-size catfish, boudin, stuffed mushrooms and andouille to feed a small army.

The Cabin Restaurant in Burnside, serving seafood and its world-famous gumbo, is in a 179-year-old building.

Mike Anderson's in Baton Rouge is one of the finest seafood restaurants in the South. The younger family members will enjoy watching the fish swim in the large in-wall tanks located around the restaurant. Those without little ones can enjoy an appetizer of raw oysters and their choice of libations while waiting for a table. The grilled oysters are a must-try. The seafood platter can also be ordered grilled. Reservations are not accepted at this popular eatery.

North Baton Rouge is the site of Tony's Seafood, pioneer of Louisiana Fish Fry products. It is also the largest fish market in the South; visitors can walk in and watch the catfish swimming around. Walk over to the hot deli, and order up a few pieces of that catfish fried to a golden crisp.

Sammy's Grill is a local establishment with two locations, one on Highland Road in Baton Rouge and one in the town of Zachary. The casual atmosphere is popular among the locals and visitors alike. The seafood-stuffed potato is always a favorite, and it offers daily specials.

No matter what brings you to Plantation Country — business, pleasure or just passing through — the variety of destinations and attractions will impress you.

