

## *Cultural Exploration*

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The Cajun Coast is a blend of numerous cultures. French, Spanish, English, Native American, African, and Cajun traditions have all contributed to our fascinating cultural mix. The food, music, art, and festivals of the Cajun Coast celebrate our rich variety.

The original inhabitants of the area were the Chitimacha (Sitimacha – People of the many waters). Excellent hunters and fishermen, the Chitimacha lived along the bayous in homes constructed of wood, cane, and palmetto. Their extraordinary skill at basketry was considered their chief artistic glory, an art which is being kept alive today by a few tribal members. Examples of Chitimacha basketry and other artifacts are on display at the Chitimacha Museum. Today, the Chitimacha reservation in Charenton is also home to Cypress Bayou Casino, Louisiana’s first land based casino.

The residents of the Cajun Coast are extremely hospitable in addition to being great storytellers. To truly experience Cajun country life, stop at Medric Martin’s plantation store on Irish Bend Road in Franklin. Medric took over this family general store in 1935 and has kept it open ever since. The sugar cane workers still stop to make small purchases, and a few regulars drop in often just to visit. Tourists and travelers are welcome, and Mr. Martin speaks of the colorful area history with firsthand knowledge.

A terrific (and fun) way to learn more about Cajun culture is to participate. Sample great Cajun food and kick up your heels to hot Cajun music at one of our great festivals such as the Cypress Sawmill Festival or the Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival. The Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival held every Labor Day weekend in Morgan City is the oldest state-chartered harvest festival. The festival honors the industries that are the economic lifeblood of Morgan City. Highlights of the Shrimp & Petroleum Festival include three days of almost continual live music in Lawrence Park, an arts & crafts fair, traditional events such as the Blessing of the Fleet, and much more. A complete press kit on this great festival is available from the Cajun Coast Visitors and Convention Bureau.

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