



CAJUN COAST

VISITORS & CONVENTION BUREAU

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Morgan City Facts

- Atchafalaya is an Indian word meaning “long river”. The Atchafalaya River is 135 miles long. It is a living delta and the main distributary of the Mississippi River.
 - The first Tarzan movie was filmed in Morgan City in 1917 starring Elmo Lincoln.
 - From 1862-1865 Federal troops occupied Morgan City. They set up two forts – Fort Star and Fort Buchanan.
 - In 1947, Morgan City successfully produced the first offshore oil rig out of sight of land.
 - The present 22-foot seawall was completed in 1985 after the floods of 1973 flowed over the previous 13-foot seawall.
 - The Atchafalaya Basin is over 500,000 acres, covers 1/3 of Louisiana, and is the largest overflow swamp in the United States.
 - Through a system of levees and floodways, the Corps of Engineers controls the Mississippi River’s direction, preventing it from its preferred course of merging with the Atchafalaya.
 - The Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival is the oldest state-chartered harvest and a top 20 Southeast Tourism Society event.
 - Morgan City, Berwick, and Patterson played a major role in the timber industry. Patterson once had the largest cypress sawmill in the United States.
 - Morgan City is home to the world’s largest commercial marine fleet, *Tidewater, Inc.*
 - Morgan City is home to the world’s largest helicopter pad. It is owned and operated by *Petroleum Helicopters, Inc.*
 - Patterson is the historical home of speed aviation. The Flyer “44” which was built and flown by Jimmy Wedell in Patterson, was the first land plane to exceed 300 mph.
 - The “Mr. Charlie” was the first submersible drilling rig, the first transportable offshore rig, and the first retired rig to be converted into a museum.
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Franklin Facts

- Home to former Governor Murphy J. “Mike” Foster, Jr. – the grandson of Governor Murphy J. Foster who governed Louisiana from 1892 to 1900.
 - Former Governor of Louisiana, Murphy J. “Mike” Foster’s private home, Oaklawn Manor is a tourist attraction open to the public.
 - Home to five Governors, three U.S. Senators, a Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, an Attorney General, a Lt. Governor, and two State Senators.
 - Teche is an Indian word meaning “snake.” Franklin follows Bayou Teche. Chitimacha legend has it that the Bayou Teche was formed when Chitimacha warriors battled a huge venomous serpent that terrorized the region.
 - A bayou is a slow moving body of water. A swamp is low ground filled with water and trees.
 - Easy access to an abundance of waterways.
 - Named as a top 100 small town in America two consecutive years by Norman Crampton in his book *The Best 100 Small Towns in America*.
 - Franklin’s Historic District includes more than 420 noteworthy structures, many of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
 - Over 44,000 acres of sugar cane within St. Mary Parish.
 - One of the largest producers of carbon black with three carbon black plants.
 - Battle of Irish Bend fought in Franklin. Significant because it thwarted the Union’s efforts to capture Avery Island’s salt mines and the capture of Texas.
 - Described as “hauntingly beautiful land” by *National Geographic Traveler*.
 - Described as “...one of the prettiest of Louisiana towns, all cool and green and white, with old homes standing back on smooth green lawns...” by Lyle Saxon in *Old Louisiana*.
 - Home to the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, a critical habitat for the management and protection of the federally threatened Louisiana black bear.
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Cajun Coast Day Trips

Adventure

Overnight aboard a cabin or houseboat for a weekend adventure on the bayou. There are many ways to view and tour the Atchafalaya Basin, the largest overflow swamp in the U.S. Allow Cajun Jack guide you into the basin on a swamp tour aboard the pontoon vessel. If you enjoy paddling, pick up a Cajun Coast Paddle Trail brochure or visit www.cajuncoastpaddle.com to find recommended trails. To explore by foot, visit the Brownell Memorial Park and Carillon Tower, a 9.5 acre designated bird sanctuary and a must for naturalist and photography buffs or visit the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, a habitat for the Louisiana black bear. Other things to do while visiting the Cajun Coast include chartering an offshore, saltwater or freshwater fishing trip or following the America's Wetlands birding trail throughout the Cajun Coast.

Downtown Main Street

The Morgan City Main Street program is revitalizing the downtown area. Shop at several stores along the waterfront and within the historic district. Tour the downtown area with a walking tour brochure, get a bird's eye view of the Atchafalaya River on the 21 ft. seawall, tour the International Petroleum Museum & Exposition, the Mr. Charlie, the first submersible drilling rig ever built. Learn about the oil industry's past and present. Enjoy lunch at Rita Mae's, Latin Corner, or Café Jo Jo's. To view historic churches, make arrangements to tour Sacred Heart Catholic Church or Trinity Episcopal Church both boasting magnificent stained glass windows.

Culture & Nature Based

Tour the swamps and bayous with Cajun Jack's Swamp Tour. For a walking tour and interpretation of the Cajun people, tour Swamp Gardens. Nature lovers will enjoy a drive to the Brownell Carillon Bell Tower. View wildlife and walk to the edge of the swamp for a magnificent view of the lake. Afterwards, drive to the Mosquito Bar & Grill down Stephenville road for a beverage, snack and an opportunity to meet locals. To view wildlife, drive along Four Mile Bayou Road, one of the many trails highlighted in the America's Wetlands Birding Trail. For boiled seafood, try Scully's, Susie's Seafood Restaurant or Patty's One Stop.

Heritage

Overnight at the Provost House Bed & Breakfast or Fairfax Inn located in downtown Franklin. Visit Franklin's Main Street and walk around the historic district with over 400 noteworthy properties many of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Stop at Medric Martin's plantation grocery store off of Irish Bend road. Although it may look closed, it's usually open. The site of movies, videos and photography backdrops, Mr. Martin delights in telling stories about the area. For a view of antebellum homes, visit Grevemberg House Museum, an authentically restored town home of the 1800's or Oaklawn Manor,

Cajun Coast Day Trips

the former governor of Louisiana's private home, which boasts European Antiques, wooden bird carvings and an extensive Audubon collection.

For lunch, try a hamburger from Iberia Cash Grocery. Gumbo and sweet potatoes at Charlie's of Franklin, crawfish cooked three ways at the Forest Restaurant or one of the specials at Main Street Café.

For dinner enjoy Mr. Lester's Steakhouse, located in the Cypress Bayou Casino. Although a bit pricey, you'll dream about the crab cakes and the crawfish bisque! After enjoying the bread pudding soufflé, play a few rounds of craps, blackjack, or the slot machines.

Special Interest

Aviation buffs will enjoy touring the Louisiana State Museum that houses the Wedell Williams Aviation Collection and the Cypress Collection. The museum documents Louisiana's aviation history from 1920 until the present.

The first settlers to the region were the Chitimacha Native Americans. To learn more about Native Americans, visit the Chitimacha Museum in Charenton.

Golfers will delight in playing the Atchafalaya at Idlewild, the newest addition to the Audubon Golf Trail. The Atchafalaya was highlighted as one of the best courses to play under \$75.00 by *Golfer's Digest*.

Culinary

Follow the food chain through the Cajun Coast. First watch local fishermen as they make their own traps and nets. Next, spend time at a local seafood dock viewing crabs, crawfish, shrimp and a variety of fish as they are brought in from the Atchafalaya Basin and the Gulf of Mexico. Ameripure Oyster Company is an oyster purification and distribution plant that will gladly give a personalized tour of their facilities. Meet Mrs. Belle Guidry, a local Cajun cook who has penned several cookbooks and Charlie Faul, a local restaurateur who was instrumental in the development of the Tur-Duc-Ken (a boneless turkey stuffed with a boneless duck stuffed with a boneless chicken). Tag along with a local sugar cane farmer and learn all about this sweet industry.

Festivals

The Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival, the state's oldest chartered harvest festival, voted the best Louisiana festival in its category by the Louisiana Fairs & Festivals Association, a top 100 American Bus Association event and a top 20 Southeast Tourism Society event, celebrates every Labor Day weekend with the

Cajun Coast Day Trips

Historic Blessing of the Fleet and water parade, street parade, arts & crafts, the Children's Village, continuous live music and much more.

The Cypress Sawmill Festival, a top 20 event by the Southeast Tourism Society takes place the last weekend of March/early April of each year in Patterson. The Festival features live music, an old engine display, artifacts of the cypress industry, food, crafts, a petting zoo and more.

The Cajun Coast's newest festival, the Bayou Teche Bear Festival, celebrates the Louisiana black bear and features live music, educational seminars and exhibits, children's activities and more

Christmas on the Cajun Coast offers a variety of Christmas activities including a lighting display, light trails, downtown functions, plantation homes decorated in Christmas finery and much more.

Mardi Gras on the Cajun Coast includes eight parades, a Mardi Gras Museum and homes decorated in purple, green & gold.

Cajun Coast Story Ideas

Follow the Route of Steamboats

Steam boating developed as a major means of transportation in the South in the 1830s. The Bayou Teche was a major artery for the movement of the South Louisiana sugar crop - a crop that made many plantation owners extremely wealthy. Those plantation owners built stunning homes along the Bayou Teche, a remarkable number of which survived the Civil War intact. Take the Highway 182 scenic route that follows the Teche under moss-draped oaks past stately homes.

Nature-Based Tourism - For the Birds

Bird watching has become an increasingly popular hobby, and a true devotee is always looking for undiscovered yet accessible locations that offer scenic beauty and the opportunity to view a wide variety of both rare and common species in their natural habitat. The bayous of the Cajun Coast are home to numerous birds such as bald eagles, egrets, herons, belted kingfishers and wood ducks. Raptors such as owls and hawks are plentiful, and since the area is situated in the Mississippi River flyway, migratory fowl abound at certain times of the year. Pick up an America's Wetland's Birding Trail Guide for a complete list of birding sites. Eagle Expo is held in early February.

Birthplace of the Offshore Oil Industry

The very first oilrig drilled out of sight of land was erected in 1947 out of Morgan City, Louisiana. In 1954, the first submersible, transportable offshore drilling rig was constructed in Morgan City. Named the "Mr. Charlie", it is now used for training and is open to the public for tours. Morgan City remains a hub of activity in the petroleum industry.

Atchafalaya Heritage Area

Designated in 1997, the Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area encompasses thirteen parishes around the Atchafalaya River Basin that are rich in historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources. The Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area represents a unique aspect of Louisiana heritage and reflects a complex mixture of people and their environment.

Cajun Coast Story Ideas

Off the Beaten Path - Driving, Motorcycling or Bicycling Along America's Back Roads

The Bayou Teche Scenic Byway encompasses over 125 miles and winds through three parishes (counties). 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 home to an incredibly beautiful natural landscape with moss-draped oaks along the banks of the Bayou Teche interspersed with over 100 historic properties, many of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Whether you enjoy motorcycling, driving or bicycling, you don't want to miss this picturesque place.

Ancient Art - Chitimacha Basketry

The Native American Chitimacha Tribe became established in the Bayou Teche/Atchafalaya region around 500 AD. Though the tribe's numbers and lands have dwindled since their first contact with Europeans in the 1700s, the Chitimacha remain the only Louisiana tribe never moved from their ancestral territory. Of the material culture associated with the Chitimacha, their extraordinary skill at basketry is most famous. They are considered the basket weavers in North America. Distinctive geometric designs decorate containers that they can weave finely enough to hold water. Today, tribal members John & Scarlette Darden and John's sister Melissa strive to keep this remarkable art alive. They weave river cane into intricate baskets in the ancient manner learned from their grandmothers. The Chitimacha reservation is located in Charenton.

Project Main Street - Everything Old is New Again

One of the latest additions to the Main Street Program is Morgan City, Louisiana at the mouth of the Atchafalaya River. The goal of the Main Street Program is to revitalize the historic downtown shopping districts of small towns. In an era of warehouse shopping, the program celebrates the "Mom & Pop" specialty store. Historic preservation and economic development marry to produce new or revitalized businesses in older buildings. Franklin was one of the first Main Street Programs in the state. On the Cajun Coast, one can examine both a newly started program and a well-established one.

Cajun Coast Story Ideas

Flying High - Heroes of the Air Races

In the 1920s and 1930s, aviation enjoyed its golden age when the daredevil pilots were the heroes of the newsreels. Millionaire playboy Harry Williams and one-eyed barnstormer Jimmy Wedell formed a partnership in Patterson, Louisiana at this time. The airplanes that this unlikely pair designed and built won numerous national air races, and the company flourished until the deaths of its founders, in separate crashes less than 2 years apart. Harry Williams' widow, silent screen star Marguerite Clark, then sold the company to Eddie Rickenbocker, founder of Eastern Airlines. The Louisiana State Museum in Patterson houses numerous planes, including a flying replica of Williams' and Wedell's "44" racer, and displays memorabilia from the period.

Festivals and Joie de Vivre

Okay, the name is funny, but the Shrimp & Petroleum Festival held annually over the Labor Day weekend in Morgan City's historic downtown is a celebration of the local culture, with the food, music, and traditions that made Cajun Country famous. The oldest state-charted harvest festival in Louisiana, the Shrimp & Petroleum Festival is named for two of Morgan City's most important industries. The festival is definitely a family affair. Some of the highlights of the Shrimp & Petroleum Festival include the Children's Village (with storyteller), Music in the Park, the Cajun Culinary Classic, and the traditional Blessing of the Fleet in which the gaily decorated shrimp boats parade down the Atchafalaya River. The Shrimp & Petroleum Festival has been selected as a top 100 event in North America by the American Bus Association and is consistently named as a top 20 Southeast Tourism Society event. For a complete press kit on the Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival, contact the Cajun Coast Visitors and Convention Bureau.

The Cajun Coast is also home to the Cypress Sawmill Festival. Along with food, music, and craft booths, the Sawmill Festival features games and tournaments, including the passé partout, or two-person saw race. The cypress lumber industry was once the source of a great deal of wealth in Louisiana; the festival honors this part of our heritage.

Cajun Coast Story Ideas

America's Wetland - The Disappearance of Louisiana's Coast

One of the largest and most productive expanses of coastal wetlands in North America, the valuable landscape along Louisiana's coast is disappearing at a rate of 35 square miles per year, the equivalent of losing over 21,000 football fields.

Louisiana's coastline, also known as America's WETLAND is the seventh largest delta on earth and is the heart of an intricate ecosystem on the verge of collapse. Serving as the habitat for millions of waterfowl, migratory birds and endangered species such as the Louisiana black bear and the American bald eagle, it is the most neglected major wetland ecosystem in America.

As these wetlands disappear, a habitat for wildlife and endangered species is threatened, America's offshore oil and gas supply becomes vulnerable, America's seafood supply is in danger, wells, pipelines, ports, levies and roads become even more susceptible and the world's largest port system is at risk. Perhaps, the largest concern is that these wetlands serve as protection from hurricanes and storm surges for more than two million people living in the coastal zone, including the city New Orleans.

Endangered Species - Louisiana Black Bear

As the first Europeans explored, then settled what is now Louisiana, Louisiana black bears were probably a common sight. But clearing the land reduced bear habitat and many bears were killed for food. In a conflict with the needs of man, inevitably the Louisiana black bear was fated to lose. The Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, two miles south of Franklin, is hoping to change that fate. Designated in 2001, the refuge encompasses over 9000 acres. Its mission is to provide critical habitat for the management and protection of the Louisiana black bear, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

To raise awareness of the plight of the Louisiana black bear, the City of Franklin and the Parish of St. Mary have partnered with the Black Bear Conservation Committee, the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge and other conservation organizations to create the Bayou Teche Bear Festival, a two day festival held in downtown Franklin, which features numerous educational exhibits as well as family oriented activities and entertainment.

Atchafalaya Basin Floodway

Summary

The Atchafalaya Basin Floodway is one of the last great wildernesses remaining in the continental United States identified by the United States Corps of Engineers, USACE. The Atchafalaya Basin in Southern Louisiana includes the largest contiguous wetlands in the Mississippi River Valley. The Basin includes 10 distinct aquatic & terrestrial habitats ranging from large rivers to backwater swamps. The Basin is most noted for its Cypress-Tupelo Gum swamp habitat and its Cajun heritage.

Vision Statement of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway

Future visitors and residents of the Atchafalaya Basin will encounter a landscape where natural processes are operating on a grand scale with humans moderating their activities so that they have become less intrusive and a reasonable part of, rather than an encumbrance upon, these processes;

Where the built and natural environments are visually attractive, the object of intense human enjoyment, and manifest the qualities of scenic beauty and aesthetic harmony;

Where the photogenic panoramas and vistas of the region will exhibit more than static post card images, but rather a truly dynamic landscape, as in ages past, constantly changing and evolving; forests in various states of succession, seasonal flooding and other natural disturbances; soil erosion and deposition; the minimum necessary control of waterways and unpolluted lakes;

Where in these grand settings, ecological processes will be apparent in all scales, from the geological time frame of river course changes and land formation to the moment-to-moment pace of life in a bird rookery;

Where human institutions are re-oriented toward a stewardship approach to the region's diverse resource processes, patterns, qualities, uses and values;

Where a diversity of livelihoods will continue, commercial fishing, timber harvesting, oil & gas extraction, all activities done in harmony with, and sensitive to, other resource values and land uses;

Where people regard the Atchafalaya ecosystem as a single, complex organism and are working together in concert with widespread public support to plan, manage and interpret the region's intrinsic (natural) and extrinsic (man-made) resources as a unified whole;

Where the overriding mood of the Atchafalaya will be a harmonious balance between naturalness and unimpaired ecological processes, and the enlightened and unobtrusive use of the land for needed economic and social purposes;

Where, complementing that mood, educational opportunities abound and where the Atchafalaya has become a world model – a showcase of visionary planning and progressive management of public & private resources, and cooperation among many agencies, groups and individuals to achieve goals.

One of the last great wildernesses remaining in the United States.

Atchafalaya Basin Floodway

Fact Sheet

- Located between Baton Rouge, Louisiana to the east & Lafayette, Louisiana to the west
- More than 1 million acres in size, comprising the largest floodway in North America
- Consists of three floodways: Morganza Floodway, West Atchafalaya Floodway & Atchafalaya Basin Floodway
- Largest river swamp in North America, 173,000 acres of cypress swamps and 64,000 acres of aquatic habitat. 18,000 acres are under the jurisdiction of the State Land Office, 37,280 acres are managed by the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, 15,220 acres are owned by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge), 36,000 acres are owned by the Corps of Engineers and 40% is owned by private landowners
- Home to nine Federal and State listed endangered/threatened wildlife species
- Over 170 bird species located in the basin
- Important wintering grounds for the birds of the Mississippi Flyway
- Major wintering concentration of wood ducks, mallards and woodcocks
- Largest contiguous bottomland hardwood forest for forest interior nesting species
- Highest nest production for Louisiana species
- Home to six endangered/threatened species of birds and 29 rookeries
- Diversity of wetlands, 500,000 acres of hydric soils, provide habitat for 14 wading bird rookeries
- Home to numerous bald eagle nests
- More than 50 mammalian species
- More than 40 reptilian and 20 amphibian species
- More than 100 species of fin fish and shellfish
- The Atchafalaya River is one of the top five rivers in discharge in the United States; average annual flow is 180,000 cubic feet per second
- The projected flood flow is 1.5 million cubic feet per second
- Most active growing delta (land accretion) in the continental United States
- Website - www.dnr.state.la.us
- 225-342-6437
- The State of Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Atchafalaya Basin Program coordinates the Atchafalaya Basin Advisory Committee and supervises the implementation of the Atchafalaya Basin State Master Plan

Atchafalaya Basin Floodway

Economics

- Produces over \$123 million annually from recreational activities
- Nature study averages 49,000 hours per year
- Produces \$5 - \$6 million annually from commercial fishing & crawfishing
- Produces more than 1000 pounds of fin fish per acre in certain water bodies in the lower Basin - greater than any reservoir in the Southeastern United States
- More than 500,000 user days of sport fishing recreational activity each year - over 8000 hours per month in just a 17 square mile area which is only 2% of the basin
- More than 164,000 user days of hunting activity each year
- Deer hunters on the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area/ Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge contributed over \$1 million to the state's economy
- 25% of Louisiana's commercial forest lands and 51% of the state's hardwood forest are located in the basin
- Vital oil & gas pipelines cross the basin
- More than 300 active oil & gas wells are located in the basin
- Atchafalaya River is a vital port for the oil & gas industries in the Gulf of Mexico
- More vessels pass Morgan City annually than Baton Rouge, the sixth largest port in the country

Flood Control

- Important component of the USACE Mississippi River and Tributaries Flood Control Project
- As part of Project Flood, 1.5 million cubic feet of water is routed down the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway
- Designed flood for the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System would fill the Superdome in one minute and the City of New Orleans to a depth of 8 feet in less than 12 hours

Culture

- Important in the development of unique cultures of Acadian & Native Americans
- Location of several hundred archeological sites, including several prehistoric sites

For the Naturalist

Covering one third of Louisiana, the Atchafalaya Basin Swamp is the largest overflow swamp in the United States. A land of ancient moss-draped oaks and old growth cypress, the mysterious Atchafalaya swamp is home to an abundance of wildlife, including rare and endangered species such as the Louisiana black bear and the American bald eagle.

The Cajun Coast is laced by a network of bayous and waterways which provide easy access to the swamp for nature lovers, wildlife photographers, and birders. To help the visitor explore this treasured ecological wonder, Cajun Jack's Swamp Tours in Patterson offers guided swamp tours into the basin. If you'd prefer to explore the waterways on your own, pick up a paddle trail guide or visit our website www.cajuncoastpaddle.com for recommended trails.

In Morgan City, there are two areas of preserved natural swampland open to the public. The Brownell Memorial Park & Carillon Tower is a 9.5-acre park in a natural setting next to Lake Palourde. Founded as a non-denominational devotional park, admission is free. A 106-foot tall carillon tower containing 61 bronze bells graces the park and plays two selections every 30 minutes.

The Cajun Coast is located in the Mississippi flyway for migratory birds, seasonally increasing the number of species the dedicated birdwatcher can enjoy. The Atchafalaya hardwood swamp, nearby coastal marsh, and ample farmland provide ecological niches that are home to more than 200 species, from the spectacular roseate spoonbill to the comical anhinga to the humble brown thrasher. The rich variety of avian life will thrill veteran birdwatchers and intrigue beginners. Pick up an America's Wetlands birding guide to help you navigate the birding trail or join us in February for the annual Eagle Expo, the celebration of the American Bald Eagle. Presentations, photography seminars and guided tours highlight the event.

For the Heritage Traveler

Residents of the Cajun Coast treasure their rich history and heritage and are enthusiastic caretakers of the architecture, artifacts, and anecdotes of the past. But they are interested in more than simple preservation. On the Cajun Coast, the past is a vibrant part of the present.

Fans of historic architecture must visit the town of Franklin. Franklin's National Register Historic District encompasses more than 420 noteworthy structures including stunning antebellum structures, charming Victorians, and a turn-of-the-century shopping district. Lined by the original lampposts, East Main Street is shaded by an oak arcade under which stately Greek Revival homes stand shoulder to shoulder.

Two antebellum homes in Franklin are open to the public. The Grevemberg House Museum is an excellent period restoration of an 1851 townhouse. Four "Temple of the Winds" Corinthian columns adorn the facade. The interior is furnished with fine antiques, documented wallpapers, and early artifacts from the area. Oaklawn Manor, the private home of Louisiana's former governor, is also open to the public. Built in 1837, Oaklawn is a monumental plantation home furnished with European antiques, lovely bird carvings, and an extensive Audubon collection.

Overnight in a lovely Greek Revival home, Fairfax Inn when in the area. This refurbished home still retains its historic charm while allowing guests many great amenities. Visit their website at www.thefairfaxhouse.net.

Morgan City's riverfront Historic District is a recent addition to the national Main Street Program. The program is designed to encourage the revitalization and restoration of historic downtown retail shopping areas. In addition to unique shops, excellent restaurants and several tourist attractions, Morgan City's Historic District is also home to several splendid churches ranging from the 1870s to the early 1900s.

Learn Something New -- Unique Museums

Mardi Gras, airplanes, and oil are not topics that typically spring to mind at the mention of the word “museum”. On the Cajun Coast, though, our unique museums offer the opportunity to explore areas of special interest.

Relive childhood dreams of being a flying ace with a visit to the Louisiana State Museum in Patterson. The museum boasts two collections: the Wedell Williams Aviation Collection and the Cypress Collection. The Aviation Museum houses original planes and flying replicas from the Golden Age of Aviation as well as a display on aerospace achievements in Louisiana. In the 1920s and 1930s, the world center of developments in speed aviation was the small town of Patterson. Aviation pioneers Harry Williams and Jimmy Wedell set numerous records in the air races of the early 1930s with their innovative designs. Their “44” racer was the first landplane to exceed 300 mph. The Cypress Collection highlights Patterson’s role in the lumber industry, the funding source that allowed Harry Williams to tinker with aviation.

Walk aboard an authentic oilrig, the Mr. Charlie for a glimpse of the oil industry. The Mr. Charlie, the first submersible oil rig is docked in Morgan City. Although no longer capable of drilling in the current depths, Mr. Charlie had a long and distinguished career.

Cultural Exploration

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 (Sitimaxa – 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.

The Gulf Harvest

The first Native American inhabitants of the Atchafalaya Basin depended upon the seafood provided by the river, basin, bayous, and Gulf. Archaeological sites throughout South Louisiana are defined by shell middens, the heaped discarded remains of oyster feasts. Later settlers were also dependent upon the bounty of the waterways for survival.

Commercial fishing for profit was not prominent in the area until the development of a device called a tow car enabled the transport of seafood from the remote bayou reaches to the railhead at Morgan City. By the 1880s, the packing and shipping of oysters and shrimp had become a principal business. The seafood industry bloomed over the next few decades as technology such as fast freezing allowed for better storage and long range shipping.

The fleet of ocean-going shrimp trawlers and seafood vessels that make port in Morgan City is a vital part of the culture. Generation after generation, local men have learned the special skills associated with harvesting the Gulf's bounty and become accustomed to days of back-breaking labor out of sight of land. The shrimpers have weathered the fiercest storms of the Gulf, and rescued many unlucky individuals from the sometimes treacherous waters. These veterans of the fishing industry, such as "Butch" Felterman, are excellent storytellers and passionate about their work.

Every Labor Day weekend since 1936, the fleet has gathered in Morgan City to participate in the Blessing of the Fleet. The owners decorate their vessels and parade in the Atchafalaya following the Blessing. The tradition is at the center of the Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival, the state's oldest chartered harvest festival. Since the advent of the offshore oil industry, the crew boats and petroleum industry vessels also participate. The seafood and oil industries coexist harmoniously along the Cajun Coast, and many men have worked in both Gulf-based industries.

History

The Chitimacha

The Chitimacha Indians (Sitimaxa - People of the many waters) were the original inhabitants of the area. Around 500 AD, the Chitimacha began settling the bayou region of Louisiana, where they lived in permanent villages in homes constructed of cane, wood and palmetto leaves. They raised corn for hominy and meal and were excellent hunters and fishermen. The plentiful shellfish of the area were also an important part of their diet. Of the traditional crafts practiced by the Chitimacha, they are most famed for their extraordinary skill at basketry. Chitimacha baskets were made from wild cane reed, dyed naturally and woven into geometric designs.

The Chitimacha in this area lived along the Bayou Teche (a Chitimacha word meaning "snake"). Their legend has it that the bayou was formed when Chitimacha warriors battled a huge venomous serpent that terrorized the region. The snake was miles in length and as it twisted and writhed in death, it deepened the mud where it lay, forming the sinuous course of the bayou.

Wars with the French and Spanish during the early 1700s left the Chitimacha on the brink of extinction. In the mid 1800s, the Chitimacha obtained a governmental decree establishing title to 1,062 acres of land, but by the early 1900s, there were only 260 acres remaining in tribal hands. In 1918, Sarah McIlhenny (of the Tabasco family) helped petition the Bureau of Indian Affairs for federal recognition of the tribe. Today, the Chitimacha Reservation encompasses 283 acres of land. Approximately 350 Tribal members live on the reservation and total Tribal membership is approximately 900.

Berwick

The first white settler to trek through the wilderness in this area was Thomas Berwick, a surveyor from Pennsylvania who was working in Opelousas. He settled along the banks of the Atchafalaya River in the late 1700s. Today the town of Berwick is home to several seafood processing plants and numerous boat companies.

Patterson

During the early 1800s, a group of Pennsylvanian Dutchmen boarded a sailing vessel in New Orleans and ventured into the Bayou Teche. One of them, Hans Knight, decided to settle his family in what is now Patterson. The community was originally called Dutch Settlement, Dutch Prairie and Dutch Town. In 1832, Captain John Patterson, a trader from Indiana, settled. He built a store and

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became a prominent citizen. The town was renamed Pattersonville after the captain successfully moved the post office to Dutch Settlement. Pattersonville was incorporated in 1907 as the Town of Patterson.

The town of Patterson was once home to the largest cypress sawmill in the world, owned by Frank B. Williams. Two of his sons became prominent citizens within the community. Kemper Williams was an extraordinary philanthropist, leaving behind foundations for the support of the Historic New Orleans Collection and the Kemper Williams Park and Campground in Patterson.

His brother Harry Williams was a wealthy playboy with a love of speed. He met Jimmie Wedell, a daredevil barnstormer, in 1927 when he purchased his first airplane. Harry learned that though Jimmie had very little formal education, he was a genius with engines and had some innovative ideas about increasing air speed. With Harry's money and Jimmie's know-how, they developed an extremely successful partnership. The aircraft they manufactured held the world's speed for land planes as well as transcontinental and international records for flights across the United States.

The Wedell-Williams Air Service was originally formed to provide charter trips to New Orleans. The business expanded to include sightseeing, student instruction, and airmail. Jimmie Wedell became famous for the construction of speed planes and his skill as a race pilot. He won the Bendix Trophy, the French Government award, Shell Trophy, Thompson Trophy, and many more. Jimmie Wedell died behind the controls of a plane on June 24, 1934 at the age of 34.

Harry Williams died in 1936. His widow was Broadway and silent-screen star Marguerite Clark. With the loss of both Jimmie and Harry as well as other vital members of the Wedell-Williams team, Marguerite could not keep the air service operational. She sold it to Eddie Rickenbacker, owner of Eastern Airlines, then moved to New York, where she died in 1940.

Franklin

Founded in 1808 as Carlin's Settlement, Franklin (named for Benjamin Franklin) became the parish (county) seat in 1811 and the first incorporated town in 1820. Though early settlers included French, Acadian, German, Danish, and Irish, the town's culture and architecture is heavily influenced by the unusually large numbers of English that chose to settle there after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Numerous large sugar plantations arose in the area, and with the development of steamboating, Franklin became an interior sugar port. By the 1830s, Bayou Teche was the main street of Acadiana, with one plantation after another.

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The area's sugar cane planters were among the South's wealthiest agriculturists. This is reflected in the grand plantation homes and mansions they built in Franklin and the surrounding countryside. Most of these magnificent structures are still standing and well preserved, giving Franklin its unique architectural flavor. Franklin's Historic District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and encompasses over 420 noteworthy structures. Many of the spectacular Greek Revival antebellum homes are along the live oak arcade on the East Main boulevard. East Main Street retains its distinctive turn-of-the-century iron street light standards, which have become a symbol of the picturesque town.

Though a small town, Franklin has produced more than its share of statesmen, including five governors of Louisiana, four United States senators, a Chief Justice, an Attorney General and a Lieutenant Governor. Franklin was also the boyhood home of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy.

During the Civil War, the Battle of Irish Bend was fought near Franklin on April 14, 1863. Though eventually forced to retreat, the badly outnumbered Confederate forces cost the Union troops significant losses. Four hundred men were killed or wounded in the confrontation, which proved to be an important point in stopping the Union drive to invade Texas.

Today Franklin is a modern town with a population of about 9,000. The area produces oil, gas, carbon black, salt, seafood, and of course, sugar.

Morgan City

Morgan City, formerly Brashear City, is the gateway to the Atchafalaya Basin. Morgan City was originally called Tiger Island by surveyors appointed by U.S. Secretary of War John Calhoun because of a particular type of wildcat seen in the area. It was later called Brashear City after Walter Brashear, a prominent Kentucky physician who purchased large tracts of land and acquired numerous sugar mills. During the Civil War, Brashear's strategic location at the mouth of the Atchafalaya made it one of focal points of the campaign in the region. In 1876, Brashear City was renamed Morgan City in honor of Charles Morgan, a steamship magnate who successfully dredged the Atchafalaya Bay. The dredging allowed the city to become a booming port, which set the pattern for future growth as a trade center.

The Atchafalaya River and the Gulf of Mexico have always been the economic lifeblood of Morgan City. Commercial fishing, particularly shrimping in the Gulf, has provided for generations of Morgan City natives. The natural resources of the Atchafalaya Basin have also been a major contributor to the local economy. The Atchafalaya Basin is over 800,000 acres. It covers 1/3 of the state

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of Louisiana and is the largest overflow swamp in the United States. The Basin is home to countless species of fish and wildlife. The natural beauty of the Atchafalaya Basin at Morgan City was chosen as the site for filming the first Tarzan movie in 1917, which starred Elmo Lincoln.

In the last fifty years, the offshore petroleum industry has become a major sector of the economy. In 1947, Morgan City gained national recognition when Kerr-McGee produced the first offshore oil well out of sight of land. Today, oil is still vital to the area's economy.