

## *Cajun Coast Story Ideas*

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### *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.

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### *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.

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### *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.

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### *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.