



Story Ideas

Exploring Louisiana's "Outback": The 180-mile Creole Nature Trail was one of the first byways in the nation to achieve "All-American Road" status. Accessible from Interstate 10 at two locations, the Trail takes visitors through the untamed wilderness in southwestern Louisiana's *Calcasieu and Cameron parishes*. The Trail is home to a huge population of alligators – the reptiles outnumber humans in this part of the state – and more than 400 bird species, making this one of the top 10 birding destinations in the world. Activities include wildlife viewing, crabbing, fishing, hunting, boating, shelling, hiking and photography. Visitor centers – including a new Creole Nature Trail Adventure Center set to open in early 2015 – and a free app help travelers navigate the trail and arm them with the information they need to gain a greater understanding of this fascinating region as they get close to the flora and fauna that are right at home here.

Cajun Culture: Nicknamed "The Most Cajun Place on Earth," *Vermilion Parish* is a great place to get a glimpse – and taste – of true Cajun culture. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Vermilion Parish is home to more residents of Cajun ancestry than anywhere else in the world; nearly 50 percent of the population has Cajun roots. Vermilion's towns date to the 1800s, which means they were settling grounds for many of the displaced French Acadiens after their expulsion from Nova Scotia. Both Cajun French and English are spoken here, museums give an overview of the history and culture of the Cajuns, and restaurants serve up some of the finest Cajun cuisine. And since the Cajuns are known for their *joie de vivre* (joy of life), this is a pretty great place to participate in a festival ... or head to the Richard Sale Barn to enjoy a concert hosted by Le Bayou Légendaire, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the French rural culture of this part of the state.

Flavorful Fun: Though you'll find amazing culinary experiences all along the Louisiana coast, *Iberia Parish* offers an array of factory tours and museums that are a food-lover's dream. For generations, the name "Tabasco" has been synonymous with the words "pepper sauce," and its Avery Island headquarters is *the* place for fans of this iconic brand to visit the factory, learn about growing and harvesting peppers, and stock up on favorite items – classic and recently released – and taste plenty of samples (Tabasco ice cream?!) at the country store and gift shop. In the neighboring town of New Iberia, the Conrad Rice Mill is the oldest operating rice mill in the United States. The 1912 mill is open for tours and home to the Konriko Company Store, where visitors can sample and buy (gluten-free) rice products, plus purchase other local delicacies and regional crafts. Both the Jeanerette Museum in the town of Jeanerette and the Bayou Teche Museum in New Iberia have exhibits about another local delicacy, sugar cane ... ensuring that visitors to the parish get a good dose of sweet to offset all those other flavors.

Birthplace of the Offshore Oil Industry: Morgan City, located in *St. Mary Parish*, is a hub of activity for the petroleum industry. More than 65 years ago, the first oil rig that drilled out of sight of land left from Morgan City; in 1954 the first submersible, transportable offshore drilling rig was constructed here. Called "Mr. Charlie," this rig also became the first one to be transformed into a museum. Properly called the International Petroleum Museum & Exposition, Mr. Charlie now sits on the banks of the Atchafalaya River and serves dual roles as a tourist attraction and a training facility for rig workers. On Labor Day weekend each year, Morgan City pays tribute to both its petroleum industry and its other major source of revenue, shrimp, when it hosts the Louisiana Shrimp & Petroleum Festival, the oldest state-chartered harvest festival.

Swamp-sational: Louisiana is home to countless swamps ... and in turn those swamps are home to an interesting and unforgettable array of wildlife. Less than an hour from New Orleans, **Terrebonne Parish** calls itself the “home of the original swamp people” (this is where R.J. and Jay Paul Molinere from the History Channel series are from). In Houma, a capital of Louisiana’s bayou country, guests are invited to board an airboat, pontoon boat, canoe or even a small airplane in order to explore the swampy world protected by moss-draped cypress trees. They’ll see and hear about alligators, deer, wildcats, black bears, otters, and exotic species of birds ... and meet some fascinating human beings in the process. A collection of birding trails and nature parks gives visitors additional ways to access this remarkable world.

Sweet Spirits: Guided by the motto, “grain to glass, cane to cocktail,” two couples from the town of Thibodaux in **Lafourche Parish** have stumbled upon a sweet and intoxicating combination ... using two favorite Louisiana crops, long-grain rice and sugar cane, to blend vodkas, gins and rums with a uniquely Louisiana taste. Donner-Peltier Distillers handcrafts its drinks in small batches at a distillery located in the middle of a sugarcane field. The results are Oryza vodkas and gins made from rice – including one flavored with another local delicacy, the satsuma orange – and Rougaroux rums made from sugar cane, featuring one infused with toasted pecans. The distillery offers tours and tastings.

So Much, So Close: **Jefferson Parish** is located just outside the New Orleans City limits, but it offers a whole different world in terms of outdoor activities. A great place to get a feel for the natural side of the state is to visit the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve’s Barataria Preserve. Named for a French pirate and privateer who traveled along the Gulf Coast in the early 1800s, this park is an ideal place to get a bit closer to nature during a visit to New Orleans, whether that’s on a swamp tour or via a hike along a boardwalk that passes through areas that are home to hundreds of birds and alligators.

Reel Life: Fishing is at its best along the Louisiana coast ... because fishing equates to catching in this part of the world. **Plaquemines Parish** is home to dozens of captains who will take a group or individual out for some of the most memorable fishing ever experienced. All year round, the fish are biting ... and that makes this area a place perfect for both beginning and seasoned anglers. Nobody comes back empty-handed, and catch limits are high. “Fish camps” – from rustic cabins to well-appointed lodges to Woodland Plantation (formerly pictured on bottles of Southern Comfort) – cater to the land-based needs of those who want to spend their days on the water and their nights telling true fish tales.

The Battle that Ended the War ... Sort of: The greatest American land victory of the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans, was actually fought in Chalmette, in **St. Bernard Parish** (which is one reason the parish is called “New Orleans’ most historic neighbor”). Though the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war, was technically signed on Christmas Eve in 1814, it wasn’t ratified by the United States until the following February ... which meant that fighting continued into the new year. On January 8, 1815, General Andrew Jackson led a rag-tag team of about 5,000 U.S. soldiers – regular troops, state militiamen, volunteers from many different cultures and backgrounds, and even a band of pirates led by Jean Lafitte – to an undeniable victory against 7,000 British soldiers. In less than two hours, 2,000 British soldiers were killed, wounded or captured ... compared to just 20 American casualties. The Americans succeeded in driving the British away from Louisiana and its ports, and Jackson became a hero who eventually landed in the White House. The 200th anniversary of the battle will be commemorated in January 2015.

A True Taste of Louisiana: Celebrity chef John Besh – cookbook author, frequent guest on daytime TV shows and host of his own PBS series – is from the town of Slidell in **St. Tammany Parish**. One of his restaurants, La Provence, is located here on the Northshore, and its menu is inspired by the bounty of local seafood and a variety of fresh, seasonal ingredients grown in this region. Though Besh has truly become a household name, he’s certainly not the only accomplished chef in the area; James Beard nominees, Food Network guests and award-winning culinarians can be found all over the parish. Another household name is Abita Brewery, whose beers can be found throughout the United States. Named for its hometown of Abita Springs, the brewery is open for tours and tastings every day and operates a nearby brew pub (in the original, smaller factory) that serves beers, ales and even Abita’s own root beer.