



## What's New Along the Louisiana Coast

**200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans:** As the bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812 comes to a close, at last it's Louisiana's turn to be in the spotlight. General Andrew Jackson led the American troops to victory in January 1815, after the Treaty of Ghent (which ended the war) had been signed but not yet ratified ... so the war went on. Fought in the town of Chalmette in **St. Bernard Parish**, the battle was waged over New Orleans and control of the Mississippi River, which was key to commerce and communication during the three-year war that was taking place between the United States and England. Though the British troops outnumbered the Americans, the formalities of how they fought made them much weaker than their less structured but very passionate counterparts. The Americans soundly beat the British troops, which ultimately forced Great Britain to recognize the United States' claims to Louisiana and West Florida; it also marked Louisiana's official incorporation into the Union. The history of the battle is preserved at Chalmette Battlefield, part of Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve. [www.battleofneworleans2015.com](http://www.battleofneworleans2015.com)

**Ardoyne Plantation:** This Victorian Gothic plantation home dates to 1894 and was built in grand scale on a sugar plantation in the town of Schriever in **Terrebonne Parish**. Direct descendants of the original owner, Louisiana Senator John Dalton Shaffer, continue to live on the property, and they've recently opened it for guided tours. Among the architectural marvels at Ardoyne are its gingerbread trim, a 75-foot tower, an octagonal plantation office, a hand-painted staircase, and 16-foot cove-molded ceilings. The home is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has been the set for three movies. Ardoyne welcomes individual guests as well as groups. [www.ardoynplantation.com](http://www.ardoynplantation.com)

**Bayou Country Children's Museum:** This hands-on museum was especially designed for guests 12 and under, giving them both recreational and educational experiences as they learn about life on the bayou. In this informal and innovative setting, children get a glimpse of the sugar industry by playing on an authentic cane harvester, and they learn about the shrimp industry by climbing aboard a shrimp boat. The oil industry comes to life on an oil derrick, and a Mardi Gras float gives kids a chance to toss beads and participate in one of the region's most exciting celebrations. The fun, family atmosphere of the museum is a great way to introduce young visitors to all that makes this region so unique. The museum is located in Thibodaux, parish seat of **Lafourche Parish**. [www.bayoucountrychildrensmuseum.org](http://www.bayoucountrychildrensmuseum.org)

**Buras Volunteer Fire Department's Annual Oilfield Crawfish Boil-Off:** More than 100 four-member teams each boil a minimum of six sacks of crawfish to determine which group creates the tastiest results. An anticipated 10,000 spectators pay \$10 each for all the crawfish they can eat and vote on the winners. The goal of this charitable event in **Plaquemines Parish** is to raise funds for fire department improvement projects, small equipment items, in-house training, fire prevention lessons at local schools, local parades and holiday events, and the annual Fourth of July fireworks display. The event is held the last Saturday in April in a field adjacent to historic Fort Jackson, site of a Civil War battle.

**Cajun Coast Visitors & Convention Bureau Welcome Center:** Visitors hoping to get a good introduction to life along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana will soon have another great starting point. A new 15,000-square-foot welcome center is set to open in Morgan City in **St. Mary Parish** this May. At the new center, guests will find a collection of brochures and visitors guides to the parish – its attractions, special events, restaurants and accommodations – and similar materials about the other parishes along the coast as well as destinations elsewhere in the state. Travel counselors will also be on hand to answer questions and help plan visits. Open daily, the center will include a gift shop and an interpretive center where visitors can view the swamp and the wildlife that makes its home here; a boardwalk, set to open later, will give guests a chance to "walk" into the swamp to get a better glimpse of life there. [www.cajuncoast.com](http://www.cajuncoast.com)

**Grosse Savanne Eco-Tours:** A waterfowl and wildlife lodge located south of Lake Charles in **Calcasieu Parish**, Grosse Savanne has been a favorite getaway along “Louisiana’s Outback” for the past several years. New to the offerings is a collection of eco-tours that don’t require an overnight stay; they range from two hours to a half day to a full day. Tours are customized to individual areas of interest but are always a very personal way to experience this unique region of Louisiana. There are never more than four participants per guide, and the tours move at the pace chosen by the participants. Guests can take a guided boat tour through a private marsh, follow a driving birding/nature tour through other parts of Grosse Savanne’s 50,000 acres, or visit a “photography blind” and get a glimpse of countless species of birds (this region is one of the top 10 birding areas in the United States). Participants may encounter alligators, coyotes, bobcats, otters, herons, cranes, brown pelicans and dozens of other species during their tours. [www.grosse-savanne-ecotours.com](http://www.grosse-savanne-ecotours.com)

**Jungle Gardens’ New Tour:** People certainly know the name “Tabasco,” and if they study the label on their pepper sauce, they also know the name “Avery Island,” where the spicy stuff has been bottled for more than 125 years. Edward “Monsieur Ned” McIlhenny, the son of Tabasco’s inventor (he took over the business in 1898), helped rescue a bird species, the snowy egret, from extinction by building an aviary on his family’s island. From that effort developed Jungle Gardens, a 170-acre paradise that’s home to Louisiana’s fascinating flora and fauna. In its ongoing effort to help guests have the optimal experience in this natural wonderland, Jungle Gardens has introduced a free cell phone and web-based tour. Visitors to this **Iberia Parish** attraction can access recorded commentary with details about 15 points of interest in the gardens – including Bird City, where the descendants of McIlhenny’s egrets continue to return each year – simply by dialing 337-606-4063. Those guests with smart phones can access a tour that features an interactive map with details in text, audio, video and photo format. Soon these new additions will be offered in French, too. [www.junglegardens.org](http://www.junglegardens.org)

**Mardi Gras Plaza:** Located along Veterans Boulevard in Metairie in **Jefferson Parish**, the plaza opened in January 2014 and honors the parish’s Carnival traditions. Veterans Boulevard is the east bank of the parish’s main parade route, and the plaza is now the staging area for the annual Family Gras festival, a family-focused celebration of Mardi Gras. The design of the plaza features Carnival beads and medallions; it boasts the name of every krewe (an organization that hosts a parade or ball during the Mardi Gras season) that has participated in the Jefferson Parish parade since the first event was held in 1932.

**Southern Hotel:** For more than 100 years, the Southern Hotel has been a focal point of life in the charming community of Covington, located 45 minutes north of New Orleans in **St. Tammany Parish**. Originally established as a physical and spiritual retreat, the hotel thrived for more than 50 years; it then saw life as a drug store and later as government offices, including acting as the local courthouse. But the building was shuttered in 2003 and stood vacant for several years, until a local lawyer and her family decided to breathe new life into the 1907 hotel by restoring it to its former glory. When the Southern Hotel opens in late May, it will feature more than 40 sleeping rooms, meeting space, banquet facilities, a fitness center, plunge pool, full-service restaurant and lounge designed to appeal to guests and locals alike. It’ll be the perfect place for a weekend getaway to Covington, a town listed on the National Register of Historic Places and home to dozens of boutiques, antique and specialty stores, art galleries, and restaurants. [www.southernhotel.com](http://www.southernhotel.com)

**Whooping Cranes:** In an effort to re-establish the population of endangered whooping cranes, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries released 10 young birds at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area in the marshes near the town of Gueydan in **Vermilion Parish**. These magnificent birds are only found in North America, and it’s estimated that a mere 600 remain. This represents a tremendous comeback, considering that just one crane was left in the state in 1947 ... but fish and wildlife experts are eager to build those numbers even more. Officials indicate that at least 130 cranes must survive in the region for at least 10 years before the species can be removed from the endangered list, and Vermilion Parish is doing its part to help in the process. [www.wlf.la.gov](http://www.wlf.la.gov)