

LOUISIANA'S CAJUN BAYOU TOURISM

In Louisiana's Cajun Bayou, It's All About ... Culture!

When you plan a visit to Louisiana, you start hearing and throwing around the word “Cajun,” but what does it really mean? An easy way to figure it out is to spend some time in Louisiana's Cajun Bayou, in the unique communities of Lafourche Parish.

Here's a quick history lesson: “Cajun” is an English corruption of the French word *Acadien*, which describes an ethnic group that was exiled from Canada's Maritime region in the mid-1700s because they refused to declare allegiance to the British crown. About a third of these people ultimately ended up in Louisiana, where they found others who spoke French and many who practiced the Catholic faith; otherwise, it was an unfamiliar territory to them. It was a much different topography and climate than they were used to, but they worked hard as farmers and fishermen and forged a new life in strange surroundings while clinging to those things they knew best: religion, music, food and family bonds.

There's a lot more to it, of course, but the short story is that the British attempt to eliminate the Acadian (the English spelling of the word) culture backfired completely, because the group made themselves quite at home in Louisiana and has had an undeniable impact on the state's culture ... much to the delight of locals and visitors alike.

Perhaps the best place to get a hearty dose of all things Cajun is at the [Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center](#) in Thibodaux, one of the facilities of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The center highlights the music, religion, cuisine, recreation and livelihoods of the Cajun population through a series of exhibits and films. The facility also offers walking tours of downtown Thibodaux, the biggest town in Lafourche Parish, and boat trips along the famed Bayou Lafourche.

Throughout the year, Cajun culture is acknowledged at festivals up and down the Bayou, with events celebrating everything from food to music to boat building. But of course, the highlight among these events is Mardi Gras, which is embraced by everyone in Louisiana but especially the

Cajuns. Lafourche Parish offers a particularly family-friendly version of “Fat Tuesday,” with G-rated parades and festivities that are the perfect way to introduce *les enfants* to both the fun and the true meaning of the celebration.

And as a rule, you can’t address the topic of Cajun culture without talking about food ... at length and with great passion and enthusiasm. Books have been written and songs have been sung about Cajun cooking, a rustic cuisine that stands out for its use of local ingredients and its utter simplicity. Popular ingredients include seafood (especially shrimp), sausage, rice, green bell peppers, onions and celery.

Wherever you go in Lafourche Parish, you’ll see, hear, smell and taste the impact and influence of the Cajuns. Perhaps the best part about time spent in this region is that there’s nothing contrived about these experiences you’ll have; they’re completely authentic and become the most memorable part of a visit.