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ROAD TRIP

LOUISIANA



➤ **Miles:** 162 • **Days on the Road:** 5 • **Best Byway Detour:** Creole Nature Trail All-American Road • **Most Colorful Stop:** Mardi Gras Museum



If you're hoping to hear the heartbeat of Cajun country, drive straight to Acadiana. Rooted in French and Canadian heritage, the region became a haven for French settlers who were exiled from L'Acadie (present-day Nova Scotia). Acadiana now encompasses 22 southern Louisiana parishes west of New Orleans. It's prime road-tripping

territory, inviting detours to small-town attractions. Pull over to climb inside a retired oil rig or meditate at a 12th-century Chinese Buddha statue. Tune in to Cajun Radio 1470 AM (1290 AM as you head east)—the go-to zydeco and swamp-pop station—and let the Gulf Coast flavors be your guide.

—Kelsy Chauvin



Chow down on crawfish étouffée, a Cajun specialty, at Prejeans Restaurant in Lafayette, Louisiana.



STOP 1

In Good Spirits

Kick off your road trip in Lake Charles, marking its 150th anniversary in 2017. First stop: **Leonard's Food Quarters** to fill up on Cajun and creole dishes such as boudin, étouffée, and po'boys. Then catch live music at **Rikenjaks Brewing Company** or at **Ember** inside **L'Auberge Casino Resort**, where you can let the good times roll in spirit—or dice. To the east of Lake Charles, sip samples of rum made with local sugarcane at **Bayou Rum Distillery**, one of America's largest, privately owned rum distillers.

STOP 2

Local Accents

New Iberia is a bona fide hub of Acadian culture. Folks here have drawls as thick as the Spanish moss draping live oaks, and they'll point you to **Jane's Seafood** for crawfish and crabs. **Main Street** is home to an art deco theater and **Books Along the Teche**, an indie bookstore that stocks James Lee Burke's famous Dave Robicheaux detective novels, all set in Iberia Parish.

STOP 3

Spice of Life

Follow the aroma of pepper mash southward to Avery Island and tour the **Tabasco factory**. Learn how founder Edmund McIlhenny concocted his magic formula in the 1860s, why it became the world's most popular hot sauce, and the complex process that goes into producing 700,000 bottles of Tabasco every day. Visitors can check out the site's pepper-stocked greenhouse, journey through a salt mine, and join a Cajun cooking class. Drive through the factory's adjoining **Jungle Gardens** to spot birds and local wildlife (including an occasional alligator), and find a few moments of tranquility at the giant 12th-century Chinese Buddha statue enshrined in a pagoda.

STOP 4

Bayou Country

Head east on U.S. 90 to Franklin, the seat of St. Mary Parish. On the banks of Bayou Teche, tour the sprawling 1830s-era plantation house of **Oaklawn Manor**, which offers a sanctuary for bird lovers in its dedicated Audubon room. You may even be greeted by the manor's resident-owner, former Louisiana Governor Mike Foster. Feel at home in a similar style while lodging at the **Fairfax House**. Built in 1852 on a sugarcane plantation, it's now a classic southern-style bed-and-breakfast, complete with restored antique furniture inside and wide porches outside that offer rocking chairs for guests to take in Acadiana's breezy atmosphere.

STOP 5

Gone Shrimpin'

Farther east in Morgan City—the site of Labor Day weekend's annual **Shrimp & Petroleum Festival**—you can climb to the seawall's elevated walkway and peek at the Atchafalaya River's shrimp boats. On historic **Front Street**, browse boutiques on your way to tour a retired oil rig called **Mr. Charlie**, where you can see what life is like when you're working in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. Wrap up your road trip with an overstuffed roast beef and gravy po'boy at **Atchafalaya Café**, or sample Italian-meets-Cajun dishes at the upscale **Café Jo Jo's**, serving specialties like crawfish fettuccine and seafood grits.