

TOURISM WORKS

for SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

LAKE CHARLES/SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

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READERS' CHOICE AWARD

Three Consecutive Years



Recently, the publishers and editors of ConventionSouth, the national multimedia resource for planning events in the South, presented the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau with a 2018 Readers' Choice Award.

"ConventionSouth readers and fans have voted to decide the best meeting sites in the South, and it is no surprise to us that Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau has been selected to receive our annual Readers' Choice Award," said ConventionSouth Publisher J. Talty O'Connor. "The value in receiving this prestigious recognition is that it comes from the United States' top

meeting professionals who hold events in the South. These planners demand the highest level of customer service and quality facilities, and they have contributed in determining that Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau indeed displays the commitment to professionalism, creativity and service that they require."

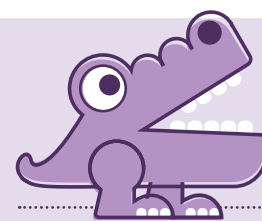
Throughout the year, meeting professionals nominated the meeting sites they believe provide exemplary service for group events. The nominated sites are then compiled onto an online ballot where meeting professionals and fans are asked to vote for the best of the best. With over 7,000 voters participating in the selection process and the highest social media interaction to date, this has been the most successful and engaging year yet.

"We strive for excellence in all that we do, and the team at the CVB is honored to be recognized by professional meeting planners who appreciate the service that

we provide. The CVB cannot do this alone. We are fortunate to have partners in tourism who work alongside us to raise the bar of expectations for groups meeting in Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana. Being awarded this title for three years in a row is incredibly encouraging for our team. We would also like to congratulate Golden Nugget Lake Charles, another local Readers' Choice Award recipient," said Kyle Edmiston, chief operating officer of the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Celebrating over 35 years as a leading meeting planning resource, ConventionSouth magazine is based in Gulf Shores, Ala., and is distributed to more than 18,000 meeting professionals located across the country who book meetings held within the South.

More information about hosting an event in Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana can be found at www.visitlakecharles.org/meet.



GATOR BITES

Bringing the Business Home

The sales team at the bureau works to bring business meetings, sports tournaments, conventions and group tours to Southwest Louisiana. The staff works to create relationships with the decision makers within each group whether a meeting planner or an event owner.

Some of the reasons that clients might choose a destination could revolve around capacity or facilities, but some game-changers could be services, partnerships and additional hospitality factors. The competition can be fierce, and the team always works to have creative solutions and programs to entice meeting planners or groups.



This year, the bureau has hosted multiple Louisiana High School Athletic Association state championships and countless baseball and softball tournaments. A myriad of groups and conventions were hosted during 2018 by the bureau with



notables being the Lt. Governors Summit on Tourism presented by Louisiana Travel Association with record-breaking attendance, the Louisiana Municipal Association, the Louisiana Rural Water Association, Louisiana Society of Association executives, the annual business conference for Waitr, Louisiana Oil and Gas Association, Louisiana Chiefs of Police, Port Association of Louisiana, and the Louisiana Airport Managers Association.

The CVB also offers services to all individuals or groups planning an event in Southwest Louisiana. These services range from bid proposals to assisting clients with finding the right venues or accommodations for the host hotels. It also includes registration assistance, publicity and more. **Learn about planning meetings in Southwest Louisiana at www.visitlakecharles.org/meet.**

THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

From the Desk of
Shelley Johnson, CDME,
LCTP, Executive Director

The mission of the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana CVB is to provide leadership in initiating and coordinating the worldwide marketing of Calcasieu Parish as a highly desirable leisure and convention destination. The arts community is a tremendous asset to Calcasieu Parish and highly advantageous to the bureau in attracting leisure visitors. The CVB supports arts initiatives, festivals and events through a myriad of actions and investment of resources.

The bureau invests in the tourism/arts partnership grant (the first of its kind in LA), tourism development grants and tourism economic development grants, designed to boost events, community projects and visitation to Southwest Louisiana. Several events benefited from these grants that are above and beyond the grants administered by the Arts Council such as SWLA Mardi Gras, Rouge et Blanc, Chuck Fest, Smoke & Barrel Festival, Arts and Crabs, and Boudin Wars. Investments with the Lake Charles Symphony and Banners Program at McNeese also increase



the cultural offerings to visitors as well as residents. The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana is utilizing a \$10,000 Tourism Development Marketing Matching Grant to assist with the research into a Bike Share program benefiting the entire community.

This year, the CVB created and instituted the Project Enhancement Grant, the first of its kind in Louisiana, to make CVB grant funds available to tourism attractions that would elevate their marketability with brick and mortar improvements. The first recipient, McNeese State University, was awarded \$30,000 to assist with the production and installation of signage on roads around the university to have a direct impact of tourism, visitation and recruitment. The CVB also partnered with the City

of Lake Charles on a project to bring the amphitheater sound and lighting to a level where any fair or festival can "plug and play," therefore utilizing the facility for even more events.



Shelley Johnson, CDME, LCTP
Executive Director



TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS

Visitor travel expenditures in Calcasieu Parish exceeded **\$732 million** in 2017, ranking 4th in the state of 64 parishes.

3%

Southwest Louisiana employed over **11,000** people in the tourism industry in 2017, an increase of 3%.

4TH IN THE STATE



RECOGNITION

Top 20 Under the Radar Destinations

TheTravel.com named Lake Charles as one of the Top 10 Under the Radar Destinations recognizing the area's culture, unique museums and historic significance.



Check out articles written about the area here: www.visitlakecharles.org/extra.

Travel Media

DID YOU KNOW?



A function that many in the public are unaware of is the constant pitching of story ideas by the CVB to media that garners free publicity for Southwest Louisiana in publications, blogs, and media outlets. This October, the CVB hosted culinary writers from the **Houston Chronicle**, the **Philadelphia Sun Newspaper**, **Houston Woman Magazine**, **Houston CityBook** and several bloggers to experience the unique food culture of the area.

The bureau's communications department also secured **H Texas Magazine** and

Chili Pepper Magazine to attend the Smoke & Barrel Festival, and just this week, the team is hosting eight golf travel writers to experience Southwest Louisiana's links and culture. In 2018, the CVB produced over \$5 million in free publicity for Southwest Louisiana through hosting media or pitching story ideas.