Acadiana’s got what tourists want. “People want the real thing. And we’ve got it here,” said Gerald Breaux, executive director of the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission (LCVC). In a recent national survey, thousands of tourists were asked what they look for when they travel, said Breaux. The response seemed tailored to Acadiana, he said. "The things we offer are things that people want to do anyway," he said. "Acadiana is not a fabricated, Disneyland type of thing. You get the real thing here.”

What people want is something different, he said, something that others haven’t done. And they want to participate in what’s going on around them. They also want good food, and good music. And they don’t want to pay a lot of money for it, said Breaux. Additionally, tourists are interested in the past, he said. Acadiana offers an abundance of all these things, Breaux said. "Think about it," he said. "Look at the Cajun and Creole food we offer here. And there’s dancing at many of our restaurants, so the people can feel they are participating in the culture. What’s more, our restaurants and hotels are much less expensive than you would find in New Orleans.

"Also, this area is strong in its history," he added. "And it’s not just a vanilla history. It’s real.” Breaux cited another national survey in which 22,000 tourists were asked if they would return to places they had recently visited. Of those who had visited Acadiana, 80 percent said they would return, he said. The only area with a higher percentage of return interest was Disneyland.

"What that indicates is that people are satisfied with the product here," said Breaux. The so-called “Cajun Craze” has subsided, Breaux noted. But that’s not necessarily a bad thing. "The craze generated interest in the Cajun lifestyle, Breaux said, and LCVC is working hard to take advantage of that in the 1990s. “Ten years ago we didn’t know how to market ourselves,” he said. "Now we’re real cognizant of making sure that people are made aware of the true experience rather than a fabricated false experience.”

Something that can’t be marketed like other tourist attractions is the genuine friendliness of Acadiana’s native residents, he added. Breaux, who travels across the country hollering the region, said the most frequent compliment he hears from people who have visited here is that they were treated well by the people. "It sounds like a cliche because everybody says it about their area," he said. "But it’s something you have to experience for yourself in Acadiana. And, again, it isn’t a fabricated type thing. It’s just the way it is.”

The recent national recession hurt the travel industry overall, said Breaux. But, fortunately for Acadiana, the South wasn’t as hard hit as Northern states, he said. In fact, he said, all statistics dealing with the region’s tourism trade have been on the rise in recent years. "All our numbers indicate an increase in visitation,” he said. "That kind of speaks for itself. We’re in an excellent posture right now.”