Cajun Country centered around town of Lafayette

By BRUCE SCHULTZ

LAFAYETTE — Lafayette is considered the Hub City of Acadiana, a region of southern Louisiana populated by tax-paying Cajuns.

The city serves as the area's center of good times, good food and good people, all only an hour from Baton Rouge. The drive is an easy excursion on I-10 across the Atchafalaya Basin, the nation's largest river basin swamp. Much of the four-lane highway is elevated across the massive expanse of wetland.

Expect to be treated like a long lost friend by Cajuns, who are known and envied for their ability to serve up delicious dishes of scrumptious hospitality. Cajuns are eager to share their good times in the form of festivals. Many of the events abound in the Lafayette area, including Lafayette’s own Festivals Acadiens, the Rayne Frog Festival, Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, Opelousas Fish Festival and Abbeville French Market Festival.

Lafayette Sugar Cane Festival in New Iberia, a day-long and petrochemical festival in Morgan City, Louisiana Cotton Festival in Ville Platte, Yambala in Opelousas and the Church Point Buggy Festival, just to name a few.

Lafayette has numerous restaurants serving delectable seafood and Cajun cuisine that offer mouth-watering opportunities for hungry palates. But restaurants also worth remembering are found in the nearby areas of Henderson, Breaux Bridge, New Iberia and Abbeville.

The food depends heavily on crawfish. The crustaceans are either eaten after boiling or used in dishes such as boudin (pronounced “boodun”) or étouffée (pronounced “eh-too-lay”). While on the subject of pronunciations, don't even mutter the forbidden “gyeyfish” or “crayfish” as substitutes for crawfish.

Lafayette offers several recreational facilities, including three municipal swimming pools, several golf courses, a planetarium, 11 parks, six museums and more that three dozen public tennis courts.

Nearby lakes, Vermilion Bay and the Gulf of Mexico offer unlimited fishing and boating opportunities. Many choose to try the Atchafalaya Basin for excellent fishing and hunting.

South of Lafayette is Acadia Village, a replica of a 19th-century Cajun community, which is open to visitors year-round.

Lafayette’s $60 million Cajunotum offers a variety of entertainment opportunities, sporting events and conventions.

The University of Southwestern Louisiana, nestled inside the city, offers a wide curriculum for its 16,000 students. The university has gained a reputation for its instruction in computers.

More than four dozen schools, both public and private, are found in Lafayette, including schools for instruction in business or vocational-technical learning and for the mentally retarded.

Lafayette is the southernmost end of the new I-49 highway which, when completed, will provide a quick freeway route to Shreveport.

For more information on the sights and attractions of Lafayette and Acadiaha, call the Lafayette Parish Convention and Visitors Commission at (337) 232-2077.