Lafayette offers good people, good food and good times

Acadiana Bureau

LAFAYETTE — Cajuns call this place home.

It's the hub of Acadians and the starting point for tourists who are interested in experiencing the three main ingredients of Cajun culture: good people, good food and good times — all only an hour west of Baton Rouge.

The drive to Lafayette from Baton Rouge is unique.

The main route, Interstate 10, crosses the northern portion of the Atchafalaya Basin, the nation's largest river-basin swamp.

A large stretch of the four-lane highway is elevated across the massive expanse of wetland, offering breathtaking views.

Expect to be treated like a long-lost friend by Cajuns, who are known and envied for their servings of sincere hospitality.

Events abound in the Lafayette area, including the city's Festivals Acadiens and the Festival International de Louisiane, the Rayne Frog Festival, Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, Gueydan Duck Festival, Louisiana Sugar Cane Festival in New Iberia, Louisiana Rice Festival in Crowley, Shrimp and Petroleum Festival in Morgan City and the Louisiana Cotton Festival in Ville Platte.

Restaurants worth remembering can be found in Lafayette and in nearby Carencro, Henderson, Rayne, Breaux Bridge, New Iberia and Abbeville.

The food depends heavily on crawfish. And lest you be scorned, don't even mutter the forbidden words "crawfish" or "crayfish" as substitutes for crawfish.

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

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

At Vermilionville, a Cajun and Creole heritage park, visitors will experience life as it was in the early years of Cajun and Creole culture.

The Jean Lafitte Acadian Center, operated by the National Park Service, is next door to Vermilionville, featuring multimedia displays of area culture.

Lafayette's Cajundome offers a variety of entertainment opportunities, sporting events, including semi-pro ice hockey and conventions.

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, inside the city, offers a wide curriculum for its 17,000 students.

The university has gained a reputation for its instruction in computers and a developing research center.

It also is being recognized for its Productivity Center, its Marine Survival Training Center and the National Wetlands Research Center.

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 handicapped.

The Affiliated Blind of Louisiana has developed a comprehensive training facility in Lafayette for the visually impaired.

The Lafayette Regional Airport has undergone major renovations to make its facilities more attractive, comfortable and efficient for its customers.

Lafayette also has a bus system, which runs from 6:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

The community also is served by Amtrak and by Greyhound Trailways Lines.

Acadiana Village in Lafayette is a wonderful sight, especially at Christmas.

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