TOUR LOUISIANA
THE CENTRAL AREA
The Central Louisiana city of Alexandria not only marks the geographical middle of the state, but it is also contains a tour area that sweeps from the Sabine River and rolling hill country in the west to the bayous and lowlands of the Mississippi River on the east. The sights and sounds of Central Louisiana are as diverse as its landscape. The area includes some of the finest hunting and fishing in the South. It has been a retreat for some of Louisiana’s ablest writers. The area contains a prehistoric Indian museum and, elsewhere, the only known example of African architecture in America.

Located on the Red River, Alexandria is the center of commerce for an agricultural area. During the Civil War, Federal troops from the Battle of Mansfield sacked and burned the town, but many of the ante-bellum homes in the area were saved and have been preserved. The city is a convention spot and features excellent accommodations.

At Hot Wells, 20 miles to the north, is a modern, state-developed mineral spa. It has extensive mineral bath facilities and guest accommodations. Nearby are excellent fishing streams, lakes and vacation camps.

West of Alexandria and just south of Leesville is the site of the Newllano Cooperation Colony — one of the nation’s most interesting experiments in communal living. The colony, which began in California in 1914, moved to Louisiana in 1917 and continued until the late 1930s. Too-rapid growth and internal dissention led to the dissolution of the experiment. The colony was the longest-lived secular utopian experiment of this type in the United States.

Between Alexandria and the Mississippi River are some of the finest fishing lakes in the state. The largest is Catahoula, 15 miles long and approximately four miles wide. Others include Larto and Saline Lakes. In the middle of the Mississippi River is the famed Vidalia Sandbar, once a popular dueling ground. It was here that James Bowie is believed to first have used his famous Bowie knife to kill a man.

In Avoyelles Parish the atmosphere changes. Avoyelles is the northernmost of the Cajun parishes. The people speak the Cajun’s distinctive blend of English-French and the rolling hills give way to bayous and lowlands. In the heart of the Marksville area is the Marks-
ville Prehistoric Indian Park. The 40-acre park is on a bluff overlooking Old River, site of ancient Indian mounds and a prehistoric Indian village. The museum on the grounds displays ancient Indian artifacts uncovered in the area.

Below Marksville lie Point Coupee Parish and False River, a beautiful oxbow lake formed when the Mississippi changed its course early in the 18th Century. False River is a center of fishing, boating and water skiing and annually holds several power-boat events.

In this area are several of Louisiana's most famed plantation homes: Parlange, built in 1750; Austerlitz; Pleasant View; River Lake, and Alma. Alma was the home of Julien Poydras, a wealthy bachelor who left part of his fortune to be used as dowries for impoverished maidens of Point Coupee and West Baton Rouge Parishes. His legacy is still distributed each year to needy maidens. Nearby is famed Randall Oak, an ancient live oak named for James P. Randall, author of "Maryland, My Maryland."

Chicot State Park, between Alexandria and Ville Platte, is one of the state's finest and most beautiful camping and fishing areas. Modern, well-equipped cabins and lodges are available at reasonable rates, and fishing skiffs can be rented. It is open year around.

On nearby Bayou Courtableau is the old shipping town of Washington, dating back to the days when the bayou was an important waterway.

Directly below Alexandria lie LeCompte, Cheneyville, Meeker and Bunkie. In the area are Wytchwood plantation, with hand-hewn cypress beams held in place by wooden pins, and Lloyd's Hall.

Northwest of Alexandria at Melrose Plantation are three of the state's most distinctive homes: Melrose, Yucca and the "African House." The plantation was founded shortly after 1750 by Marie Coin-Coin, a former slave, on the huge land grant. Under her guidance the plantation prospered. She constructed the first residence, Yucca (still standing) and the African House. The hutlike structure of whitewashed brick with its enormous overhanging roof has been named by the Federal government as one of the 13 most distinctive buildings in the South.

Melrose manor was built in 1833 and is an excellent example of the early Louisiana "raised cottage" plantation home. One of the later chatelaines, Mrs. Cammie G. Henry, assembled probably the most extensive private library on Louisiana history in existence and made it available to writers. Lyle Saxon, among others, lived at Yucca while working on several of his Louisiana novels.