Welcome to Baton Rouge!

If you're a newcomer to Baton Rouge, knowing about some of the unique personality traits of the city may help you understand it quickly. You'll discover as soon as you look for housing that Baton Rouge has something for everyone.

Millennia ago, some human came ashore on the first high ground on the east bank of the Mississippi, a glimpse of the retreat from the mighty river and the marshy land to the west and south. No one knows what he called it, but the Indians who used the site for centuries were calling it 'Istrouma' when the first European settlers arrived. 'Istrouma' translates to 'Red Stick' and, according to local custom, identified a tall dead cypress tree with a blaze, a highly visible landmark in the virgin wilderness of green. The first French explorers and trappers used the landmark to rendezvous on, calling it 'Baton Rouge,' the French translation of 'Red Stick.'

Since one of the mightiest rivers in the world curve around the site, all the growth from the original settlement was forced to the south, east and north, forming the up-sided city of Baton Rouge. The River is very much a part of Baton Rouge. From carrying a few Indian and French trappers' canoes or a place of heavily laden rafts and steamboats, to the barges, tags and ocean-going freighters that crowd the river today. It has always been one of the major economic factors in the city's life. Even though Baton Rouge is almost a hundred miles upriver, it's one of the top five ports in the United States, in most years handling more traffic than San Francisco.

And yet, because of the high protective levees, many Baton Rougians go from year to year without catching a glimpse of the Mississippi unless they are driving west or traveling by plane. Baton Rouge has more fun with politics, football and food than other American cities. Being the center of state government here is more exciting than in most states because Louisianians really get involved in their politics — a legacy from Huey Long.

Another legacy from that controversial political genius is the fanatical interest in the doings of the LSU Tigers football team. Long set out to create a team the whole state could identify with — and it worked. You might be startled to find that a native who was educated at an Ivy League school or abroad would be indistinguishable from an LSU alumni in his support of the Tigers.

One great advantage for a newcomer at a Tiger Stadium game is being able to indulge in an hour or two of primal screaming to re...