Welcome to Baton Rouge

Enjoy our history, culture and beauty

By JULIE KAY
Special to The Advocate

Sit down, relax and sit a spell. If the lull of the river, the smell of the foods and the lure of its history haven't won you over, the heart of its people will surely make you glad to call Baton Rouge home.

If you're a newcomer, you won't want to relax too long. There are plantations to see, like Magnolia Mound right here in the city, or museums to visit, such as the Rural Life Museum that acquaints you with our rich heritage, and then there's the downtown Old State Capitol or the Louisiana Arts and Science Center.

The city is growing and changing as we speak.

Downtown is in the middle of a renovation effort that city planners see as one that will take us well into the next decades.

Roadways throughout the city have been in various stages of construction for the past several years, with more changes on the horizon to accommodate continued growth.

Just to get you started on what we're all about, here are a few brief facts on state trivia.

The state flower is the Magnolia; the state bird is the Brown Pelican; its nickname is the Pelican State; the state tree is the Bald Cypress and there's even a state insect just in case you're ever stumped for a piece of real trivia. It's the honeybee.

East Baton Rouge Parish, in addition to Ascension, Iberville, West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, West Feliciana, East Feliciana, St. Helena and Livingston Parishes, comprise the Greater Baton Rouge area.

And, by the way, in case you're from a state that has counties, we call them parishes here.

Armed with all your newly acquired knowledge, take a dive into experiencing Baton Rouge first hand and be sure to take the whole family.

With Baton Rouge as the capital city, be sure and make one of your first stops at the State Capitol. It's the tallest in the U.S. so you can't miss it. Just head downtown.

Be sure and go up to the 27th floor for a spectacular view of the Mississippi River. Nearby, you'll find the Old State Capitol, also known as the Louisiana Center for Political and Governmental History. Restoration efforts have allowed visitors to enjoy the pristine condition of past glory, while including interactive exhibits of some of some colorful history.

Learning more about our fascinating history or any other history for that matter is easy. Baton Rouge is home to two major universities — Louisiana State and Southern.

Since we are also a "college town," you can expect to enjoy a wide range of musical offerings from Zydeco and jazz to rock, gospel and blues.

Whether you're a student or not, there are a number of opportunities to expand your knowledge in just about any field of interest. There are lagniappe courses offered throughout the year for any number of subjects and if you're really into research, there are library branches throughout the city, including one, the Bluebonnet branch, that offers an extensive genealogical collection.

Military history buffs might enjoy the World War II destroyer, the USS Kidd, which is docked downtown on the Mississippi River and available for tours.

Nature lovers will surely enjoy the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, Alligator Bayou, or the Hilltop Arboretum, just to name a few.

You can also visit the state's capital, the Louisiana State Capitol, which is open to the public.

Aerial view of the State Capitol and Capitol Lake on the edge of downtown Baton Rouge.

ATTENTION
NEW BATON ROUGE RESIDENTS

If you are a newcomer to the Baton Rouge area we want to welcome you to our city. Call us and we will be glad to send you a welcome package filled with information on our area, PLUS FREE gifts and gift certificates from area businesses. This does not obligate you in any way.

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multitude of parks and commemorative areas, where you can hike, pitch a tent, or enjoy its beautiful picnic facilities if you’re longing for a taste of the great outdoors.

Speaking of the great outdoors, you can’t lose if you’re a sportsman.

There’s plenty of hunting and fishing available in the area. Check with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for licensing requirements.

If you’re looking for great entertainment, perhaps you’ve heard of our festivals.

We have one to celebrate just about anything from frogs or crawfish to jambalaya and watermelon.

Notice that many of them revolve around food and music. It’s part of who we are.

Just look for listings published yearly in The Advocate or through the Office of Tourism.

Mardi Gras parades aren’t just in New Orleans.

When Mardi Gras rolls around, Baton Rouge has its own parades to enjoy.

Schedules and maps will be published ahead of time, so you can plan your strategy.

The city is also home to two casinos — Argosy and Casino Rouge, each in the downtown area for gaming enthusiasts.

New shoppers in Baton Rouge will soon find there are two major malls, Mall at Cortana, on Airline Highway and Florida Boulevard, and Mall of Louisiana, at I-10 and Bluebonnet Boulevard, from which to choose, not to mention a great number of suburban shopping centers and independent retailers.

What can one say about the food? From Cajun to Creole, there’s something for everyone and a spice for every palate. We like to brag about our cuisine, but you’ll have to experience it for yourself to know what we mean.

Check out the multitude of restaurants, seafood markets and home-cooked selections available to you and you’ll soon be as spoiled as we are.

You’re in luck, as well, with the variety of sports to be enjoyed here.

The universities offer a wide array of football, baseball and basketball games to enjoy, but you might be surprised to know that we also have a professional ice hockey team, the Kingfish, that strut their stuff from October through April.

Soccer, tennis and swimming are also enjoyed by families through such organizations as the Baton Rouge Soccer Association, YMCA’s or Baton Rouge Recreational Centers (BREC).

State officials are proud of the many opportunities available to its citizens and visitors alike.

Tourism is growing by leaps and bounds, according to Lt. Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, who says tourism in the state ranks first in the nation.

“In 1999, Louisiana hosted a statewide celebration, commemorating our founding and 300 years of French influence,” she said. “FrolicFest brought in nearly 26 million international and domestic visitors.”

“Baton Rouge celebrated in tandem with BonneFete, which was so enthusiastically received that it was brought back by popular demand,” Blanco said.

The city’s hospitality speaks for itself, Blanco said.

“As you get to know our community, you will also enjoy historical preservation such as Magnolia Mound and Mount Hope.”

“We also encourage you to visit our outstanding museums and libraries,” the lieutenant governor said.

“Baton Rouge’s many outstanding restaurants will explain why Louisiana’s food is celebrated all over the world.”

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