



MASK AND BEADS—NPS / ANGELA FAULKNER

Top photos, from left: a baldcypress swamp in Barataria Preserve; costumed riders during Cajun Mardi Gras; coastal marsh, where Gulf meets delta; living history commemoration of the Battle of New Orleans at Chalmette Battlefield; cast iron tracery gives the French Quarter a 19th-century air.

CREDITS FOR ABOVE PHOTOS, LEFT TO RIGHT: MARK GRASINIAN © JENNY BAGER; MAN PLAYING REDDIE STICK © PHILIP GOLD; MAN HOLDING TRAY OF CRAWFISH © PHILIP GOLD; CHEF © SYNDY BYRD; WOMAN PLAYING CLARINET © PHILIP GOLD; MAN PLAYING SAX © SYNDY BYRD; CRAWFISH MAN © SYNDY BYRD; BOY PLAYING ACCORDION © SYNDY BYRD; WOMAN PLAYING REDDIE © ALEX DEVIAN; SUGAR CANE WORKER © CHANDRA MCCORMICK; SHRIMPERS © PHILIP GOLD; LIVING HISTORY PORTRAIT OF CHOCFAC INDIAN © SYNDY BYRD; BROWN PHIL AN © ALEX DEVIAN.

Before the Battle of New Orleans, Jean Lafitte commanded a large confederation of smugglers and privateers based in Barataria Bay. Though long hounded by American authorities for smuggling slaves and goods, he joined forces with Jackson in the battle, providing men, artillery, and information. Pardoned for his service, he slipped from the pages of history and lingers only in delta legend.

Accordion and alligator: icons of the delta world—the accordion because its driving rhythm underpins Cajun and zydeco music; the alligator as top predator in the bayou ecosystem.

Left: St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square.

© ALEX DEMYAN

The bayous of the Barataria Preserve wind slowly through giant blue iris and bald cypress draped with Spanish moss. The word "bayou," borrowed by the French from the Choctaw Indians, is usually applied to the slow-moving rivers and creeks of the flat delta country.

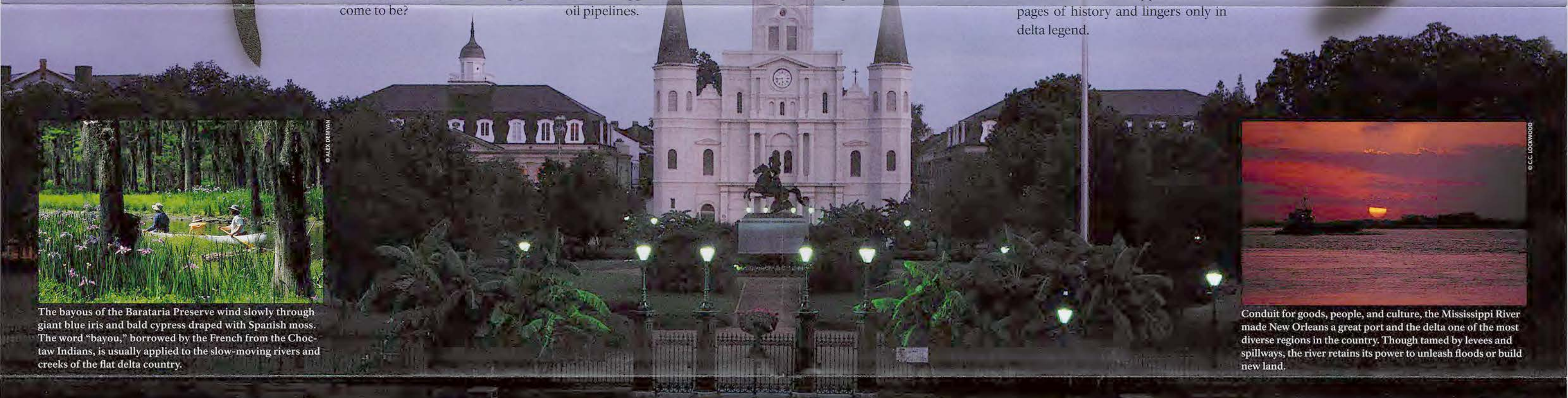
Times change, meanings blur, and people's sense of themselves evolves. But "Creole" retains its old meaning as an adjective describing the food, music, and customs of those areas of Louisiana settled during French colonial times. In a sense, despite the overwhelming Americanization of Louisiana, the original Creoles won. Visitors come to experience Creole, to experience what sets this place apart: Mardi Gras and red beans, jazz and *jolie de vivre*. Whoever came here

A black and white photograph showing a man in a light-colored uniform and hat standing in a small, narrow boat. The boat is filled with a large, messy pile of brush, sticks, and debris. The man holds a long pole that reaches into the water. The boat is on a calm river or lake, with a dense forest of trees lining the banks in the background. The water reflects the surrounding trees and the boat.

English, African, Irish, Italian, Chinese, Filipino, Croatian, Honduran, or Vietnamese—contributed to Creole culture and in turn were shaped by it.

From their arrival in the late 1700s the Acadians, or "Cajuns," were a people apart. Mostly small farmers and craftspeople, they settled in the bayou country, where their isolation was compounded by their distinctive dialect and their fierce loyalty to family and place. Unlike New Orleans,

ians saw them as quaint and rustic, subjects of humor. Driven by hard times to seek other livelihoods, Cajuns pioneered new ways to live off the bounty of the delta landscape. In this they were joined by other groups who helped shape the culture we now know as Cajun. No longer isolated, their culture is admired worldwide—even in New Orleans.



Conduit for goods, people, and culture, the Mississippi River made New Orleans a great port and the delta one of the most diverse regions in the country. Though tamed by levees and spillways, the river retains its power to unleash floods or build new land.

Creoles and Cajuns—names romanticized, stereotyped, and misunderstood. Visitors are deluged with the words, all too often used to sell something rather than convey meaning about a people and their culture. Who are Creoles and Cajuns, and what do the names mean? Today various groups in Louisiana describe themselves as Creole—often claiming exclusive rights to the term. All have legitimate ties to that heritage. The distinction dates to the early 1800s, when Louisiana

ceased to be a European colony and became a possession of the United States. Creole originally meant "born in the New World." Whether people were of French, Spanish, African, or German heritage, it meant "us"—French-speaking and native born. "They" were Americans or European immigrants arriving in droves at the port of New Orleans, speaking not French but English or their native tongues. They were outsiders bent on changing the Creole way of life.

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Shaping a New Land

The Mississippi River delta is some of the youngest land in North America. The deltaic sediments that underlie the New Orleans region are less than 4,000 years old. Natural processes—deposition of new sediment, erosion, subsidence (settling of sediment)—maintained a healthy equilibrium between land and water at delta’s edge. Human engineering has upset the balance, blocking sedimentation and increasing coastal erosion. Rising sea levels due to climate change are accelerating the loss—a football field’s worth of land every 45 minutes.



Natural levees along river and bayou provided higher land for farms and towns. Once forest was cleared, human settlement followed the narrow courses of the levees, leading to a pattern of linear settlement where waterways were the main corridors of transportation.

Before artificial levees and jetties, the Mississippi and its distributary branches built land in two ways. Spring floods overflowed river banks. The heaviest particles of the water-borne sediment settled on the bank; the rest spread out gradually. This process created natural levees (left) along the flanks of the waterways. The land,

highest near the river, sloped gradually down the back of the levee to freshwater swamps and finally marshes. The soils got wetter as the levee sloped downward. Oaks and other hardwoods dominated the highest ground; maple, ash, and palmetto the backslope; bald cypress and water tupelo the swamp;

with grasses, sedges, and rushes in the marsh.

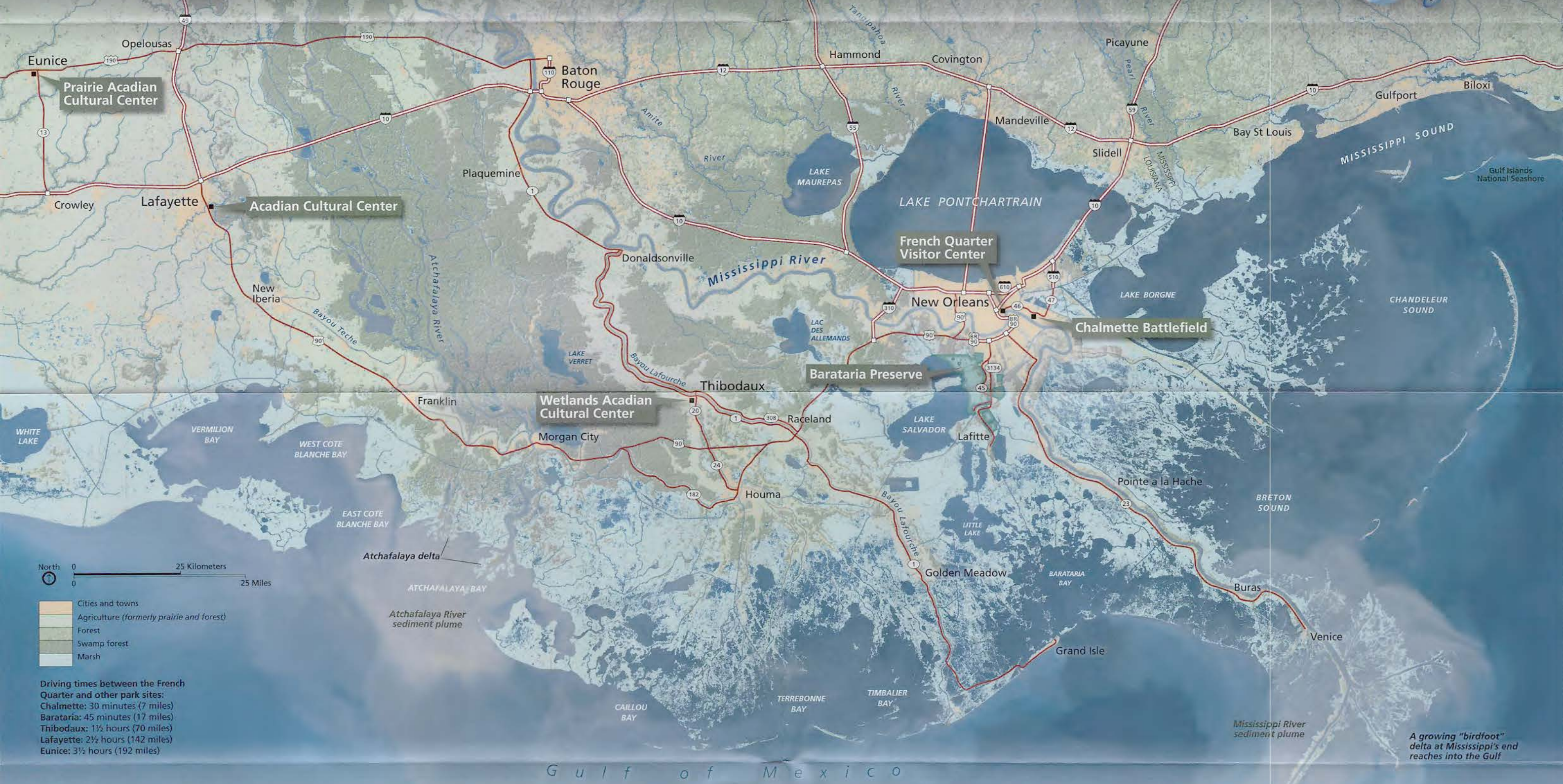
The second process of delta-building occurs at the mouth of the river, where great plumes of sediment are deposited in the shallow waters of the Gulf of Mexico as the current slows. Deposits build up into mud flats, eventually colonized by

wetland vegetation. The river tends to wander and change course over this flat area, always seeking the shortest route to the sea. It often forks into two or more distributary channels within one delta. The new distributary forks sometimes capture the main flow from the old channel. In this way, new deltas are built. As old

deltas wash away, their sediments are reworked by gulf waves and storms into barrier islands and beaches. Over the last

3,500 years, the Mississippi has created five major deltas (below), the newest only 500 years old.

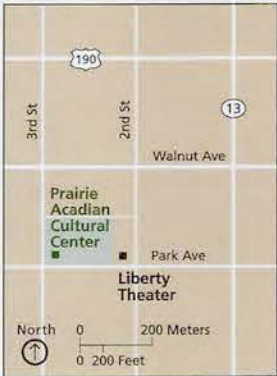
- 1 3,500–2,500 years ago
- 2 2,600–1,500 years ago
- 3 1,500–700 years ago
- 4 1,200–500 years ago
- 5 500 years ago–present



The Six Sites of Jean Lafitte

Exploring Acadiana

Eunice



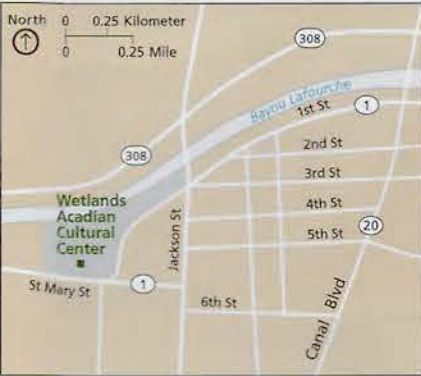
Prairie Acadian Cultural Center utilizes exhibits, Cajun music and dancing, cooking demonstrations, and live radio programs at the Liberty Theater to interpret the culture of the Acadians who settled the southwest Louisiana prairies. 250 W. Park Ave. Eunice, LA 70535 337-457-8499 www.nps.gov/jela/Prairie acadianculturalcenter.htm

Lafayette



Acadian Cultural Center presents exhibits, films, programs, and boat tours of Bayou Vermilion to share the history, customs, language, and contemporary culture of the Acadians who settled Louisiana. 501 Fisher Rd. Lafayette, LA 70508 337-232-0789 www.nps.gov/jela/Acadianculturalcenter.htm

Thibodaux



Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center interprets the bayou Acadian culture with music, exhibits, art, boat tours of Bayou Lafourche, craft demonstrations, and other activities. 314 St. Mary St. Thibodaux, LA 70301 985-448-1375 www.nps.gov/jela/Wetlands acadianculturalcenter.htm

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org

The New Orleans Area

French Quarter



French Quarter After founding New Orleans on a bend of the Mississippi River in 1718, French colonists laid it out in a neat grid. The distinctive look of the 66-block Vieux Carré (old square) is due to its architectural styles, developed in New Orleans in the 1700s and 1800s. The St. Louis Cathedral, the heart of the district, is flanked by grand Spanish colonial public buildings.

In 1856 the city erected the statue of Andrew Jackson, hero of the Battle of New Orleans and namesake of the public square. The Vieux Carré retains much of its character today because it is among the nation's oldest protected historic districts.

Visitor center exhibits, walking tours, films, music performances, folklife and cooking demonstrations, and ranger talks highlight the history and culture of New Orleans and the Mississippi River delta. 419 Decatur St. New Orleans, LA 70130 504-589-2636 www.nps.gov/jela/French quarter.htm

Directions to Barataria Preserve from French Quarter Take Magazine St. to Calliope St. Turn right onto ramp for "Mississippi River Bridge" (Business Hwy. 90). Take exit 4B. Turn left at second light onto Barataria Blvd. Stay on it for nine miles until you reach the preserve.

Barataria



Barataria Preserve is made up of 26,000 acres of marsh, swamp, and hardwood forest. The preserve offers a visitor center, environmental education center, ranger programs, walking trails, waterways, and picnic areas. 6588 Barataria Blvd. Marrero, LA 70072 504-689-3690 www.nps.gov/jela/Barataria preserve.htm

Chalmette



Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery offers living history programs, ranger talks, and visitor center exhibits and films. The battlefield is the site of the 1815 Battle of New Orleans; the Civil War-era national cemetery holds more than 15,000 graves of American troops from the War of 1812 to the Vietnam War. 8606 West St. Bernard Hwy. Chalmette, LA 70043 504-281-0510 www.nps.gov/jela/Chalmette battlefield.htm

About Your Visit

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve 419 Decatur St., New Orleans, LA 70130 www.nps.gov/jela, 504-589-3882

Contact park headquarters or individual park sites for information on days and hours, programs, drive time between sites, and volunteering. There are no camping facilities, food, or lodging in the park; these can be found in nearby communities. Public transportation is very limited; contact the park or see the park website for information on firearms regulations and other special uses.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

For Your Safety In summer drink plenty of fluids and avoid exposure to sunlight for long periods and at midday. Avoid small mounds of dirt; biting fire ants may live there. In Barataria Preserve, stay on trails; be alert for venomous snakes; don't approach or feed wildlife (especially alligators); use insect repellent.

Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

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A mural in Eunice evokes the Prairie Acadian spirit.



Good times roll at Lafayette's Festivals Acadiens.

Jam session at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux.



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The famous Po' Boy

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