



Day Trips from New Orleans

River Road p156

Graceful antebellum mansions with elaborate gardens, majestic live oaks and clustered slave shanties offer a glimpse into a foreign but not too distant past.

St Francisville p159

Antiques, birds and ghost stories, plus a few more plantations, make a fine trip. And that's without mentioning the museum at the 18,000-acre penitentiary in Angola.

Lafayette & Breaux Bridge p161

Join the party – or the *fais do do* – in Lafayette and Breaux Bridge where Cajun dance halls and crawfish boils keep things lively. And the food? It's serious business around here.

Cajun Prairie p165

Suit up for dancing and a lot of great music in the prairielands, where a young wave of fiddlers and accordion players keep Cajun and zydeco music relevant – and fun.

Down the Bayou p168

Swamps, alligators and oil. And a whole lot of Cajun culture. Soak it all in – and enjoy fresh seafood – on a road trip that's best done slow.

River Road

Explore

Historic house tours usually take about an hour. You won't be able to visit all the ones listed here in one day, so you'll need to be selective. Note that River Road is actually two roads lining the west and the east banks of the Mississippi River. Looking at a map, the east bank is the area above the river and the west bank is the area below the river. 'Downriver' means heading southeast, as the river flows toward New Orleans. 'Upriver' means northwest, against the river's flow toward Baton Rouge. River Road has various route names along the way, yet few of the towns you pass through will display any signage to indicate the change in route numbers. Sound confusing? It's not – just follow the sinuous levees.

The Best

- ➔ **Sight** Laura Plantation
- ➔ **Place to Eat** Wayne Jacob's Smokehouse
- ➔ **Place to Drink** Latil's Landing

Top Tip

Bridges are not that numerous on this part of the Mississippi River. Several plantations are on the west bank, so plot your itinerary carefully and allow extra time for travel.

Getting There & Away

Direction Northwest

Travel Time From three hours to all day depending on stops

Car Take I-10 west to I-310, exit at Destrehan and follow River Road (alternately called Hwy 44) northwest from there. Don't despair if you're still on the road at 6pm and have 8pm dinner reservations in New Orleans. Even the distant upriver plantations are only a little over a one-hour drive from the city if you hop back on I-10.

Need to Know

- ➔ **Area Code** 985, 225
- ➔ **Location** 25 to 100 miles northwest of New Orleans

➔ **Tourist Office** (☎225-675-6550; 6967 Hwy 22, cnr Hwys 22 & 70, Sorrento; ☀9am-4:30pm) Near I-10, off exit 182, the Ascension Parish visitor center has tons of information on River Road and beyond.

SIGHTS

Plantations dot the Mississippi riverbanks, often tucked among oil refineries and light industrial sites. And though corridors of centuries-old live oaks present a dramatic photo opportunity, views of the river are usually blocked by the elevated levees. Plantation tours offer a fascinating look at the lives of antebellum plantation owners and, perhaps more so than in the past, provide insights into the hard lives of the slaves as well.

The plantations here are listed in geographic order, following the Mississippi upriver toward Baton Rouge.

DESTREHAN PLANTATION

PLANTATION

(☎985-764-9315; www.destrehanplantation.org; 13034 River Rd/Hwy 48, Destrehan; adult/child \$18/7; ☀9am-4pm) Destrehan, the oldest plantation home remaining in the lower Mississippi Valley, is an impressive starting point for a River Road tour. Only 12 miles from New Orleans International Airport, the plantation was originally established for indigo production. Antoine Robert Robin DeLongy commissioned the original French colonial-style mansion in 1787, using *bousillage* (mud- and straw-filled) walls supported by cypress timbers. The house features a distinctive African-style hipped roof, no doubt the inspiration of the plantation's builder, who was of partial African descent. When DeLongy's daughter, Celeste, married Jean Noel Destrehan, they added the present Greek-revival facade. Destrehan was part of a tribunal, held on the property, that tried and convicted slaves involved in a revolt just upriver in 1811.

Costumed docents lead tours through the graceful home where the pirate Jean Lafitte was once a guest. Possible demonstrations include making *bousillage*, cooking in a hearth and African American herbal remedies. A highlight is seeing the historical-documents room that contains original Louisiana Purchase-era artifacts.