



Day Trips from New Orleans

River Road Plantations p160

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 p161

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

Lafayette & Breaux Bridge p163

Join the party – or the *fais-do-do* (Cajun dance) – 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 p167

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 p169

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 Plantations

Explore

Plantations dot River Road, which follows the Mississippi as it winds its way past New Orleans. In the past (and to be fair, even today), people visited these homes for their architecture and the moonlight-and-magnolia narrative that was built around them. An increasing number of visitors find this story to be one told in bad taste; at the least, they want the accompanying story of the slave labor that built and maintained the area's plantations. Some of the places we list delve into that history, while others give it a cursory reference.

Note that River Road is actually two roads lining the west and 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 (p160)
- **Place to Eat** Wayne Jacob's Smokehouse (p161)

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.



SIGHTS

Plantation tours offer a peak into the lives of antebellum plantation owners and, perhaps more so than in the past, provide insights into the hard lives of slaves as well.

LAURA PLANTATION

HISTORIC SITE

(☎888-799-7690, 225-265-7690; www.laura-plantation.com; 2247 Hwy 18, Vacherie; adult/child \$20/6; ☀10am-4pm) Where other plantations reflect the tastes of Anglo-America, Laura is a rare example of a Creole-operated, West Indies-influenced manor house. The blue-and-yellow property was built in 1805 by Guillaume Duparc and named for his granddaughter, Laura Locoul. Four generations of women ran the plantation, and the tour – the best one on the river – describes their fascinating role in the operation's success. More than 12 buildings – slave cabins, barns, sugar-processing stations and the like – still stand.

More than 5000 pages of plantation documents, including Laura's diary, provide firsthand details about the plantation life of women, children and slaves.

WHITNEY PLANTATION

HISTORIC SITE

(☎225-265-3300; <http://whitneyplantation.com>; 5099 Highway 18, Wallace, LA; adult/child under 12yr/student \$22/free/15; ☀9:30am-4:30pm Wed-Mon, tours 10am-3pm) The Whitney is the first plantation in Louisiana that focuses on the history and realities of slavery. Visitors are given a historical tour into the world of the German American Haydel family and their slaves, but the visit emphasizes the lived experience of the latter group. In addition to a tour that focuses on the appalling living conditions slaves toiled under, the property is speckled with memorials and monuments to the area's slave population.

DESTREHAN PLANTATION

HISTORIC SITE

(☎877-453-2095; www.destrehanplantation.org; 13034 Hwy 48; adult/child under 7yr/7-17yr \$18/free/7; ☀9am-4pm) Destrehan, the oldest plantation home remaining in the lower Mississippi Valley, was originally established for indigo production. Antoine Robert Robin DeLongy commissioned the original French Colonial-style mansion in 1787, which uses *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 partially of African descent. Viewing