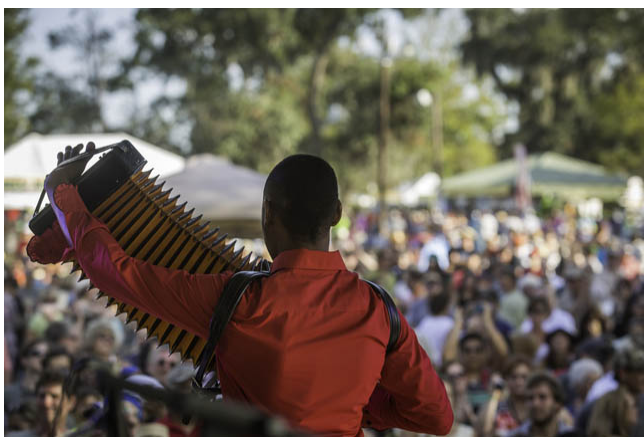




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Lafayette



From the unmistakable flavors of gumbo and jambalaya to the upbeat rhythms of zydeco music, there's nothing like Cajun culture anywhere in the world. When you want to experience the very best of it, find yourself in Lafayette, The Heart of Cajun Country. Known as the "Happiest Place on Earth," Lafayette is a thriving community with a rich history and a spectacular dining scene that resides among the many majestic bayous and lakes of southern Louisiana. Whether you're an outdoor adventurer or you're traveling with family, you'll come across something that captures your imagination here.

Lafayette may have been officially established in 1821, but its history goes back much further. Native Americans once called this place home, and European settlers started founding small communities along

Bayou Vermilion as far back as the mid-1700's. Many of the new arrivals were from Acadia, a region of Canada from which French settlers were expelled in the last 18th-century. They brought with them the foundation of the Cajun culture that exists today.

This history comes to life at [LARC's Acadian Village](#), where you'll experience what life was like for the first Acadian settlers in the area. Stroll through various houses around the village, many dating back to the early 1800s. Another great spot to experience hands-on history is [Vermilionville Living History Museum & Folklife Park](#), where you can see how Acadians, Native Americans, and Creole people of the era lived and worked.

Along with its historic appeal, Lafayette is an ideal destination for anyone who loves spending time outdoors. Its location on the Mississippi Flyway and in the Atchafalaya Loop of America's Wetland Birding Trail makes it a popular spot for birdwatchers. One of the best sites in the area is [Lake Martin](#), home to the Cypress Island Nature Preserve, where more than 240 species have been spotted. Lake Martin is also home to a substantial nesting population of alligators, which welcome sightseers—from a distance, of course.



Beyond the wildlife watching, Lafayette is a great starting point for exploring swamps, rivers, and bayous by canoe, kayak, or on an airboat tour. For a real adventure, take on the [Vermilion Voyage](#), a three-day paddle down the Bayou Vermilion launching from the Acadiana Park Nature Station to Palmetto Island State Park.

While there's plenty to keep you busy in Lafayette, you'll eventually start to notice your cravings. Fortunately, you're in just about the best place to be hungry. *Southern Living Magazine* even named Lafayette the Tastiest Town of the South, and *Rand McNally/USA Today* called it the Best Food City. Fresh seafood right from the Gulf of Mexico, steaming hot bowls of gumbo and jambalaya, delicious crawfish, and even the many flavors of the Mediterranean are all on the menu. For the full experience, follow one of these [food tours](#) that serve up a tantalizing taste of local flavor.

When you want to experience another side of Lafayette's Cajun culture, visit the downtown area. Throughout the year, this part of town hosts more than 1,400 live performances at its more than 40 restaurants and bars. Come here on any night and you'll hear everything from country to zydeco. [Downtown Lafayette](#) also has some of its own attractions, including family-friendly museums, art galleries, and parks.

Looking to experience the best of Acadiana? Then head for Lafayette, The Heart of Cajun Country.