

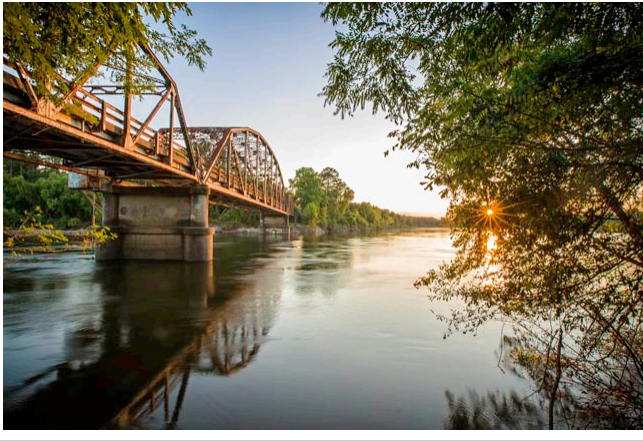


Vernon Parish
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Vernon Parish

It doesn't take long to see that pleasant surprises are tucked behind every corner in Vernon Parish. Rich in both history and mystery, the area was once part of "No Man's Land," an early 19th Century ungoverned buffer zone between America and New Spain that attracted pirates, outlaws and escaped slaves. This wild and rugged part of western Louisiana later became a hub for the state's timber industry thanks to its lush piney woods. And since 1940, it's been home



to [Fort Polk](#), one of the country's most important military installations and the site of the U.S. Army's Joint Readiness Training Center.



Visitors flock to Vernon Parish to soak up its many historic sites, including the [Fort Polk Museum](#) and the [Museum of West Louisiana](#). An outdoor lover's paradise, Vernon Parish is known for hiking, biking, camping, birding and fishing. As for food, there's no shortage of mouthwatering Cajun cooking throughout the area, whose winding country byways are dotted with "[gas station gourmet](#)" cuisine.

A great place to begin the journey is [Leesville](#), the cultural center and the historic hub of the Vernon Parish timber industry. Downtown Leesville's Historic District is the perfect blend of old and new, featuring well-preserved turn-of-the-century buildings now occupied by cheery shops and local restaurants. The Museum of West Louisiana, located in the former Kansas City Southern Railway Depot, takes visitors back to the area's beginnings as a logging community. After touring the museums, you might enjoy a bite to eat at a downtown cafe, browse through a local gallery and snap some pictures in front of the domed [Vernon Parish Courthouse](#), a stunning example of the Beaux-Arts architectural style.

Vernon Parish is also famous for its historic cemeteries. Hit the road and head for the town of Cravens to find one of its most famous, [Talbert-Pierson Cemetery](#). Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the family graveyard features 13 remaining graves covered by wooden grave houses, an unusual tradition in some parts of the southern United States, and a method of protecting graves before cemeteries were fenced. These resting places are sure to spark, or "spook", some interest.



Vernon Parish is a treasure trove of outdoor adventures, notably fishing, hiking, cycling and birding. Five well-known bodies of water, including the Sabine River, Toledo Bend Reservoir, Toro Bayou, Anacoco Lake and Vernon Lake, provide opportunities to catch many species of bass, crappie, catfish and other tasty fish. Scores of marinas and boat landings make it easy for anglers to do their thing. Louisiana's only national forest, the 604,000-acre [Kisatchie National Forest](#), is an excellent place to enjoy a day hike, an overnight camping trip, or an afternoon spent observing nature. [Blue Hole Recreation Complex](#) features picnic areas, canoeing,

and a loop trail that includes a shaded wildlife viewing platform. Little Cypress Recreation Complex, Wolf Rock Cave, and the Fullerton Recreation Site are other popular areas within the Kisatchie where visitors can hike, observe nature and enjoy different recreational activities.

Vernon Parish shows its joie de vivre in numerous events that draw visitors from all over the region. [MayFest](#), held every first weekend in May, is a gathering of artists and vendors of homemade items, as well as delicious eats, made from scratch. See live demonstrations, live bands and taste some palate-pleasing food. And in October, the [West Louisiana Forestry Festival & Fair](#) and Louisiana Soapbox Derby serve up everything from the rodeo, to logging challenges, to soapbox races. It's a slice of Americana that brings a smile to everyone's face, so pack your bags and head for simpler, soulful times in Vernon Parish.