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Natchitoches Area Convention & Visitors Bureau  
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## Things to Do in Natchitoches

### Go Back in Time and Experience Louisiana's Oldest Settlement

Explore Natchitoches' storied history as the **first permanent European settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory** at the [Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site](#). Located on the downtown waterfront, the site features an interpretative center as well as outdoor exhibits that show the area's past as a trading post settled in 1714 by the French. The attraction features numerous artifacts and replicas of buildings that point to Natchitoches' roots as a trading hub and military outpost. Meander along a shaded trail to see an

**exact replica of the original fort** that provided settlers protection, along with a chapel, mercantile, and cabins. Guides in period dress help bring more than 300 years of history to life.

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### Shop and Dine in Downtown Natchitoches

A popular gathering place for locals and guests alike, historic brick-lined downtown Natchitoches is a visitor's must. The area is situated on the sleepy Cane River Lake and includes a 33-block [National Historic Landmark District](#). Stop by the [Natchitoches Visitors Center](#) and join a **free guided tour of this beautifully preserved downtown**. Or, opt for a **cozy horse-drawn tour of the historic district**, as well as Steel Magnolia filming sites, with the [Cane River Carriage Company](#).

Creole and Art-Deco architecture line the streets, and include breathtaking historic houses, churches, and other buildings. Newcomers can't get enough of two-story [Kaffie-Frederick General Mercantile](#), **Louisiana's oldest general store founded in 1863** and still operational today. Peruse shelves lined with both trendy gifts and practical hardware. Head around the corner to [Lasyone's Meat Pie Kitchen](#) to **savor the mouthwatering flavor of Natchitoches' signature dish, the meat pie**.

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### Feed the Critters at a Real Alligator Park

With more than 250 American Alligators on its seven-acre site, [Gator Country](#) is **the largest alligator park**

**in Louisiana.** Celebrating this remarkable reptile, Gator Country features all sorts of wildlife experiences, including **boat tours, feeding shows, and hands-on exhibits.** Bring the kids and grandparents to this fun-filled attraction, which includes Cajun music, a petting zoo, bird sanctuary, reptile house, jungle area, tortoise exhibit, baby gator wading pool, gator feeding show, and much more.

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## Meander Along the Cane River National Heritage Trail

Natchitoches is the starting point of the [Cane River National Heritage Trail](#), a 71-mile byway that follows the route of the Cane River and ends at Cloutierville, **birthplace of American author Kate Chopin.** The peaceful road, dotted with pastoral farmland and live oaks, includes several points of interest.

The [Cane River Creole National Historical Park](#) is a **National Park Service site that holds the two most intact French Creole cotton plantations in the country,** Oakland and Magnolia. Further along the trail is [Melrose Plantation](#), where the **famous African American folk artist, Clementine Hunter** lived and produced her distinct primitive folk paintings. Join a **guided tour** to explore the site's nine historic buildings, which include the Big House, Yucca House, the Bindery, the Weaving Cabin, and the African House, where Hunter's breathtaking murals adorn the walls.

St. Augustine Catholic Church and Cemetery, part of [Louisiana's African American Heritage Trail](#), is also part of the Cane River Trail, a picture-perfect country road that celebrates Louisiana's diverse history.

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## See Where Steel Magnolias was Filmed

Fans of the **1989 bittersweet comedy** about six Southern women, *Steel Magnolias*, recognize its setting as Natchitoches, where screenwriter Robert Harling was once a student at Northwestern State University. Local [Steel Magnolia Tours](#) take visitors to the **sites where some of the movie's most memorable moments were filmed,** including the American Cemetery, location of Shelby's funeral, and **Beau Jardin**, a lush garden with numerous soothing water features on the banks of the Cane River Lake, and the site of the Easter egg hunt scene that closed the movie.

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## Rest in Cozy Elegance at a Local B&B

It's no surprise that **one of America's most charming towns** is chock-full of pretty places to spend the night. Choose from quaint inns and elegant [bed-and-breakfasts](#), including the **Victorian-inspired Queen Anne Bed and Breakfast**, and the [Andrew Morris House Bed and Breakfast](#), an **Antebellum planters cottage built in 1855.** Like many others, they're located in downtown Natchitoches and are conveniently located near historic sites and restaurants. Relax in well-appointed quarters, enjoy a full breakfast, and chat with locals about Natchitoches travel tips.

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## Hike the Piney Woods of the Kisatchie National Forest

Natchitoches is a short distance from the beautiful [Kisatchie National Forest](#), which features **more than 600,000 acres of protected recreational land**. Hit the trail for some leisurely hiking through piney woods. The national forest's many different activities include birding, swimming, boating, fishing, primitive camping, hiking, and mountain biking.

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## Enjoy Paddle Boarding and Kayaking on the Cane River

The centerpiece of downtown Natchitoches is Cane River Lake, an oxbow whose clear and placid water is perfect for a day spent on a **stand-up paddle board or in a kayak**. Head over to [Cane River Paddle & Pedal Sport](#), a riverfront outfitter, to rent recreational equipment. Experiencing Natchitoches from its **famed Cane River** is an experience you won't soon forget.

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## Get to Know Natchitoches' Fascinating History Through its Local Museums

Visitors can't get enough of the **two-museums-in-one experience** at the magnificent [Louisiana Sport Hall of Fame & the Northwest Louisiana History Museum](#) in downtown Natchitoches. The **award winning \$23 million museum complex**, noted for its innovative architecture, includes design features that reflect the area's topography. For example, the interior mimics the flowing Cane River Lake, while other design features depict the legacy of an agrarian economy.

Inside the complex, **visit the Louisiana Sport Hall of Fame** and find a hit parade of Louisiana's many sport heroes. Fans soak in the many personal and professional accomplishments of Bayou State greats like **Shaquille O'Neal, Archie Manning, Chanda Rubin, Pete Maravich, and others**.

Move through the complex to find the **Northwest Louisiana History Museum**, where the story of the region's cultural influences unfolds. Learn about the **lived experiences of Caddo Indians, French and Spanish settlers, free and enslaved Africans, and rural southern whites**, and how each group contributed to Northwest Louisiana's distinct identity. Admission price includes access to both museums.

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## Drop a Line in One of the Area's Many Famed Fishing Spots

Natchitoches Parish is a **well-known angler's paradise**, home to numerous fishing tournaments as well as relaxed recreational fishing for all ages. A favorite destination is [Sibley Lake](#), a **2,000-acre reservoir** on the west side of Natchitoches with a 38-mile shoreline and three public boat launches. **Cane River Lake, Black Lake and the Red River are other beloved fishing spots** that offer calm water, many public boat launches, and beautiful scenery. Natchitoches Parish is just the place to catch the big one.