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Louisiana Kitchen & Culture™

March / April 2013
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Stuffed Crawfish Bread

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you know what we mean pg 6



**Kosher, Creole Style:
A Louisiana Passover**
with Chef Alon Shaya
and author Mildred Covert

Intoxicological Focus:
Whiskey, Water of Life

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for **Easy Weeknight**
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Destination: Historic Natchitoches



By Jyl Benson

With pristine historic homes lining one bank and an equally pristine 18th-century downtown

shopping district on the other, the shimmer of morning light upon Cane River Lake forms a highly compelling backdrop for the Green Market that unfolds along the water's edge each Saturday at dawn, enticing passersby to descend the steep stairs to the water's edge, where vendors sell zesty handmade tamales from Zwolle, several varieties of jerky, baked goods, farm-fresh eggs, herbs, fruit, vegetables, honey, and cheese, vibrant, fragrant flowers, an array of homemade wines, jams, jellies, pickles, syrups, and other flavorful condiments, stained glass, jewelry, and craft-made cutting boards inlaid with both native and exotic woods.

There's usually some form of live entertainment, the occasional Zumba fitness or dance class, and frequent pet adoption fairs.

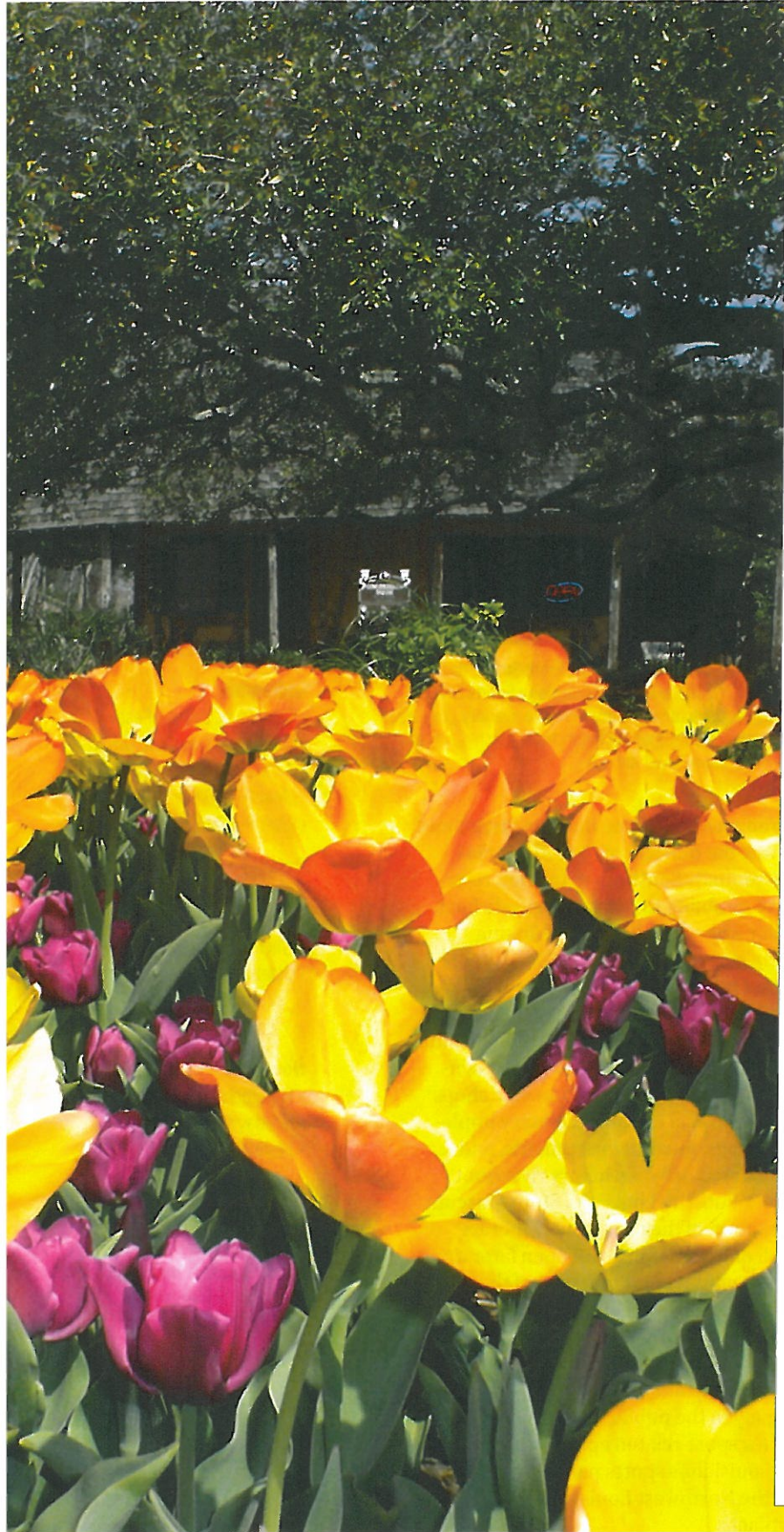
"This is a real community gathering place," said Iris Harper, a proud native of Natchitoches, "and many people start their weekends at the market. It's a real microcosm of life around here: Lots of creativity on display and friendly faces in an absolutely beautiful setting."

Natchitoches was established as a French settlement in 1714 by Louis Juchereau de St. Denis. The town takes

its name from the existing Native American village on the Red River, south of the current town's center. As the settlement was ceded to the Spanish and later the Americans, the town moved north to what is now the Front Street area. The ultimate shifting of the Red River left Natchitoches behind, cutting off its lucrative connection with the Mississippi River and sealing it off from 20th-century development. A 33-mile lake, the aforementioned Cane River Lake, was left in the river's previous location. The lake runs through the city's downtown historic district and outlying sprawling plantation country.

With its waterfront locale, abundant flora and fauna, and nearby graceful plantations, Natchitoches' beauty comes as no surprise—but its well-scrubbed appearance does. Old tends to look old and worn, however charming. Three hundred years old tends to look ever more so, despite its pedigree. But not Natchitoches. If only we could all age so flawlessly. The city retains much of its historic European-style architecture, the facades of its mostly two-story structures generously laced with wrought iron, stucco, and red brick. Front Street, the historic district's main thoroughfare, is still paved in its original, painstakingly restored, brick. In 2005, the National Trust named the town one of a "Dozen Distinctive Destinations" for historic preservation.





Spring arrives in
a riot of colorful
blooms

Cultural Events and Festivals

Natchitoches' calendar is well stocked with interesting things to do and see, with the spring and holiday seasons being particularly active.

A thriving downtown beautification project sets the city positively abloom in the fair months with hanging baskets and densely planted daffodils and tulips crowding the sloping riverbank. Natchitoches officially welcomes spring with Bloomin' on the Bricks each March. The spring garden festival features vendors and merchants selling and displaying items related to garden and lawn beautification, including plants, trees, patio furniture, and accessories. A speaker's series and demonstrations on gardening-related topics guarantee a healthy crowd and a companion art festival, Art Along the Bricks, brings the towns many artists and craftspeople out in droves.

In the colder months, Natchitoches' Holiday Festival of Lights sees 300,000 lights and 100 lighted holiday sculptures brightening the banks of Cane River Lake and downtown for six weeks. The town's year-round population of less than 20,000 swells by 30,000 visitors the weekend of the lighting (always the first weekend after Thanksgiving) and accompanying fireworks display. One hundred thousand people rush to Natchitoches for the Christmas Festival, held each year over the first weekend in December. By the time the lights go out on January 6, typically 500,000 people will have sought out the town's charms.



Calendar of Events

March

- Blooming on the Bricks Festival
- Ashland Plantation Spring Festival
- Sacred Places Tour

April

- Jazz/R&B Festival
- Rebel State Spring Festival
- American Cemetery Tour

May

- Cane River Music Festival

June

- Melrose Plantation Arts and Crafts Festival
- Natchez Plantation Heritage Festival (In nearby Natchez)

July

- Celebration on the Cane
- Natchitoches/NSU Folk Festival
- Fourth of July Fireworks on Cane River Lake

September

- Cane River Zydeco Festival
- Marthaville Good Ole Days (In nearby Marthaville)
- Meat Pie Festival & Triathlon
- River Run-Motorcycle Poker Run

October

- Annual Natchitoches Pilgrimage
- Smokin' on the Red
- Witch Way to Main Street
- Celebrity Chef—featuring native cuisine, local eateries, and Louisiana chefs

November

- Marathon Rowing Championship
- Holiday Open Houses
- Festival of Lights

December

- Fireworks Every Saturday Night
- Barge Parade
- Natchitoches Christmas Festival
- Holiday Tour of Homes
- "Fete Hiver"
- Christmas in the Park — Rebel State Historic Area
- New Year's Eve Fireworks on Cane River Lake

For more information: 800.259.1714
or experiencenatchitoches.com



Destination:

Historic Natchitoches

■ Slated to open later this year on historic Front Street, the ultra-contemporary 27,500-square-foot Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame will showcase loads of sports memorabilia including the 2007 Louisiana State University football national championship and the New Orleans Saints' Super Bowl XIV title.

But it would be erroneous to assume that the quaint and perky town that was the film site of *Steel Magnolias*, that most quintessentially Southern of movies, rests upon the laurels of its ability to transport guests back in time to a simpler way of life. Forward-thinking progress is keeping step with the past as Natchitoches prepares to greet its third century. With 64 small inns and bed and breakfast establishments, Natchitoches is recognized as the Bed & Breakfast Capital of Louisiana, but a full-service luxury hotel is also going up downtown. Blocks away, historic Fort Jean Baptiste sits just steps from chic shops and galleries selling elegant, sporty, and whimsical clothing, culinary implements, antique and contemporary furnishings, musical instruments, and art in all media. Just down Front Street, located between luxury riverfront condominiums and the fun, funky Pioneer Pub, the Louisiana State Museum system is nearing completion on construction of the ultra-contemporary 27,500-square-foot Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, which will open later this year. The current Hall of Fame collection includes color portraits of the 285 current inductees, loads of memorabilia, and the Grits and Mary Gresham Collection, showcasing hunting, fishing, and other outdoor sports. Items representative of major events in state sports history, such as the 2007 Louisiana State University football national championship and the New Orleans Saints' Super Bowl XIV title, will also be on display to the public.

In addition to serving as a repository for sport-related ephemera, the impressive building will also showcase Louisiana's sports paradise, a blend of sports history and culture, as well as the Northwest Louisiana Regional History Museum of regional art and artifacts.

What to See



NATCHITOCHES

“Visit www.louisianakitchenandculture.com/natchitoches for more information and links to associate sites.”



Melrose Plantation Arts & Crafts Festival April 13 & 14, 2013

Main House Tours & African House
(318) 581-8042 or www.aphnatchitoches.net

BLOOMIN ON THE BRICKS



DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT MARCH 23 2013

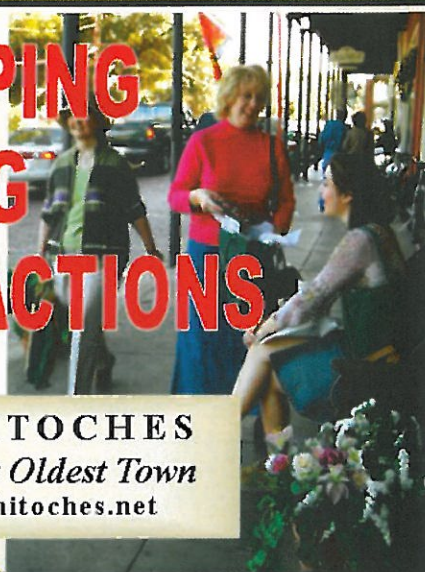


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What
to See

Cane River Creole National Historical Park

Located within the Cane River National Heritage Area, this U.S. National Historical Park protects 67 historic structures at two locations, Magnolia Plantation and Oakland Plantation, both on the Cane River. The park was established in 1994 to preserve examples of French and Creole architecture and interpret the multicultural history of the area. Visiting these places is fascinating, a real trip in time. The best part? It is absolutely free, your tax dollars at work!

Oakland Plantation

■ nps.gov/cari
4386 Highway 494, Bermuda,
318.356.5555

Oakland Plantation is the most complete French Creole plantation in the South, and it is perpetually 1960 here. After the National Park Service acquired the property, which had served as a working plantation from 1785 to 1960, in 1997, the decision was made to “date” the space it had acquired to the final year it served as a working plantation, which had been owned by the

marched on. A flow of cypress and pine flooring breaks suddenly into peeling yellow linoleum as one enters the kitchen to observe yellow Formica counters, avocado green appliances, and funky aluminum-framed windows. The effect is both fascinating and just plain weird.

A National Bicentennial Farm, only one of two west of the Mississippi River (both of which are in Natchitoches Parish), Oakland Plantation has 17 of its original outbuildings still remaining,



Prud’homme family throughout its history. To put it kindly, the Prud’hommes were extraordinary pack-rats and the progression of time spills out clearly before the visitors’ eyes. Lamps that once burned oil were frugally and unattractively converted for electrical use, and they keep time alongside Naugahyde settees, Victrolas, bubble-shaped early televisions, and centuries-old ancestral portraits. The family added on to the house haphazardly, tacking on rooms and enclosing porches to accommodate their brood and its needs as time

including two pigeonniers, an overseer’s house, a massive roofed log corn crib, carriage house, a mule barn that was originally a smokehouse, a carpenter’s shop, plantation store, and worker cabins. The plantation includes an interpretation of the history of free blacks and Creoles of color who lived and worked on the plantation for nearly 100 years after the American Civil War and Emancipation.

Magnolia Plantation Complex

■ nps.gov/cari
5549 Highway 119, Derry
318.356.8441

The 18-acre Magnolia Plantation Complex

includes a blacksmith shop, plantation store, gin barn, eight cabins, and former slave hospital that at various times housed the owners and overseer. The gin barn houses a wooden screw-type cotton press, the last such press remaining in its original site in the United States.

The main house is not open for tours.

Oakland Plantation looks much today as it has through its 228-year history. **OPPOSITE:** Strings of native peppers grown on the grounds are hung out to dry at quirky Oakland Plantation

Destination:

Historic Natchitoches



What to See

Melrose Plantation

■ melroseplantation.org
3533 Highway 119, Melrose,
318.379.0055

The history of Melrose is a story of a string of fascinating women and events, beginning with Marie Therese Coincoin, the matriarch of the Isle Brevelle Creole community, who was born in 1742 to the first generation of African slaves brought to Louisiana. Brilliant, resourceful, and hard-working, she eventually attained freedom and prosperity for herself and her 14 children, 10 of whom were fathered by Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a French merchant who eventually bought her freedom and gave her property on the Red River. Between 1794 and 1803, Coincoin and her sons received a number of land grants, and amassed holdings of land and slaves of their own, eventually becoming one of the wealthiest families of color in the nation. It was with these land grants that the Yucca and Africa houses, still on the property, were built. The Yucca House, miniscule by most standards, remained the largest structure on the plantation until 1833 when the main house, Melrose, was built.

Cammie Garrett Henry, another remarkable woman,



TOP: The Africa House at Melrose Plantation. **BOTTOM:** Guests are welcome to tour the modest cabin where artist Clementine Hunter lived and worked.

transformed Melrose into a haven for artists and writers when she and her husband, John Hampton, acquired the property in 1898. Many noted writers honed their craft while partaking of Ms. Henry's generosity and sponsorship, among them Rachel Field, Roark Bradford, Francois Mignon, and Lyle Saxon. It was at Melrose that Saxon wrote *Children of Strangers*, which portrays life in the Cane River area.

This same plantation also spawned the artistic achievements of Clementine Hunter, a plantation field hand and cook, who became one of the South's foremost primitive artists. Some of her paintings, which incorporate the people, life, and scenes of Cane River, remain on view in the Africa House. Visitors are invited to tour her modest cabin.

Fort St. Jean Baptiste

■ crt.state.la.us/parks/iftstjean.aspx
155 Rue Jefferson, Natchitoches,
318.357.3101 or 888.677.7853



In 1714, about a quarter of a century after LaSalle first traveled down the Mississippi River and claimed all of the lands it drained for France, a band of Natchitoches Indians guided a group of French soldiers led by French Canadian Louis Antoine Juchereau de St. Denis up the Red River in search of trade outlets. When they reached the Red River, St. Dennis had two huts constructed within the Natchitoches' village and left a small detachment there to guard the trade encampment, effectively creating the first permanent European settlement in what would become the Louisiana Purchase.

In 1716, Sieur Charles Claude Dutisn was sent to Natchitoches with a small company of colonial troops to build and garrison an outpost that would prevent Spanish forces in Texas from advancing across the border of French Louisiane. They named the outpost Fort St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches for a French patron saint. The fort continued to serve as a military outpost and commercial trade center until 1762, when France's defeat by England in the French and Indian War forced her to cede the Louisiana colony to Spain.

The fort's original location is unknown, though it is believed to have stood where the Old American Cemetery is today. The fort that visitors tour today is a reconstruction based on historical records. Though it appears to be original, nothing inside the walls of the reconstructed fort is a genuine artifact from the 18th century—except, perhaps, the slowly weathering mud that is mixed with moss and grasses to seal the walls in a method the French called *bousillage*.

Historical enactments at the fort include examples of defense, trade, and storage tactics and cooking techniques.

TOP: Appearances can be deceiving.
BOTTOM: Knowledgeable guides lead the way at Fort St. Jean Baptiste.

Where to Shop 

Destination:

Historic Natchitoches

**Where
To
Shop**

Cane River Kitchenware

732 Front St., Natchitoches
318.238.3600

The aromas wafting from within sound a siren's call every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., when Cane River Kitchenware becomes a visiting hub for locals who turn out for the ever-rotating array of samples of gumbos, dips, cheese balls, smothered meats, and baked goods made by the ultra-friendly, helpful staff with mixes and sauces stocked in the store. This bit of lagniappe seems to work: Patrons grab up the quality shortcut products along with their Wusthof knives, Le Creuset cookware, and culinary gadgets as they head for the cash register.



(L to R) Danie and Kym Habig, a daughter and mother duo have the recipe for success (and everything else) at Cane River Kitchenware. **OPPOSITE:** Kaffe-Frederick stocks a treasure-trove of interesting and useful things

Kaffie-Frederick Hardware Store

■ explore.natchitoches.com/kaffie-frederick-hardware-store
758 Front St., Natchitoches

Established in 1863 as a general mercantile, this is the oldest continuously operating business in Natchitoches, serving as a supplier of basic goods needed to run a farm, a household, or a trade. Studebaker wagons, Moline and John Deere products, school books, groceries, clothing, and even caskets were available. Constructed in 1892, the property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is noted as one of the best-preserved properties in the Natchitoches Historic District. Observe the ornamental pressed-metal front once popular in the late 19th century; Kaffie-Frederick is one of only three buildings in the town that retains this adornment.



The interior of the store is relatively unchanged, with only one update having been made in the 1920s. Original cash registers are still used daily, as is a freight elevator that was installed in the 1890s. Large skylight openings are still present, reminders of the need for natural light prior to electrical service being introduced. A large collection of items sold yesteryear are displayed on the walls and shelves. In addition to still serving as a general store, Kaffie-Frederick has expanded by re-opening its upper level to house a Christmas Department from October to January.

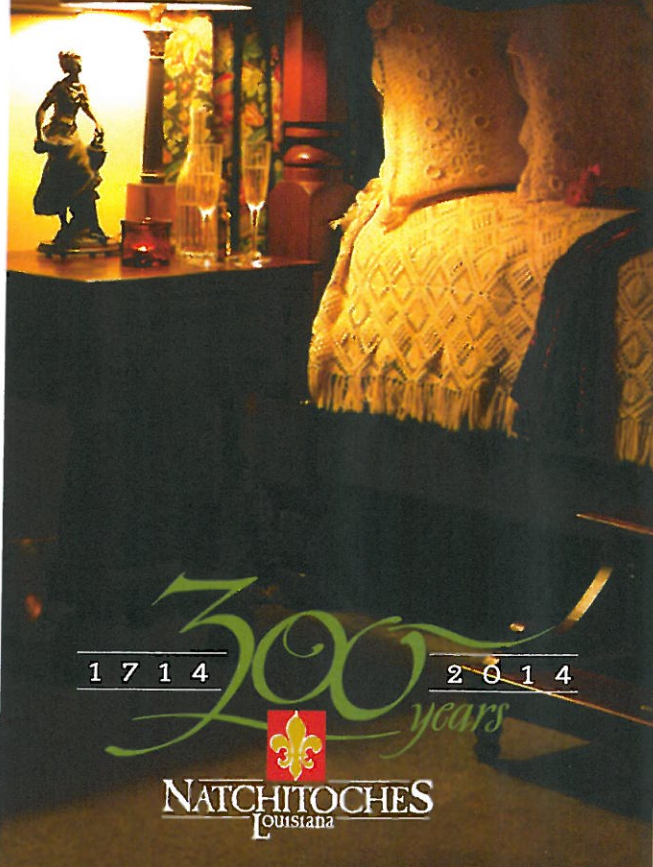
Where to Eat >

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Natchitoches Convention and Visitors Bureau
780 Front Street, Suite 100, Natchitoches, LA 71457
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Destination:

Historic Natchitoches

Where
To Eat



Merci Beaucoup

■ mercibeaucouprestaurant.com
127 Church St., 318.352.6634

Everyone in Natchitoches seems to love Merci Beaucoup, a homey restaurant run by the town's former football coach. The most popular dish here is the Cajun Potato, a large baked spud topped with crawfish étouffée and jumbo fried shrimp. The restaurant also offers its own spin on jambalaya. Cane River Jambalaya combines black-eyed peas, Cajun stewed tomatoes, and ground beef. The made-from-scratch bread pudding, apple dumplings, and Louisiana Sin Bar—a layered confection of dark chocolate and minted white chocolate, elicit raves.



Pioneer Pub & Restaurant

812 Washington St., Natchitoches,
318.352.4884

A fun and funky pub/sports bar with a huge beer selection and a menu that's a mishmash of American classics—specialty burgers, wraps, and pizza—with more regional fare—steamed shrimp, blackened or fried alligator, grilled redfish, and fried frog legs. The Wookie is a not-to-be-missed belt-buster: House-cut fries topped with brisket debris and melted cheese. Yum.

Sweet Cane Inn

Where
To
Stay

■ sweetcaneinn.com
926 Washington St.,
318.352.5630

An elegant, century-old Victorian home built for Congressman Phanor Breazeale in the late 1800s, Sweet Cane Inn's stately presence boasts of 12-foot ceilings, 11 fireplaces, and a wall of stained-glass windows at the top of the stairs, which curve and lead to seven beautifully spacious rooms and suites. Innkeeper and personal Chef Chris Levy prepares delicious full breakfasts with specialties like Cheesecake Pancakes topped with fresh strawberry sauce, French Toast with maple syrup and fresh fruit, Prosciutto and Fresh Mozzarella Frittata, and Upside-Down Pecan Apple Tart. Snacks and wine are served by the pool and in the main parlor in the afternoons.

Where
To Eat

Lasyone's

■ lasyones.com

622 Second St., Natchitoches,
318.352.3353.

Natchitoches' unique relationship with the meat pie is central to the area's culture, and some residents maintain the tradition of laboring for days to produce heaps of them during the holidays in a practice that dates back to the Middle Ages via the Spanish immigrants who inhabited the area in the 1700s and adapted the game-based pies the native Natchitoches Indians were eating to more closely resemble the empanadas of their homeland. And though the days when street vendors roamed Natchitoches chanting "Hotta meat pies! Get your hotta meat pies right here!" are long gone, the meat pie remains the city's most definitive delicacy.

For 25 years a butcher, James Lasyone, used to grind the meat for the Natchitoches ladies who made the pies at home. In the 1950s, he started working on his own recipe. In 1967, he established Lasyone's Meat Pie Kitchen. Since then, the pies have become world-famous standard-bearers with everyone from Charles Kuralt to Daryl Hannah showing up over the years to snarf down the tasty, filling half-moons, which are particularly fine when served with dirty rice and a side of brown gravy. The crawfish pies, corn fritters, smothered vegetables, chicken and dumplings, and bucket-sized bowls of gumbo are equally good.

