



travel log

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Play food game

Test your taste

There is a game that travelers play when they are waiting for a bus or a plane, or killing time in a bar someplace. I call it "Ask somebody who has been there," and the prize is worth its weight in restaurant recommendations.

I played this game with a group of travel writers in the airport in New Orleans last week, but you don't need any special travel credentials. All you need is a group of people who love to eat.

YOU NEED A pencil and paper. Sit down in a small group and ask your nearest neighbor, in a voice loud enough to be heard throughout the group, "Where did you eat in New Orleans?" Voices will soon be raised all around you. You'll know you've won when you hear the same restaurants over and over again, or when somebody says, "I never heard of this place before, it's kind of inexpensive, but the food is terrific and..."

According to Bob Conwell of Corpus Christi, Texas, Gallitore's is the best French restaurant in the French Quarter. It's not the most expensive, but it's the best. Antoine's is good, but it can be expensive. Arnaud's is good, moderately priced. And, of course, there's Brennan's. At any of these places, two people can eat with wine and drinks for under \$60.

That's the point where you learn what the word expensive means to other people. Conwell also recommended La Ruth's, along with a recommendation that you reserve two weeks in advance.

Tyler Hardeman of Arkansas said that breakfast at the Maison Dupuy was the best he'd had in 10 years. It's at Toulouse and Burgundy in the Quarter. "We had thick country sausages, poached eggs, perfect grits and magnificent biscuits for about \$4."

At this point, Conwell jumped in again to mention a place called Dooky Chase in Baton Rouge. "It's a second-generation black creole place with the best gumbo in Louisiana. You can get a strip steak for \$5 but the gumbo costs \$4."

This brought a chorus of recommendations for the Gumbo Shop in the French Quarter, with particular emphasis on the Shrimp Remoulade. The average price for lunch here is about \$6.

OF COURSE my own favorites were added to the shouting match. Corinne Dunbar's is an old-fashioned Victorian house where you must climb to the veranda and ring the bell for admission. A maid leads you into a Victorian parlor for your before-dinner drink.

When you take your place among the few small tables in the dining room, you are served a seven-course fixed menu meal for \$15. The main course changes every week.

Exchanging favorite restaurants is a popular pastime among travelers, and you are always adding to it. This week, I met a friend who opened the conversation with: "I have a terrific New Orleans restaurant to tell you about."

"Chez Helen is five minutes drive or a half-hour walk from Jackson Square in the French Quarter. It's very down home, prices are \$3 to \$10 for a full meal. The chef is one of two sent by the city to South America to demonstrate New Orleans' food. The other chef was from Antoine's."

This is absolutely the best way to collect restaurant recommendations. My problem is that I always make a list of them and leave it at home.

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Swamp crawls with excitement

History ripe in 'gator country

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

MORGAN CITY, La. —I never thought of swamps this way, with mothers calling their children from walkways over the water and men hauling swampwater fish into their boats.

I certainly never thought of a swamp as a tourist attraction. I was brought up on movies about convicts struggling to freedom through alligator-filled swamps. But a swamp as an interesting and beautiful place to visit? Never.

Not, at least, until I visited the Swamp Garden here, in the gulf coast city where they build those big floating oil rigs.

Morgan City has been known as the shrimp capital of the world and as the oil rig city on the east bank of the Atchafalaya River, but few travelers know that the people of Morgan City preserved five acres of swamp next door to the Municipal Auditorium a museum of the past.

This was all swamp country when the first settlers arrived from Nova Scotia in the 18th century. Expelled by the English, the Acadians (the French name for Nova Scotians) survived by living and fishing in the swamp. Many became part of the swamp logging industry, where a logger was known as a swamper.

There are still swamps on either side of Highway 90 as you drive toward Morgan City on your way from New Orleans to Lafayette, passing bumper stickers that read "Please pray for me, I drive Highway 90."

THIS IS THE land of the Atchafalaya Basin and the Bayou Lafourche, where you can visit old plantations, eat Cajun food and possibly even attend a Fais-do-do, a Saturday night dance, in a setting that is seldom overrun by tourists.

Morgan City is an industrial center in this otherwise rural area, but it still values its swampland and the heritage that goes with it.

The Swamp Garden is only a small patch of swamp in the middle of what is now oil rig country, but it is a convincing journey into the past, when swamp lumberjacks cleared these 600-year-old cypress trees from the land.

A high path, like a tiny causeway,



These Swamp Garden gators are for real... and there are plenty of them. (Photo by Iris Sanderson Jones)

winds around the swamp water, where one of the country's oldest cypress trees shares space with younger trees.

The swamp sounds come from loudspeakers, but the crash of squirrels is real enough and the alligators that yawn against the wet bank are real, too.

The other figures in the swamp garden are mannequins, placed in what were once authentic swamp scenes. Here a fisherman spears a frog, a priest comes to visit in his flat-ended boat and an Indian leans over a fire.

Wooden swamp houses have been built and furnished, with wooden walkways over the water. At one end of the garden, swamp animals are caged near the alligator pools.

Many of America's tourist attractions are slick, too slick. This one is very down home, sometimes downright corny, especially where Tarzan is concerned.

Tarzan? Didn't he swing from tree to tree in Africa? Yes, but the first Tarzan movie was filmed in the Louisiana swamp in 1917. So the folks of Morgan City added a Tarzan mannequin to the swamp garden and love to startle visitors with a recorded Tarzan yell.

The Swamp Garden of Morgan City is only a brief stop, but there are other attractions here. The Municipal Auditorium next door is an unusually large civic center and theater for a town of

this size. Check it out for current events.

The Eternal Flame of Morgan City, high up on an oil rig, commemorates

Bluegrass fest set

The third annual Bluegrass and Traditional Music Festival will be Saturday and Sunday, June 14-15, on the downtown campus of the University of Michigan-Flint at Stevens and First Streets in Flint.

Headlining the free 17 hours of music will be Mac Wiseman, a bluegrass musician who has been performing since 1929.

Throughout the years he has stressed solo vocal performances and some of his most requested songs are "Love Letters in the Sand," "Little Blossom," "I've Got Not Use for the Women," and "I Wonder How the Old Folks at Home Are."

Returning to the festival this year

Morgan City is an industrial center in this otherwise rural area, but it still values its swampland, and the heritage that goes with it.

the first offshore oil production here in 1947. A boat named the Spirit of Morgan City commemorates the day when this was the shrimp capital of the world.

LOCAL PEOPLE like to assure visitors that the shrimp were not destroyed by the oil rigs. The fishing industry was washed out when the basin was flooded. Rigs provide natural gathering, feeding and breeding grounds for fish.

Both of these industries are celebrated in the annual Shrimp and Petroleum Festival, the oldest chartered festival in Louisiana. Folks who gather there picnic in the Lake Paloude area and around Brownell Memorial Carillon Tower.

All of these sights are marked by cypress trees weeping into the swamp water in beautiful settings that are quite surprising to northerners who undervalue swamps.

At this time of year, we are likely to think of a swamp as something that forms in our back yard and breeds mosquitoes. Louisiana swamper have another definition.

are The Baileys and Friends of the Flint area, Sweet Corn String Band of Kalamazoo, Joel Mabius of East Lansing, High Canyon Ramblers of Lansing, and Slocum Creek of Ann Arbor.

Three new groups are Ohio-based Bob White and the Candy Mountain Express, (they will also lack Wiseman) Helen Hoskins and Home Grown Grass of Lansing and Mustard's Retreat of Detroit.

The festival is being organized by the Flint Bluegrass Music, LTD, a volunteer group which has run the previous two festivals. It will be free and run from 1-10 p.m. June 14 and from 1-7:30 p.m. June 15.

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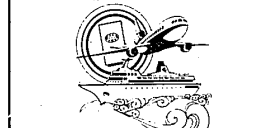
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