

Travel



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O&E Thursday, April 16, 1987

Bed and breakfast along Louisiana's River Road

First of a series.

Baton Rouge, La.: You may or may not find the River Road listed on a Louisiana map, but that's the way it is known in story and song nationwide and in the everyday language of the people who live along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Natchez.

The River Road is, of course, a road that follows along the banks of the river, but if you get logical about it you might expect it to be a continuous highway, always there. Instead, with the shifts of time and river, the road often disappears or has an entirely different name.

A river road is merely a passage-way, but the River Road is a romantic idea from another age. It is the road that led from plantation to plantation during the grand 19th-century days of red brick mansions and white columns.

It is "Gone With The Wind" country, except that the guides who play Scarlett O'Hara wear jogging shoes under their hooped skirts.

THE MYTH AND legend of antebellum life have saturated our movie screens, but the reality is that most of the plantations were sagging slightly when recent history-lovers restored them, one by one, and put them on public view. That kind of restoration is an expensive business, so in many cases you can do more than tour; you can stay overnight.

There are bed-and-breakfast accommodations at Tezucio, Oak Alley, Madewood and Nottoway plantations between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, at Mount Hope in Baton Rouge, and at Cottage, Asphodel, Catalpa, the Myrtles and Millbank in Feliciana Parish north of Baton Rouge. Technically speaking, Millbank was not a plantation, but it's a "great house" so you won't care.

From any of these great houses you can visit the plantations that were the overnight accommodations, places like Rosewood, Houmas House, Live Oaks, etc. This remarkable collection of plantations, and the lush southern life they represent, come out of a very short period of time in American history.

There were settlements, and certainly planters, in Louisiana long before the turn of the 19th century, but the plantations along the Mississippi River were the result of some specific historic events.

A Creole planter called Etienne de Bore learned how to granulate sugar. Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, which removed seeds from cotton. In 1803, Napoleon ceded the Louisiana Territory to the United States. Most of all, Fulton invented the engine that put steamboats on the Mississippi River.

History and science thus provided the means to farm the rich bottom land near the river and to get the crops out, while bringing luxurious furniture and building material in for the glamorous plantations that soon appeared along the Mississippi. It was only about 50 years between the first grand Greek Revival building, with its white pillars, and the Civil War that effectively destroyed that rich southern lifestyle.

Here are some of the plantations where you can stay overnight:

TEZUCIO PLANTATION — I began my tour by staying overnight at a very small plantation with a two-story white wood house and none of the "Gone With The Wind" look of the Greek Revival mansions. Like most of the plantations south of Baton Rouge, this was a sugar plantation in 1855.

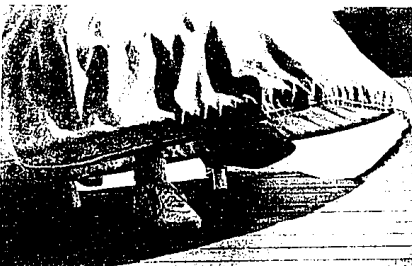
Today, you can stay in an apart-



one-of-a-kind traveler

Iris Jones

contributing travel editor



Hoop skirts and jogging shoes. That's the 1980s' fashion for plantation guides in Louisiana.

ment at the top of the house, or in one of the many slave cottages that have been brought in from neighboring plantations in the Convent, La., area. The rooms have been redone with paneled walls and provide a kitchen area.

Rates range from \$50 a night per couple for a bed-sitting room to \$85 a night per couple for the honeymoon cottage, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tezucio is a great place for a family with kids, with room to run around, but it has none of the grand-mansion green-grass and live-oak look of the plantation you've seen in the movies; it is instead a collection of small cottages clustered near the main house. Contact: Tezucio Plantation, 3138 Hwy 44, Darrow, La. 70725 or phone (504) 562-3929. Or just stop for dinner at the Pilothouse.

MADEWOOD PLANTATION — A large white pillared house on Bayou LaFourche (which leads off the Mississippi), has much of that movie look. It was built in 1848 for Col. Thomas Pugh, whose family is buried in the small cemetery behind the 21-room house.

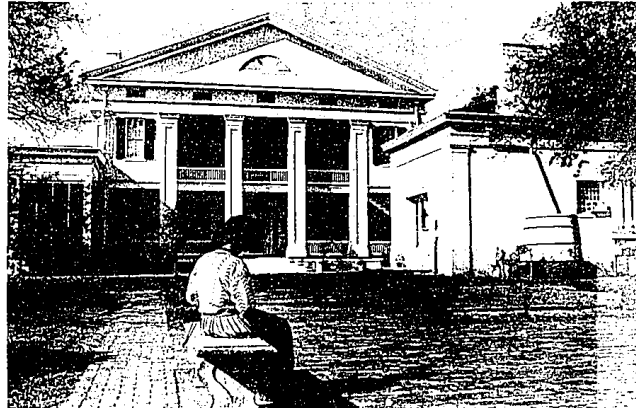
A polished black mahogany banister curves from the hard pine floor near the entrance to the four bedrooms open to overnight guests upstairs. The movies "Sister, Sister" and "A Woman Called Moses" were partly filmed here, and the guides will regale you with stories about them.

"And then there's the scene where an alligator eats the guide..." The Harold Marshall family have spent \$70,000 on Madewood since

they bought the house and 20 acres for a song in 1984, and they've done a good job of restoration and furnishings. If you want to sweep up that staircase to your room, contact the business office at 420 Julia St. New Orleans, La., telephone (504) 524-1988 or call the plantation itself in Napoleonville at (504) 369-7151.

Rates are \$150, including breakfast and dinner, in the main house, \$85, breakfast and dinner extra, in the cottages.

OAK ALLEY PLANTATION — Is everything you ever imagined about a southern plantation house and its grounds. You can walk from the house to the Mississippi River down a tunnel formed by live oaks that were planted 100 years before the mansion was built in 1839. The pillared mansion sits on sweeps of green grass and trees, with flowers blooming against every photographic view.



photos by IRIS SANDERSON JONES

Tara it's not. But Madewood Plantation on Bayou LaFourche near Baton Rouge has been featured in two movies. An overnight stay in

the main house, including breakfast and dinner, is \$150.

The overnight accommodations are in cottages down another alley of oaks at the back of the house. There are two late 19th-century cottages that represent a style of southern architecture known as the "shotgun double": two private dwellings open onto a common porch, sort of a southern turn-of-the-century duplex.

You rent one side, which includes two bedrooms and bath, from \$60 to \$75 a night for two people, \$10 for each additional person. One room in the suite includes a fireplace. The rate includes a full breakfast in the restaurant across the pathway. Add \$5 per person to tour the mansion.

Contact Oak Alley Plantation, Rte. 2, Box 10, Vacherie, La. 70090. NOTTOWAY PLANTATION, built by John Hampden Randolph of Virginia, is said to be the largest

plantation home in the south. This sugar empire included more than 7,000 acres when the mansion was built in 1859. The house, with 22 columns supporting encircling galleries, contains 64 rooms and covers 53,000 square feet. It was lovingly restored by Arlin Dease and opened to the public in 1981.

I didn't see this plantation but your wakeup call is supposed to

come with sweet potato biscuits. Creole coffee and fruit juice, all of which is followed later by a planter's breakfast. There are also candlelit dinners during the Christmas season and other special events. Guest rooms are in the house.

Contact P.O. Box 160, White Castle, La. 70780 or telephone (504) 545-2730. Rates are \$115 to \$175.

Next week: Feliciana Parish.

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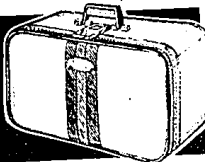
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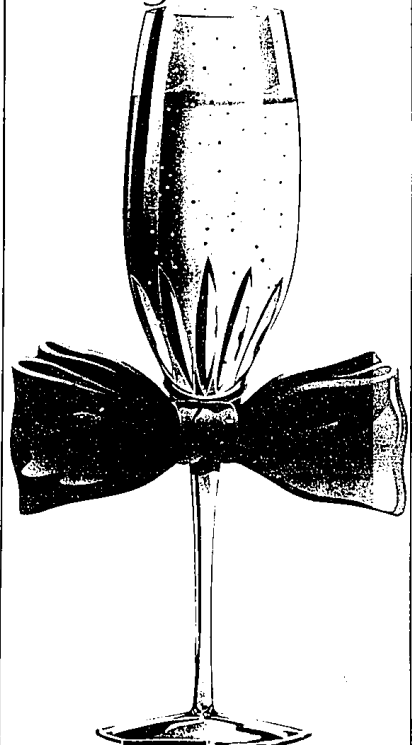
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