

A JOURNEY DOWN THE BAYOU

FROM PORT BARRE TO LAKE FAUSSE: KAYAKING BAYOU TECHE



Five days of constant paddling in the Louisiana sun can be rewarding, full of surprises, and at moments a little maddening — especially for a first-time long-distance kayaker. That was me. In May of 2016, I embarked on a journey down the Bayou Teche with my friend Jesse Guidry for part birthday celebration and part documentation of the waterway. Jesse, the birthday boy, is an avid paddler and has more than a few bucket list trips on his list, so I was happy to help him cross off this Bayou Teche journey. I, on the other hand, was limited to just a few floats looking for alligators in Lake Martin in my paddling history. Paddling the waterways of southwest Louisiana became my favorite hobby after this trip and inspired me to buy my first kayak.

On a beautiful blue-skied morning, we loaded our crafts (heavy with supplies for any situation plus my camera gear) into

the water at the Port Barre boat launch and set our course for Arnaudville, where we would spend our first night in a newly restored and updated 1890s Cajun/Creole cottage on the banks of the Teche. Beyond living in a piece of floating plastic in the middle of the bayou for days at a time, we weren't exactly roughing it. We ate steak, drank good whiskey, found an unexpected boiled seafood joint, devoured the best fried catfish in Breaux Bridge, and never had to sleep outdoors. Every night we were able to find suitable accommodations to rest our weary bodies.

The wildlife, ever-changing landscape, and views that can only be experienced from the bayou made the five-to-10-hour days of paddling visually engaging (and helped take my mind off the need to be constantly paddling to make our daily destination before nightfall). As my skin browned in the mid-day sun, I could feel my arms, chest and

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY DENNY CULBERT shoulders strengthen from the rhythmic strokes that pulled my kayak forward in the still waters of the bayou. At times it felt as if we were in the middle of the Amazon jungle while at other stretches of our

journey beautiful homes and backyard pig farms graced the horizon. The few people we did see along the river were happy to see the Teche being utilized and gave a friendly wave as we glided by. Countless pairs of cardinals (they mate for life) crossed our path, along with snakes, nutria rats, great blue herons, egrets and an alligator or two. We were even treated to a display of aquatic acrobatics by a group of guys with a fast boat and wakeboard.

The final day of the trip and possibly the most rewarding, partially because it was the end and partially because of the magical giant cypress trees we paddled between on the edge of Lake Fausse Pointe, wasn't part of our original plan. We left the Bayou Teche on a whim at Charenton to travel north into the Atchafalaya Basin Spillway, past Grand Avoille Cove and across the lake into Lake Fausse Pointe State Park. Right at the end, we caught a perfectly-timed spring shower to cool us after a full day of exploration. Thanks to those five days on the bayou I have a much greater appreciation for what the waterways of Acadiana have to offer. As you get out and explore this summer, hopefully you'll find me in the shade of the cypress forest floating in my favorite piece of plastic.

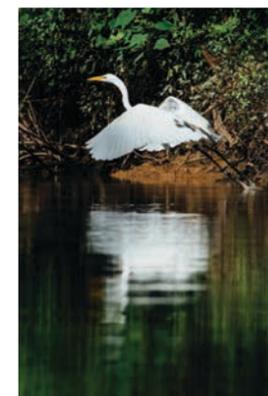
WHAT TO BRING

I completely overpacked on my first paddle trip. This list is my essential, in no particular order:

At least a half gallon of water for drinking per day, especially in the spring and summer (this can be replenished daily) // Sunscreen // Whiskey, one good bottle ought to do it // Protein-rich snacks like canned fish, smoked or cured meats, and nut butters for between meals // One good pocket knife that can cut both meat and rope // Coffee grounds and stovetop coffee pot // One can of your favorite Cajun seasoning mix and a small bottle of hot sauce (you never know when you'll encounter bland food) // Water shoes or sandals // One good pair of shoes for walking around towns and going out to dinner // One respectable set of clothes if you plan on dining out at night // One thin T-shirt for each day you'll be on the water // Three pairs of comfortable shorts // Camera plus extra batteries and memory cards // Binoculars for nature watching // Dry bags and/or watertight cases in which to pack everything // Flashlight or headlamp // At least one likable paddling partner (unless you're looking for solitude, which can easily be found on the Teche)



PORT BARRE TO ARNAUDVILLE The Bayou Teche is narrow with lush forests on each bank for large stretches in this section of St. Landry Parish. It felt as if we were floating through the jungle with the tree limbs reaching out over the water to create a shaded tunnel heading south. We saw egrets feeding on snakes and frogs along the banks as we became acclimated to life on the water. The end of our first day was rewarded with a sno-ball at Wyble's before retiring to the recently relocated and renovated Cajun Creole Cabin with a back porch overlooking the Teche.





ARNAUVILLE TO ST. MARTINVILLE The longest stretch of the trip was full of glimpses into backyard farms, a Little Blue Heron sighting, and a show of aquatic sportsmanship. We took a short break in downtown Breaux Bridge to refuel with crispy deep-fried seafood at Le Café. Cruising into our port for the night at dusk, we docked near the bridge in town and hauled our gear a few blocks to an old church that had been converted to a home.





WHERE TO STAY

*Hotels, Cabins and
Bed and Breakfasts*

Arnaudville
Cajun Creole Cabin
[airbnb.com/
rooms/11857463](https://airbnb.com/rooms/11857463)

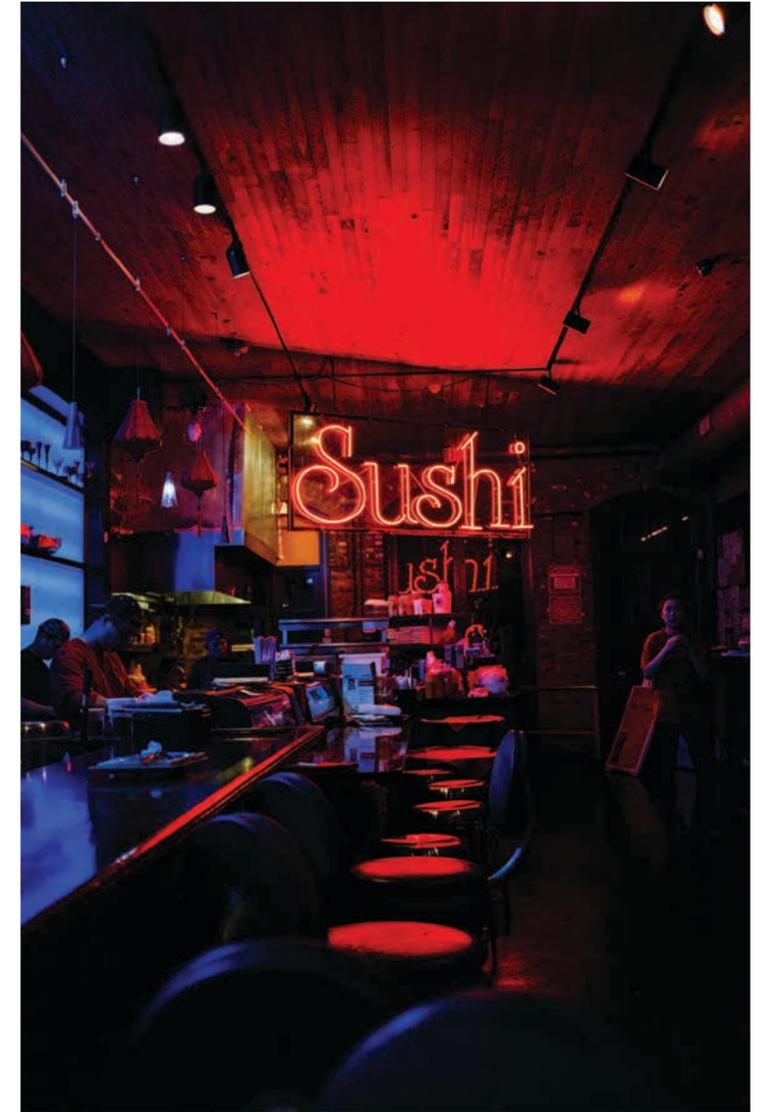
Breaux Bridge
Bayou Cabins
bayoucabin.com
or
Bayou Teche Bed
and Breakfast
[bayouteche-
bedandbreakfast.com](https://bayouteche-bedandbreakfast.com)

St. Martinville
A church built in 1904
that was converted to
a home
[airbnb.com/
rooms/14252930](https://airbnb.com/rooms/14252930)
or
The Old Castillo Bed
and Breakfast
oldcastillo.com

New Iberia
Bayou Chateau
[airbnb.com/
rooms/9203908](https://airbnb.com/rooms/9203908)

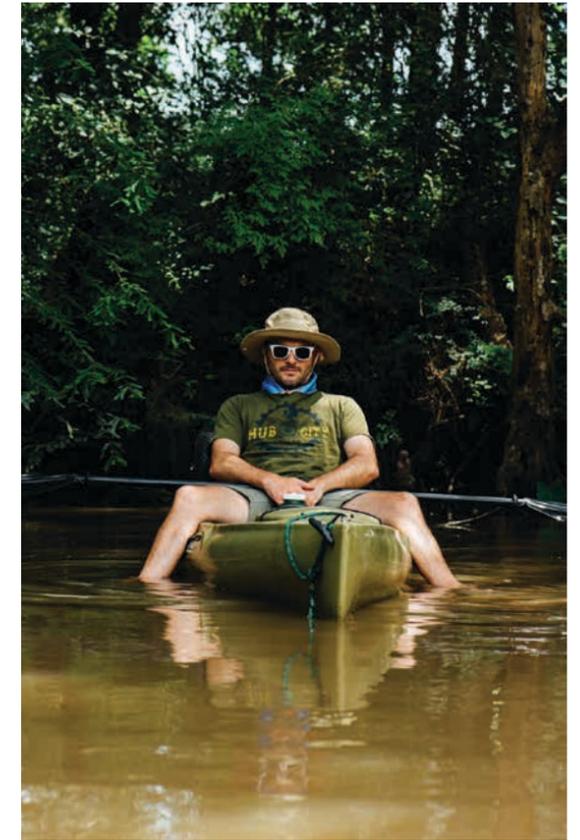
Charenton
Cypress Bayou Casino
(This stop requires
extra planning
because the casino is
not on the bayou and
is potentially
good end point
for the trip.)
cypressbayou.com

**Lake Fausse Pointe
State Park**
Campground
or Cabins
[crt.state.la.us/
louisiana-state-parks/
parks/lake-fausse-
pointe-state-park](https://crt.state.la.us/louisiana-state-parks/parks/lake-fausse-pointe-state-park)

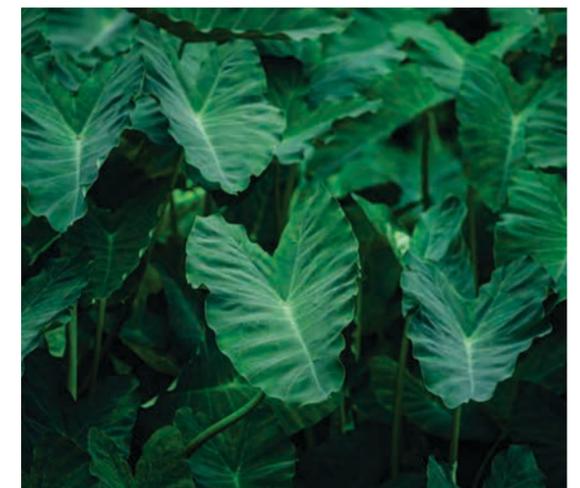
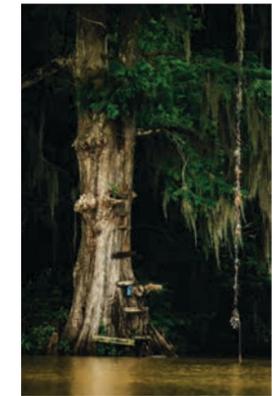


ST. MARTINVILLE TO NEW IBERIA A portage around the oldest operating lock and dam in the Mississippi Delta is one of the challenges facing a paddler on this segment of the bayou trail. If you give the St. Martin Parish Government a call 24 hours in advance you can be locked through (or assisted in passing), rather than portaging around the dam. (337-394-2200)





NEW IBERIA TO CHARENTON The water widens in this stretch of the bayou with both industry and neighborhoods increasing along the banks lined with elephant ear and cattail. On our lunch stop in Jeanerette we discovered the boiled crabs and shrimp at T-Bob's Seafood. We also picked up a fried pork chop at The Coffee House, which serves up plate lunches rather than cold brew. Jeanerette is home to LeJeune's Bakery that has been baking French bread and ginger cakes since 1884.



WHERE TO EAT

Meat, Fowl, Fish and Shellfish

Port Barre

Boudin and the famous Jalapeño Sausage and Cheese Bread at Bourque's Supermarket

Leonville

Champagne's Marche for fried chicken

Arnaudville

Little Big Cup // Wyble's Fireworks and SnoBalls // Russell's Food Center

Breaux Bridge

Le Café for fried catfish and shrimp

St. Martinville

The St. John Restaurant

New Iberia

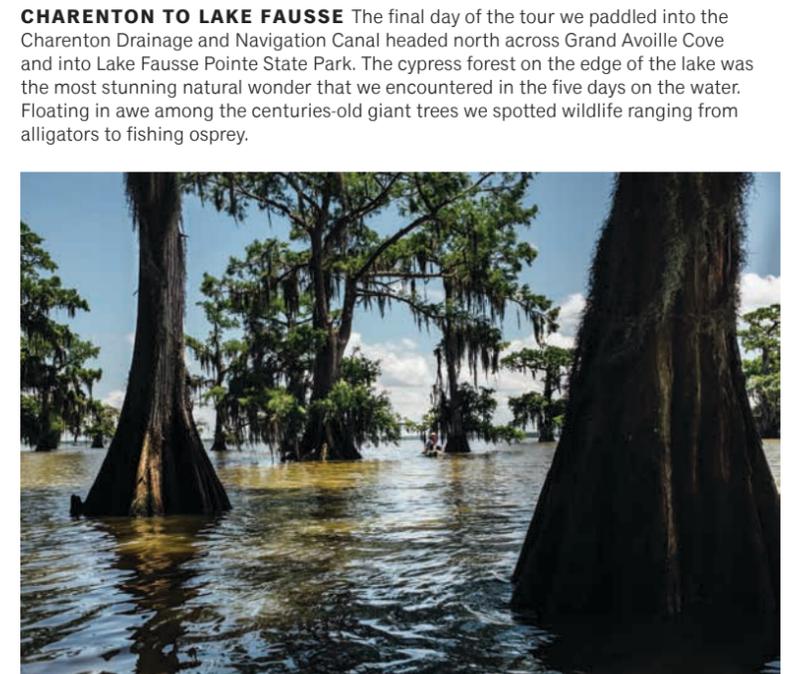
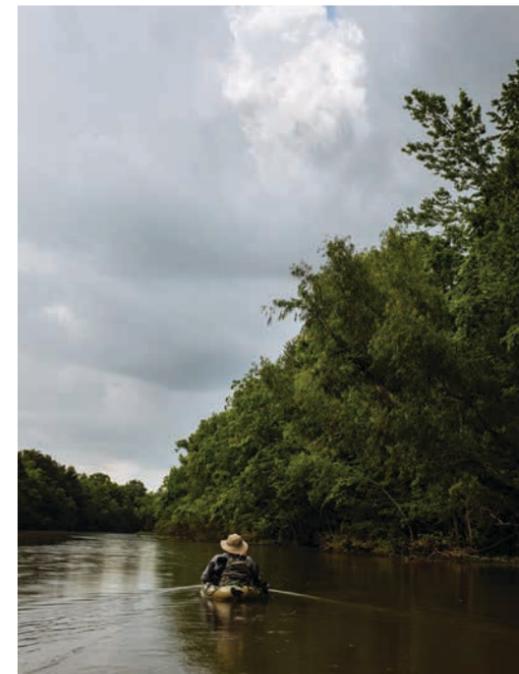
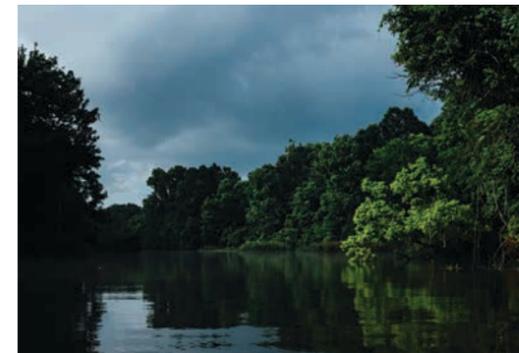
Fromage for Grilled Cheese // Bojangles Sushi and Oysters for raw seafood and a martini

Jeanerette

T-Bob's for boiled crabs // The Coffee Shop (not actually a coffee shop) for a fried pork chop plate lunch

Charenton

Mr. Lester's Steakhouse in Cypress Bayou Casino (This stop requires extra planning because the casino is not on the bayou)



CHARENTON TO LAKE FAUSSE The final day of the tour we paddled into the Charenton Drainage and Navigation Canal headed north across Grand Avoille Cove and into Lake Fausse Pointe State Park. The cypress forest on the edge of the lake was the most stunning natural wonder that we encountered in the five days on the water. Floating in awe among the centuries-old giant trees we spotted wildlife ranging from alligators to fishing osprey.