

LOUISIANA

# SPIRITS ON THE BAYOU

LOCAL LIBATIONS ARE AS EXCITING

AS LOUISIANA CUISINE

BY MONA L. HAYDEN





*From left: Shrimp plate and in-house brewed spirits at Lula Restaurant-Distillery, New Orleans; Ballroom at The Cook Hotel, Baton Rouge*



## RESOURCES

- Jefferson Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission
- Louisiana Travel
- New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau
- Visit Baton Rouge



**S**weet tea, of course, is the beverage of choice in the South, but some occasions call for something a bit stronger, smoother and more robust—an adult beverage. It's no secret that Louisiana plates up some of the most delectable food on the planet. Now it's also home to a host of award-winning breweries and distilleries that stand alone or pair well with the flavorful fare.

The sultry Louisiana climate is conducive to growing sugarcane and hops, making it ideal for producing locally sourced, creative libations. From Baton Rouge and New Orleans to Lafayette and up to Shreveport, a bevy of producers are opening shop and sharing their vision of the perfect concoction.

When the day's formal sessions are over and social time is nigh, here's where attendees can tilt a glass or bend an elbow in salute to the Bayou State's finest liquid offerings.

### BATON ROUGE

Fort Louisiana's state capital offers much more than just a political arena, colorful as that may be. Home to Louisiana State University (LSU) and Tiger football, this college town has a jovial reputation for its trendy restaurants and thrilling entertainment.

Well on its way to being recognized as a beer city, Baton Rouge has several prized breweries, with more scheduled to open this year. Late summer will bring Rally Cap Brewing Company, with the cooler seasons introducing Cypress Coast's tap room and Le Chien Brewing Company craft beers.

Touring and attending events at Baton Rouge breweries and distilleries allows visitors to enjoy the

culture and way of life of the capital city, notes Paul Arrigo, president and CEO for **Visit Baton Rouge**. "Having these businesses also gives us the opportunity to promote a unique and inviting meeting space to take events to the next level. It's a great way for attendees to truly tap into Baton Rouge," he says.

At **Tin Roof Brewing Company**, beer is crafted using pure well water, and premium American and European malts. Along with five regular brews—such as Juke Joint IPA and Voodoo Bengal Pale Ale—and a seasonal selection, visitors can enjoy a free tour, live music, trivia and even yoga. The Tap Room can host meetings or gatherings for 100 to 200 guests,

and the Private Room can accommodate 40 with space for another 50 on the patio. A brewery buyout is also an option.

Another local brewery, Southern Craft Brewing Company, delivers just what you'd expect—craft beers with Deep South cred, such as Pompous Pelican (Louisiana state bird) and Swamp Sting, made with local honey and Carolina malt.

Ready for something with more kick? Using sugar crushed from local cane at its Alma Plantation and Sugar Mill just across the river, **Cane Land Distilling Company** boasts complete control of the production and distilling process, making it one of a handful of estate-bottled producers of spirits and rum in the United States.

The downtown facility offers tours and tastings. Visitors can enjoy Cane Land's custom rums, vodka and whisky at a 30-foot-long bar or at more than 200 locations throughout Louisiana. Private event space is available for up to 70 seated guests in the Barrel Aging Room and 150 in a courtyard. The tasting room or entire facility can be reserved for more than 300 guests to convene or partake.

Thomas N. Wright, CAE, director of membership and practice sections for Louisiana Association for Justice, says, "The atmosphere was incredibly fun! I was so pleased to see how they converted this unused historic building into a cool venue for tours and events."

Another such venue is Baton Rouge Distilling, which became the city's first operating distillery since Prohibition when it introduced Strawberry Brandy in 2016. This craft micro-distillery plans to expand offerings this year with fruit brandies, distilled blue agave and bourbon. Tours and a tasting room await, and additional expansion is in the works.

Large gatherings are easily accommodated at the recently renamed convention center, **Raising Cane's River Center**. The complex boasts more than 200,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including a 10,000-seat arena, theater, grand ballroom and exhibition hall. **Baton Rouge River Center** is another versatile event facility, with 108,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space and 24,000 sq. ft. for conferences.

Hotels with large meeting spaces include **Baton Rouge Marriott**, with 29,979 sq. ft. for gatherings and 299 guest rooms, and the AAA Four Diamond **Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center**, which offers 20,000 sq. ft. and 291 guest rooms (it's been inducted into Historic Hotels of America). Across from Mall of Louisiana is **Renaissance Baton Rouge Hotel**, featuring nearly 13,000 sq. ft. of meeting space—including a chic, 7,488-square-foot ballroom—and 256 guest rooms.

**The Watermark Baton Rouge, Autograph Collection**, situated in a historic downtown bank building, opened in 2016 with 144 guest rooms and 2,295 sq. ft. of meeting space. **Baton Rouge Marriott's** \$23 million renovation updated the property inside and out, with 299 luxury guest rooms and almost 30,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. **The Cook Hotel** on LSU's campus underwent a \$3.2 million renovation of



From top: Ballroom at Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center; guest room at Baton Rouge Marriott



its 129 guest rooms. Finally, a downtown Courtyard by Marriott with 932 sq. ft. of meeting space is on track for a late-summer opening.

Between meetings, Red Stick Adventures Bus Tours is a great way to see city attractions, take a haunted adventure or a swamp tour.

"It was the best site visit I have ever had. From gracious accommodations, first-rate venues, and wonderful hospitality, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and love all things Baton Rouge!" says Cindy Cowart, co-owner of Cowart Sports Events, Inc.

## LAFAYETTE

In the heart of Cajun Country is a city known for authentic Cajun and Creole fare, zydeco music and joie de vivre (joy of living). A Louisiana gem, Lafayette will welcome you with open arms and treat you like family.

Cajuns are not just phenomenal cooks: They're great brewers, as well. That's the sole focus at Lafayette's first brewery, **Cajun Brewing**, which opened

its doors in 2015 with three crowd-pleasers—Cajun WIT, Ragin' Red Ale and Brown Ale. Located just blocks from the Cajundome, it offers a tasting room with 15 rotating taps, as well as monthly events with local musicians, food and art. For private events, the Front Door Tap Room, plus its overflow area, can accommodate 75 to 100 guests, with the brewery as an additional venue option.

A short drive from Lafayette, Arnaudville is home to Bayou Teche Brewing, a farmhouse brewery created from an old railroad car, and dedicated to crafting beers that complement the cuisine and lifestyle of Cajuns and Creoles. Amid countryside vistas along the banks of Bayou Teche, its tap room can host up to 20 private guests in the lounge section, while the covered patio and beer garden are well-suited for up to 100 visitors. The Turnip, a private room, offers space for 60, or the entire brewery can be reserved to host up to 100 guests. Adding to the ambiance is a new wood-fired pizza kitchen. All rental options include a friendly bartender.

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From top: Ballroom at Hyatt Regency New Orleans; Sheraton New Orleans

Parish Brewing Company, producers of more high-quality brews in Broussard, is renowned statewide for its Canebrake brew. Parish Brewing is the second-largest brewery in the state, thanks to a new facility built in 2012 that dramatically increased production. Beer connoisseurs especially appreciate Ghost in the Machine and other IPAs bottled there. Free public tours are available with advance reservation on Saturdays.

Louisiana's second distillery since Prohibition is Lafayette's Rank Wildcat Spirits, producing small-batch white rum made from local sugarcane juice. Tours can be arranged.

Two-story **Cajundome & Convention Center** provides 37,300 sq. ft. of exhibit space, with 20,000 sq. ft. for meetings; it can host 2,000 for seated banquets. The adjoining Cajundome has 18,000 seats.

**DoubleTree Hilton Lafayette** overlooks Vermillion River, and offers 22,000 sq. ft. of event space for up to 1,200 guests and 327 guest rooms. **Wyndham Garden Lafayette** has 14,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, with a 6,000-square-foot ballroom and 290 guest rooms, plus free airport and local shuttle service.

## NEW ORLEANS

"New Orleans is the birthplace of the modern cocktail, a hub for creativity and has become home to many award-winning breweries and distilleries. With the growing popularity of craft beer and spirits, New Orleans producers are flourishing," says Cara Banasch, senior vice president of business development and strategy at **New Orleans Convention Bureau**. "Visiting these local creators gives attendees a unique, hyper-local opportunity to enjoy products they wouldn't find at home, while sharing experiences and stories with local makers."

In the French Quarter, **Crescent City Brewery** is a two-story micro-brewery with live jazz nightly and monthly local art exhibits. The Brewery is also a premier city restaurant that specializes in Louisiana fare such as shucked oysters and seasonal seafood medley.

The quaint courtyard can handle up to 40 seated, the ground floor alcove accommodates 45 and a designated area of the dining room seats up to 110 guests. The entire second floor is available for private groups of 140—and up to 275 guests when the balcony is included. The restaurant can be reserved for a buyout for as many as 300 guests inside and 600 with use of the balcony.

Near the historic streetcar line of St. Charles Avenue, **Lula Restaurant-Distillery** is a sophisticated yet rustic micro-distillery that can host 25 guests in a small area and 125 in larger space. Guests can also dine at this Southern eatery while sampling house-distilled spirits.

**NOLA Distilling Company** is an independent, small-batch distillery with large windows for viewing the production process. Meeting and private-event space include a conference room for 12 to 15 and a tasting room that can host up to 75. For an authentic experience, the production floor is available for 200 guests.

A sister brewery, **NOLA Brewing**, is on Tchoupitoulas Street, a famous street next to the Mississippi River that's confusing to pronounce (CHOP-i-TOO-les). Its original tap room can seat 45 private guests, while the new tap room on the second floor with a balcony can entertain 150. Another 100 guests can enjoy convening in the Barrel Room.

With a mission to re-establish New Orleans as the beer capital of the South, **Urban South Brewery** has successfully incorporated European beer-making traditions with American styles. Its massive facility, with brewing equipment and a spacious tap room, is set up with picnic tables and games for a relaxed atmosphere. Buyout of the brewery is available for private events accommodating up to 200 guests.

For a cozy outdoor oasis for entertaining 25 or more, The Courtyard Brewery specializes in IPAs and saisons, a sturdy ale. Or, for a wide-ranging taste of the Crescent City's burgeoning brewing and distillery scene, catch the NOLA Brew Bus or the New Orleans Brews Cruise to hop around town, with stops at local breweries, craft beer bars and distilleries.

For meetings, planners will appreciate the recently revitalized **Ernest N. Morial Convention Center**, with 3.1 million sq. ft. of meeting space, including a 60,300-square-foot Great Hall Ballroom and 4,000-seat auditorium. Alternate convention venues include **Mardi Gras World**, which features a 33,300-square-foot ballroom and a replicated antebellum mansion with an additional 17,900 sq. ft., and **National World War II Museum**, which can accommodate 1,000 guests in The Boeing Center and has several other meeting spaces.

**Hyatt Regency New Orleans**, adjacent to Mercedes-Benz Superdome, adds 200,000 sq. ft. of versatile space with two 25,000-square-foot ballrooms, 1,193 oversized guest rooms and heated rooftop pool. Next to the Outlet Collection at Riverwalk is **Hilton New Orleans Riverside**, which offers 130,000 sq. ft. of prized meeting space, including a 26,894-square-foot ballroom and 1,622 spacious guest rooms. With panoramic views of the Mississippi River, **Sheraton New Orleans** offers 105,000 sq. ft. of convention and exhibit space and 1,110 guest rooms.

Just blocks from the French Quarter and Tulane Medical Center is brand-new **Jung Hotel and Residences**, with 21,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, including a 12,000-square-foot ballroom and 15 additional meeting spaces. It has 207 spacious guest rooms.

Recently opened **NOPSI Hotel New Orleans** is a

## L'ESPRIT DE LA LOUISIANE

Less than an hour west of Lafayette, along I-10, is Lacassine, home of the largest privately owned rum distillery in the United States.

Louisiana Spirits opened in 2013 and has been using its signature "sugarhouse" recipe—a blend of all-natural, unrefined and locally grown sugarcane and molasses—to produce award-winning Bayou Rum ever since.

The rich, moist farmland of southern Louisiana is well-suited for growing cane, a valuable cash crop since the mid-1700s and an essential ingredient in superior rum. Each batch is handcrafted, copper-pot distilled and bottled by hand. The prized rum comes in several varieties—traditional Bayou Silver Rum, Bayou Spiced Rum, Bayou Satsuma Rum (made with juice from locally grown satsuma oranges) and Bayou Select, a rum for bourbon drinkers.

Louisiana Spirits was awarded Best Visitor Center by the 2017 Drinks International Distillery Challenge and has a \$6 million expansion underway. Next to the distillery, a new event center is under construction that will accommodate 300 guests for meetings and special occasions. The expansion will also include a barrel library. Meanwhile, tours showcasing the entire distilling process are available.

As this premium distiller puts it, "Louisianans know that great cocktails are at the heart of any get-together with friends. Whether it's firing up the crawfish pot to getting the grill going for a tailgate party, great friends and good times are a bayou tradition."

### LEMON/ROSEMARY RUM COOLER

(Recipe by George Graham, AcadianaTable.com)

- 8 whole lemons, preferably Meyer lemons
- 8 sprigs of rosemary
- 8 lemon slices, seeds removed
- ½ cup granulated sugar or stevia
- kosher salt
- 6 ounces Bayou Silver Rum

In a 2-quart pitcher or 64-ounce Mason jar, squeeze juice from lemons, removing any seeds. Add four rosemary sprigs and four slices of lemon. Add sugar, fill pitcher with water and stir. Let steep for two hours or overnight.

Rub rim of four tall glasses with a lemon slice. Dip each glass rim into a plate of kosher salt until coated. Fill glasses with ice, add one jigger (1.5 ounces) of rum and fill with the steeped lemonade. Finish by adding a slice of lemon and a sprig of rosemary for garnish.



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From left: Lobby at NOPSI Hotel; Horseshoe Bossier City Hotel & Casino



reworked 1920s-era structure with 14,000 sq. ft. of elegant meeting space, a 4,000-square-foot ballroom and 217 spacious guest rooms. This spring, the former 13-story University New Orleans Tower reopens as ultra-chic Springhill Suites and TownePlace Suites by Marriott. A new boutique hotel with 71 guest rooms in the former St. Peter and Paul Church on Burgundy Street is scheduled to open in the third quarter.

“New Orleans is known for its warm hospitality and wide array of activities, and it lives up to its reputation! Our attendees come year after year for the International WorkBoat Show and for everything this historic city has to offer,” says Denielle Christensen, event director at Diversified Communications in Portland, Oregon. “After-show evening activities are a breeze, with the wide variety of venues, bars and restaurants that are available to work with. We love how the city treats our customers and couldn’t imagine a better location.”

## SHREVEPORT

There’s excitement brewing in northwest Louisiana, as well.

“One of the best things about hosting meetings in our area is that no matter how diverse a group, everyone is sure to find something to fall in love with in Shreveport-Bossier. Between the amazing casinos, unique festivals, eclectic music and arts scene and the city’s rich history, it’s no surprise that Shreveport-Bossier has seen growth in the meeting industry over the past few years,” says Erica Telsee, group tour sales manager for **Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau**. “Many visitors come initially for the affordable prices, but they come back for the Southern hospitality.”

**Great Raft Brewing** is a craft brewery as passionate about its interactive beer culture as its creative beers. Private event space includes the tasting room and brewery floor for up to 300 visitors, while a private event room can accommodate 40 to 75 guests. Somewhere between brews such as Born in a Barn and Grace and Grit, nearly everyone can find a favorite. Maybe it’s the golden sour mainstay of the Belgian program—You, Me and Everyone We Know.

Across the Red River in a historic fire station is **Flying Heart Brewing**, Bossier City’s first craft brewery. Firehouse Blonde and Milk Maid Stout are among the flagship beers. Beer lovers can tap into brews in seven different styles and seasonal offerings while enjoying karaoke, food trucks and special events. With a 1,500-square-foot tasting room, up to 80 guests are welcome for private events.

For meetings and conferences, **Shreveport Convention Center** offers 350,000 sq. ft. of event space, while **Sam’s Town Hotel & Casino** on the riverfront has a 13,200-square-foot ballroom with outdoor space for receptions, and 514 lavish guest rooms. Also along the Red River is the 26-story **Horseshoe Bossier City Hotel & Casino**, with 15,000 sq. ft. of function space, including the 11,522-square-foot Riverdome, a sophisticated space with 36-foot ceilings and 604 recently renovated guest rooms.

The intoxicating combination of unrivaled hospitality, festive days and sultry evenings in Louisiana make for an exciting meeting venue any time of the year. Cheers! 

**Mona L. Hayden** is an independent writer and an award-winning photographer. She publishes Louisiana Road Trips magazine.

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## BRILLIANT PLACES

### HYATT CENTRIC FRENCH QUARTER NEW ORLEANS



Collect some Mardi Gras beads at Hyatt Centric French Quarter New Orleans, where your group will find more than 10,660 sq. ft. of meeting space in a centralized area on the first floor. The 254-room historic hotel, adjacent to the city's Central Business District, boasts numerous eateries, whether you want seafood, grab and go items, or cocktails. Attendees can access Hard Rock Cafe through the lobby to dine among music memorabilia.

[frenchquarter.centric.hyatt.com](http://frenchquarter.centric.hyatt.com)



### NEW ORLEANS ERNEST N. MORIAL CONVENTION CENTER



Looking for a city-wide meeting spot in The Big Easy? Look no further than the freshly renovated New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, which is just steps away from the music, dining and Southern charm of the French Quarter. The convention center has 1.1 million sq. ft. of meeting space, making it the sixth-largest in the nation.

[mccno.com](http://mccno.com)



### JUNG HOTEL



This luxury property is located in the heart of the city's burgeoning Biomedical District. It offers 171 spacious guest rooms and 36 residential-style executive accommodations, thoughtfully appointed with upscale amenities. Guests enjoy complimentary Wi-Fi and dry-cleaning services, a rooftop pool and on-site valet parking.

[junghotel.com](http://junghotel.com)



### ROYAL SONESTA NEW ORLEANS



Get jazzy inside Royal Sonesta New Orleans' newly renovated 5,000-square-foot grand ballroom. The property provides 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 20 function rooms and 483 guest rooms. Your attendees will be in for a tasty treat there, because Royal Sonesta's philosophy is "Food is Art." Guests can enjoy Cajun and Creole cuisine, oysters and cocktails, and listen to jazz music nightly in the playhouse.

[sonestat.com](http://sonestat.com)

