

SUCCESS STORY

NATCHITOCHEES, LOUISIANA

Natchitoches, Louisiana, located off the beaten path in West Central Louisiana, is widely recognized as a charming community with a notable history. First settled by Native American Indians, French and Spanish traders, Natchitoches was formally established in 1714 and is the original French colony in Louisiana and the oldest settlement in the Louisiana Purchase.

Investing in its cultural and heritage resources, Natchitoches has maintained its European flavor through its architecture, history, and lifestyle and developed a strong sense of place that is home to a distinctive blend of cultures, including French, Adasaño Spanish, African, Caddo Indian, Creole and American.

The Natchitoches Convention and Visitors Bureau brings together 11 rural communities to tell their stories and promote a shared pride of place. By leveraging their cultural and heritage assets, Natchitoches has generated tourism and driven economic growth in often overlooked communities.

The cornerstone of Natchitoches' effort to promote its heritage tourism are two National Park Service sites, the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and the Cane River National Heritage Area (CRNHA), which work collaboratively to preserve and showcase a unique culture – the Creoles – and the nearly three hundred year old relationship with the waterway that has profoundly shaped their homeland and their culture.

Through a broad array of cultural conservation and heritage tourism initiatives, Cane River National

Historical Park and CRNHA preserves the tangible and intangible cultural assets and promotes the people, places, and stories of the Cane River region. Among the programs and community partnerships contributing to the interpretation, education and awareness of the Cane River culture are:

- Annual Cane River Music Festival
- Walking Tours of the Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District with the Natchitoches Historic District Development Commission and the Natchitoches Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Annual NSU-Natchitoches Folklife Festival with the Northwestern

State University and Louisiana Folklife Center

- Annual Children's Tour of Historic Natchitoches organized in conjunction with the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches
 - Cane River Plantation Ride with Bike Natchitoches
 - Natchitoches Meat Pie Festival
 - Natchitoches Jazz R&B Festival and Natchitoches Zydeco Festival
 - Natchitoches Christmas Festival of Lights, for over 91 years
- Natchitoches has welcomed visitors to Louisiana's premier holiday event, a six week long holiday season that attracts thousands of visitors each year and recognized by Southeast Tourism as the "2018 Top 20 Festival of the Year."

Natchitoches' exceptional strategies to preserve and promote its cultural and heritage resources and a strong sense of community has paid dividends in increased tourism and national stature as illustrated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation naming the community as one of its Dozen Distinctive Destinations and recognizing it with a Great America Main Street Award®



IMPACT STATEMENT

Demonstrating the compelling draw of Natchitoches's cultural and heritage resources are the number of visitors to the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and the dollars spent in the communities outside the park. According to the National Park Service Visitor Spending Effects Report, in 2017, 30,100 visitors spent an estimated \$1.7 million in the 11 Natchitoches communities that surround the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Those tourist expenditures supported 24 jobs with a payroll of \$684,000.

But economic contributions don't tell the whole story. Partnerships are an essential component of Natchitoches' cultural and heritage tourism program, which is why its impact is measured by both economic statistics and community partnership numbers. While a core group of 44 partners drives Natchitoches heritage tourism program, 225 partnerships with individuals, community organizations, local, state, and federal entities contribute to the success of the initiative.