

Golf, Dining & Gaming in Lake Charles- Louisiana's Playground

I found a new destination for those of you who like to play all day and all night. Lake Charles-Louisiana's Playground has beautifully appointed casinos and great golf courses to enjoy whether it is a buddies', couples or family trip. There are two luxurious casino hotels next to each other, The Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino and L'Auberge du Lac Resort just a short distance from Lake Charles Airport. My host was the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention and Visitors Bureau, which gave me a full buffet of things to do and see while visiting their friendly and lovely region. Lake Charles is the fastest growing city in the USA. One thing Louisiana has always been noted for is its extraordinary flavors in its dining offerings and Lake Charles in Calcasieu Parish came through with exceptional gourmet dinners.



LOUISIANA'S PLAYGROUND

I stayed at the L'Auberge for a week and enjoyed beautiful accommodations, great gaming, golf, fine dining, and some unique local tastings. On the first night, I was lavished with the savory Cajon & Creole samplings from Chef Lyle Broussard at Jack Daniels Bar & Grill dining with Kyle Edmiston, the



President/CEO of the CVB. L'Auberge Hotel & Casino has five eateries that are sure to satisfy any palate. Visit LLakeCharles.com

After a hearty breakfast at Favorite's Southern Kitchen in the Hotel, I had the opportunity to play Gray Plantation with Director of Golf Jonathan Jester. The parkland-style course has its challenges along with some beautiful scenery and warm southern hospitality. My advice is short grass equals better scoring. If you get a chance, ask PGA Professional Jester for a lesson in their complete Golf Academy. You won't be disappointed.

After our round, we had a delightful lunch at The Grill in the Gray Plantation clubhouse. Visit GrayPlantation.com for more information.

For dinner, my hosts Will and Kathryn from the CVB took me to 121 Artisan Bistro at 121 Michael DeBakey Drive in Lake Charles. When you are old like me you appreciate Dr. DeBakey who was instrumental in artificial heart transplants and many other surgical procedures that are common today but were ground-breaking in the 50s & 60s. Lake Charles should be proud to have him as one of their favorite sons. Back to dinner which was just superb. Chef & Owner Ben Herrera creates tasty southern Louisiana inspired dishes with a touch of his Italian heritage seasoning every culinary conception. We enjoyed a sampling of the many unique starters including Lamb Lollipops and Flash Fried Oysters along with some great wine. We took advantage of the seafood specials of the evening to complete our dining experience.

The next morning I was off to The National Golf Club of Louisiana in Westlake, northeast of Lake Charles. The 7,000 yard Dave Bennett 2009 design sits on a 600-acre development wandering through towering stands of Louisiana pines, providing an idyllic setting for a challenging day on the links. With 80 strategically placed bunkers and 14 water features that come into play, the golf course's rolling terrain and mounded fairways provide an interesting assortment of holes.



In May 2019, the city of Westlake broke ground on a new clubhouse to open in 2020. To go play visit NationalGCLA.com.

During my week I had the opportunity to visit two businesses producing local libations. The Bayou Rum Distillery in Lacassine is the largest privately-owned distillery in the USA, producing rum from locally grown fresh Louisiana sugarcane. The Bayou Rum signature recipe uses 100% molasses produced by the oldest family owned and operated sugar mill in the USA. With easy access off I-10, the new expanded facility houses a retail store with tours, luncheon area and tasting bar where I sampled many

of the award-winning rum concoctions available with Jeff Murphy, Head Distiller. Check it out at BayouRum.com.

My next stop was at Crying Eagle Brewery, named for the rough translation of Calcasieu, the Parish where the brewery is located, an Atakapa Indian Chief and the river that flows through the area. The Brewery crafts a myriad of beers that have very distinctive flavor profiles and serves them up in their Taproom which is housed in the same building along with a Bistro serving sandwiches and short order plates to enhance your samplings of their craft brews. Go to CryingEagle.com to learn more.

Once again my dinner was at one of Lake Charles's outstanding restaurants, Calla at Walnut Grove, a new business district with the unassuming restaurant on the 2nd floor. With a full staff of knowledgeable personnel, Mixologist Jason LaBove and Chef Ryan Schwartz dishing out phenomenal treats like blue crab beignets, seared pork belly and bone marrow with onion jam and pairing them with specialty drinks and wines to complement the dining experience, Calla, which means beautiful in Greek, has become the quiet understated choice of the connoisseurs of cuisine in Southwest Louisiana. Another unforgettable meal.

I played the Country Club at the Golden Nugget the next morning. The Todd Eckenrode designed golf course was the best of the four I played this week, stretching out to over 7,000 yards with a 73.4/130 rating/slope. The exceptionally maintained course, with a great diversity of holes, manicured greens, a splash of water mixed in here and there and natural setting, will be the perfect venue when the Korn Ferry Tour visits for the premier Lake Charles Championship March 23-29, 2020. The clubhouse is a welcoming haven for golfers and guests with a well-stocked pro shop, some lively music, and the 'piece de resistance,' The Chart House Restaurant, where I dined on a feast of flavors that evening. Visit GoldenNugget.com to learn more.



The last round of golf I played the Tom Fazio designed Contraband Bayou Golf Club at L'Auberge, just a short walk from the hotel. The course weaves its way around the bayou waters where Jean Lafitte, the infamous Gulf pirate, was supposed to have buried his booty, thus the name Contraband. The course is a perfect blend of receptive fairways, open greens and hidden treasures like the par 3, 8th that crosses water to a smallish green, and the finishing hole that plays facing the beautiful L'Auberge du Lac Resort. The front nine is a hefty 3777 while the back plays right at 3300 yards.



Put Lake Charles on your radar for playing all day and all night with some downhome hospitality in Louisiana's Playground. Go to VisitLakeCharles.org to learn more about this great destination.