

Lafayette Attractions - Convention Sneak Peak

~by Jaime Cloud

Every year our Conventions seem to get better and better, and there is no reason to expect that the upcoming 2019 Convention will be any different. There will be plenty of bloom to see, plenty of good food and plenty of friends. The host hotel is the Hilton Garden Inn, and the staff is expecting us from April 4-7, 2019. For reservations, call (337) 291-1977 and tell the reservation clerk that you are with Society for Louisiana Irises. The code identification is IRIS. We have special room pricing for the Convention.

The garden tour schedule this year is looking to be one of the best yet. Thursday's destinations include: the Botanical Gardens in Baton Rouge, Dr. Wayne Stromeyer's gardens and a stop at Lake Martin, St Martin Parish, La.

Baton Rouge Botanical Garden

The Independence Botanical Gardens were created in 1991 and is dedicated to horticultural education, recreation and nature studies. It is still a work in progress. BREC and the Botanic Garden Foundation, a volunteer organization working in partnership, are adopting an evolving Master Development Plan for the Botanical Gardens. The Botanical Gardens are being constructed in phases as funds become available. Volunteers do much of the work in planting and maintaining the specialty gardens while BREC employs a landscape crew that maintains the grounds. History of the Land: Independence Park originally was a part of the Goodwood Plantation, purchased in 1931 by East Baton Rouge Parish and used as an airport. The downtown Airport, as it was known,

operated for 44 years and closed in 1975. The City-Parish Council designated a part of the original 200-acre airport site to BREC for a public park. Independence Park was developed following BREC's Master Plan and dedicated in 1976. In 1988 Baton Rouge Green raised funds to revise this plan to include a 15-acre site for a proposed botanic garden. Sections include: The Crape Myrtle Garden, the Sensory Garden, The Rose Garden, the Louisiana Iris Garden, The Daylily Garden, the Butterfly Garden, the Fern & Ginger Collections, and the Independence Promenade.



The Butterfly Garden at BRBG



The Louisiana Iris Garden at BRBG

Lake Martin

The Cypress Island Nature Preserve at Lake Martin is home to a swampy ecosystem that supports globally significant numbers of species of colonial nesting waterbirds and native plants. Lake Martin is one of Louisiana's largest nesting colonies for many species of water birds. Some of these species include the Anhinga, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tri-colored Heron, Cattle Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, White Ibis, and Roseate Spoonbill. Lake Martin is also used as a rookery year round for many species.

Lake Martin is also home to a substantial nesting population of alligators, which can typically be spotted from Rookery

Road, which runs right along the edge of the lake. They are naturally camouflaged, but it doesn't take long to get good at gator-spotting, and even if it doesn't come easily to you, you can usually find them by looking for stopped cars and folks with cameras and binoculars.

Other reptiles and amphibians, including a variety of snakes, turtles, lizards, and frogs, are also common in the lake and the surrounding brush, so be on the lookout. Again, none of these animals are aggressive, but snakes, in particular, are best viewed from far away. Another commonly-sighted animal in Lake Martin is the nutria or coypu. These large invasive rodents began populating the South Louisiana swamps in the 1930s when, as legend has it, they escaped from a fur production facility owned by the McIlhenny family (of Tabasco fame) during a hurricane.



Lake Martin

Unlike the deeper swamps of the Atchafalaya Basin, Lake Martin can be easily reached by car and much of the surrounding area can be explored on foot or in a canoe or kayak. The preserve is currently owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy, who works to keep the lake clean and ecologically sound. They also maintain a visitor's center and a boardwalk over the swamp at the South end of the lake.

On Friday morning the iris viewing gets serious and into full swing. We will be seeing Louisiana irises at Ron & Eugenie Betzer's garden, and Jim & Kathy Leonard's iris gardens and Avery Island Jungle garden.

Avery Island Jungle Gardens

Jungle Gardens is a 170-acre botanical garden and bird sanctuary located on Avery Island, Louisiana. The gardens are open daily except for major holidays; an admission fee is charged. The gardens were created by Edward Avery

McIlhenny, second son of Edmund McIlhenny, the inventor of Tabasco sauce

Experience the natural beauty and tranquility of Jungle Gardens - a 170-acre semitropical garden that stretches along Bayou Petite Anse on Avery Island. Naturalists, bird watchers and visitors from around the world will enjoy the gently rolling landscape, botanical treasures, and abundant wildlife.

Attractions range from beautiful flowers to birds to Buddha (a magnificent centuries-old statue on the grounds). In season, visitors can see azaleas, camellias, and colorful bamboo - as well as alligators, deer and the thousands of snowy egrets that nest in Bird City. It's a nature lover's dream that's open to tourists every day of the year.



Alligator at Avery Island



Tri-Colored Heron at Avery Island