

# Creole Nature Trail

Known as Louisiana's Outback, the Creole Nature Trail meanders through marshes, prairies, and along the Gulf of Mexico. As you loop through Calcasieu and Cameron parishes in Southwest Louisiana, view alligators and birds up close and in the wild, along with colorful wildflowers and rare cheniers shaped by salty winds.



Length: 180 miles / 288.0 km

Time Depending on route, allow  
to four or five hours to drive or  
Allow: two days to visit the byway.

## Local Information

**Southwest Louisiana/Lake Charles  
Convention and Visitors Bureau**  
1-800-456-SWLA  
337-436-9588

## Visitor Services

### Fees



The ferry costs \$1 per car to ride from Cameron to Holly Beach.

### Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities



The byway has always been a popular route for bike touring even though it is primarily a two-lane facility with limited or no shoulders. Two major biking events are held annually. The routes for Tour Lafitte and the Gatorman Triathlon have distances of more than 20 miles each. Pedestrians currently have the opportunity to explore aspects of the trail at the Wetland Walkway, a 1.5-mile walking trail on the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge; on the boardwalk at the Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge; and at the Cameron jetties fishing pier and RV park. The beaches are public and fully accessible, and a public ferry that crosses the Calcasieu Ship Channel will accommodate bicyclists as well. Pedestrian and bicycle needs have also been considered in all recent designs and improvements, including a scenic overview on Goose Grit at the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, another primitive trail along the route, and three scenic pull-offs. The Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge has walking trails that provide a magnificent view of sunsets or sunrises reflecting on the water. On the Wetland Walkway in the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, you'll find hundreds of alligators roaming freely just a few yards from your feet, as well as marsh rabbits, Gallinules, and Common Moorhens.



### **Camping**

There are places to camp along this byway.



### **Food**

There are places to buy food along this byway.



### **Gasoline**

Fuel and service facilities are located throughout the byway in Sulphur, Carlyss, Hackberry, Hackett's Corner, Grand Lake, and Lake Charles.



### **Information**

There is an authoritative information center along this byway.



### **Lodging**

There is overnight lodging along this byway.



### **Phone**

Public phones are available along this byway.



### **Restrooms**

There are toilet facilities along this byway.



### **Retail**

There are places to shop along this byway.

## **Special Considerations**

There is no parking on highway shoulders except where designated. It is a good idea to bring insect repellent.

Also, some wildlife in the refuges may be dangerous. For example, the American alligator can be commonly found along the byway. The alligator is a wild animal that prefers gliding quietly up and down the waterways or sunning himself on the bank. A safe rule to remember is to keep your distance. Do not try to feed, tease, or prod an alligator into moving by throwing rocks or other things at him; he is perfectly capable of defending himself. The best months for alligator watching are April through October.

## **Restrictions**

Wildlife refuges are closed on federal holidays. Some hunting and fishing grounds require permits. While viewing wildlife, please keep in mind that alligators are wild animals and should always be treated with respect and a proper level of caution. Accordingly, please be aware of the safety of pets and children.

## Seasons

### Best Time to Drive

Visiting the byway is great year round; the best months for alligator watching are April through October.

### High Season

Summer is the best time to watch the full range of nature, such as alligators and marsh birds that live in the bayou.

## Map and Directions



## Legend:

- |                     |                    |                    |                       |                 |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| ■ Point of Interest | ▲ Campground       | — Featured Byway   | — Water               | — State Border  |
| 🌲 Park              | ⛺ Picnic/Rest Area | — America's Byways | — Wildlife Refuge     | — Urban Area    |
| ⓧ Mountain          | 🛣️ Interstate      | — Other Byway      | — Wilderness Area     | — Tribal Nation |
| 🏙️ City             | 🛣️ U.S. Highway    | — Other Road       | — Other Federal Lands | — Military Base |
| ★ Capital           | 🛣️ State Highway   | — Trail            | — Other State Lands   |                 |

## Driving Directions

Beginning on State Highway 27 near Sulphur and Lake Charles, this 180-mile trail cuts through the marshlands of southern Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes and hugs the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

## Condensed Directions

- Beginning in Sulphur, Louisiana, travel south along SH 27.
- Cross the Intracoastal Waterway and continue south to Hackberry.
- Travel on SH 27 south to Holly Beach. There, you can travel State Highway 82 west to the Texas State Line or travel east through Cameron, Creole, Grand Chenier, and the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge.
- Traveling east on State Highway 82, travelers might opt to turn onto State Highway 27 at Creole and travel north to Creole, the Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge and Lake Charles.
- At Holmwood, State Highway 27 will turn into State Highway 14, stay on LA-14 north and head to the City of Lake Charles.

## Detailed Directions

### From Sulphur to Holly Beach

- Travel south on State Highway 27 from Sulphur.
- The Cameron Parish line appears soon after crossing the Intracoastal Waterway on the Ellender Bridge.
- Continuing south you will approach the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge.
- Four miles farther south is the refuge's Wetland Walkway.
- After exiting the Sabine Refuge, travel approximately seven miles to Holly Beach.

### From Holly Beach to the Texas Border

- From Holly Beach, one of two spurs off the trail's main loop veers westward on State Highway 82 along the Gulf of Mexico past natural sand beaches to the Louisiana/Texas state line.
- A few miles west of Holly Beach is Johnson Bayou.

### From Holly Beach to Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge

- After returning to the main loop, take SH 27/82 east out of Holly Beach.
- Cross the Calcasieu Ship Channel via a large public ferry before entering the town of Cameron.
- Continue east on SH 82 for 6 miles until you come to a Y in the road. Straight ahead, Trosclair Road continues the byway east along the coast past Rutherford Beach to the junction with SR 82 just the other side of the Mermentau River.
- To your left heading north, State Highway 27/82 heads toward Creole. In Creole, Highways 27 and 82 diverge, with 27 taking you north toward Lake Charles while 82 heads south to rejoin the coastal route.
- Heading eastward from the junction with SR 82, the byway makes its way to Grand Chenier and Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge.

- The byway ends near the county line past the refuge.

### **From Creole to Lake Charles**

- Proceeding north on LA-27 from Creole, the byway gradually leaves the salt marshes behind for fresh water marshes.
- Approaching the Conway LeBleu Bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway again, the trail enters the Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.
- Immediately after exiting the bridge, the entrance to Pintail Wildlife Drive appears to the east.
- The main facility of the Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge appears soon after returning to the northern trek on Highway 27.
- At the juncture of SH 384 and 27, there is an opportunity to take a loop west toward Lake Calcasieu (Big Lake) or continue north toward Holmwood. Either route will take you to Lake Charles.
- By turning west on 384, the route crosses the Intracoastal Waterway, passes through lakeside communities such as Big Lake, then turns north on SH 385. Continue past the Lake Charles Regional Airport into Lake Charles proper until this leg of the byway ends at I-210.
- Continuing north along Highway 27 takes you toward Holmwood. This side of the loop passes an area that served as an army pilot training base in World War I, formerly known as Gerstner Field.
- Either route loops up toward Highway 14 in Lake Charles, the hub to five other unique communities in Calcasieu Parish: DeQuincy, Iowa, Sulphur, Vinton, and Westlake.

### **From Lake Charles Regional Airport**

*Distance: 180 miles*

*Driving Time: 1-1/2 to 2 days, depending on route*

While there are five entrances to the Creole Nature Trail, the largest and most frequently traveled begins on State Highway 27, just south of Interstate 10 exit 20, in Sulphur, Louisiana. A thriving community, Sulphur rests midway between Houston, Texas, and New Orleans, Louisiana. The trail loops through 180 miles of bayous and marshlands and along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico before once again heading north. The remaining entrances are located on LA 82 at the Texas state line in the west and the Vermilion Parish line on the east; exit 36 from Interstate 10; and exit 6A on I-210 just north of the Lake Charles Regional Airport on LA 385.

## Getting to the Byway



### Nearby cities

**New Orleans, LA** (206 miles / 331.52 km, 3 hours 12 minutes)

**Start:**

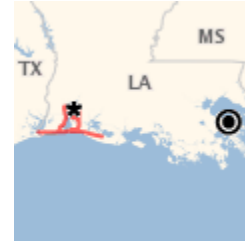
- I-10 westbound, New Orleans, LA  
N 29.954° W 90.083° [?]

**Directions:**

- Take I-10 west to the Cameron/Creole exit #36.
- Turn south onto LA-397, where the byway begins, and continue south to LA-14.
- Turn east on LA-14 (which will turn into LA-27 at Holmwood) and continue south on LA-27.

**Junction with byway:**

- \* Intersection of LA-14 and LA-3186  
N 30.175° W 93.180° [?]



## Road Trip: Creole Nature Trail Suggested Tour

**Departure:** Sulphur, Louisiana

**Destination:** Lake Charles, Louisiana

**Time to allow:** 1 day

Please see the information on the "Visitor Services" page prior to planning your trip.

Offering an up close and personal view of Louisiana's unique environment, this tour of the Creole Nature Trail travels through hundreds of thousands of acres of untouched wetlands fraught with some of the most beautiful scenery imaginable—alligators, birds, wildflowers, gulf beaches, and all kinds of Southwest Louisiana wildlife. Beginning on Hwy. 27 near Sulphur and Lake Charles, the 180-mile trail cuts through the marshlands of southern Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes and hugs the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Besides pine trees, you'll see fields of rice, soybeans, cattle and country homesteads in the summer, and in the spring, the water lilies and blossoming water hyacinth growing in the marsh will be paradise to photographers. And for those who like to photograph wildlife, the Trail takes you to four different wildlife refuges and a bird sanctuary.

### Day 1

- **Start: Sulphur**

**Suggested time at this stop:** 30 minutes

This tour of the Creole Nature Trail begins in Sulphur, Louisiana. The area is noted for rolling pasture land which gradually turns to wetland. Small ponds and bayous begin to appear as well.

- **Stop 2: Cameron Parish**

**From previous stop:** 13 minutes / 10 mi (16.0 km)

**Suggested time at this stop:** 30 minutes

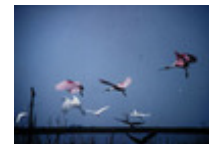
After crossing Ellender Bridge, we enter Cameron Parish, the largest parish in the state. The vegetation in the area is mostly of the salt marsh variety. Additionally, the landscape is dotted with oil wells and oilfield pumping stations.

- **Stop 3: Hackberry**

**From previous stop:** 10 minutes / 7.4 mi (11.8 km)  
**Suggested time at this stop:** 20 minutes

Next, we approach Hackberry. In this vicinity we find an abundance of shrimp and crab houses along Kelso Bayou. Here, seafood is cheap and plentiful. The area is important to the commercial fishing industry because of the abundance of natural resources.

- **Stop 4: Sabine National Wildlife Refuge**



**From previous stop:** 13 minutes / 10 mi (16.0 km)  
**Suggested time at this stop:** 1 hour

A bit further down the Byway, we come upon the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. Here, visitors get views of birds and other marsh animals. The Refuge includes the 1.5 mile self-guided Marsh Trail with interpretation stations, an observation tower, and panoramic view of miles of marsh terrain.

- **Stop 5: Holly Beach**

**From previous stop:** 15 minutes / 11 mi (17.6 km)  
**Suggested time at this stop:** 1 hour

Following the Creole Nature Trail south, we reach the Gulf Coast at Holly Beach. This area is know as the "Cajun Riviera." The beach provides 25 miles of year-round beaches and a variety of outdoor recreation. From this point, the Byway moves west along the Gulf Coast.

- **Stop 6: Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge**

**From previous stop:** 1 hour 10 minutes / 50 mi (80.0 km)  
**Suggested time at this stop:** 1 hour

Approximately 30 miles down the Byway, following the Gulf Coast, we come upon the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. This area is home to a variety of wintering waterfowl and resident mammals. The refuge is also an important area for research studies on a number of marsh management strategies. Visitors are able to enjoy recreational fishing in this area, but hunting is prohibited. Visitors will want to be cautious of alligators which inhabit the area.

- **End: Lake Charles**



**From previous stop:** 2 hours / 90 mi (144.0 km)

**Suggested time at this stop:** 15 minutes

From this area, visitors may choose to turn back west toward Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Reserve and end the tour at Lake Charles

**Totals for Day 1**

**Total Distance Traveled:** 178.4 miles / 285.4 km

**Total Travel Time:** 4 hours 1 minute

**Total Stopping Time:** 4 hours 35 minutes