

Avery Island & Tabasco in New Iberia, LA

Do you smell that? No? Well take a bigger whiff! The small city of New Iberia, LA is known as the “sweetest, spiciest, and saltiest place on earth!” As you look out the window, enjoy the semi-tropic view of its towering live oak trees, miles and miles of Spanish moss, and the rich agricultural land that has historically been a trademark for this town.

Five miles south of the tracks, across a sugar cane field in the distance, is Avery Island, site of the world-renowned Tabasco Pepper Sauce factory, as well as an historic salt mine. Just up the tracks is the McIlhenny Tabasco Company, built in 1912, which grew from Edward McIlhenny’s first invention of pepper sauce in 1868. Visitors to the plant are enveloped in the Tobasco history, and learn about production of the sauce. Many are surprised to learn that the sauce was originally sold in cologne bottles! Today you can taste-test the sauce which is grown from local peppers, mixed with vinegar and salt and aged to perfection for three years. You can buy some Tobasco Sauce in modern bottles to take home.

In 1862, during the civil war, two Union gunboats and transports attacked the island in an ill-fated attempt to capture the salt works. After another attempt in 1863, Union forces finally destroyed the salt works. The salt mine reopened after the Civil war. Altogether, the salt mine was in use from 1791 until 1898.

Several blocks east of the station you can spot the 10,000 square foot oldest operating rice mill in the US, the Conrad Rice Mill. Built in 1912, much of the equipment is original to the building and operates to this day. As the train comes to a stop at the station, look for the brightly painted orange and yellow locomotives of the Romanesque Revival brick depot. Constructed by Southern Pacific in the 1900’s, it is now used for the Louisiana and Delta Railroad headquarters.

The long, muddy flowing waterway parallel to the tracks is known as Bayou Teche and stretches for 125 miles. The 500 Spanish colonists who first settled in New Iberia in 1779 relied on the bayou as their main source of transportation; it was vital for transporting their agricultural products and trading with regions near and far. You may catch a glimpse through the magnolia trees of the aged, Victorian plantation homes along the bayou. You will notice all were built to face the bayou, which was the only highway before the advent of the railroad in 1880.

New Iberia has suffered a yellow fever epidemic, floods and fires during its history, but it is now fully restored and has a feel much like the French Quarter in New Orleans. As we prepare to depart from New Iberia, you can reflect on these historic sights that have made this town what it is today. Take a final whiff of what locals believe to be the “sweetest, spiciest, and saltiest” aroma around.

Source(s):

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