

# Lake Charles

Like a lot of Southern Louisiana, Lake Charles thrives on its cultural ties to the past through activities representing the motto, “Laissez les bons temps rouler” (Let the Good Times Roll). Over 75 festivals are held annually in the area, making it the “Festival Capital of Louisiana.” There are festivals for almost any celebration imaginable. With about 71,000 people calling Lake Charles home, there is a population large enough to produce these 75 festivals, while maintaining an economy that thrives on petrochemical processing and casinos.

Situated on the banks of the Calcasieu River and bordering both Lake Charles and Prien Lake, Lake Charles is a major petrochemical processing area and a deep water port. As you travel through the Lake Charles area, you can see these large industrial plants along with many railroad tank cars. If you are traveling at night, you might think it is the holiday season, but a closer look reveals that these lights are from the petrochemical plants which are covered with bright lights to help illuminate the plants for night workers. Many of the people living in the area work in the petrochemical industry, and many others work at the multiple casinos found in and around Lake Charles.

On the south side of the train, you may be able to catch a glimpse of what look like old steamboats. These, in fact, are floating casinos, moored to the shore and adjacent to large hotels. Gaming is now a major industry in the area, and many people from East Texas cross the border and gamble in southwest Louisiana. Many students find part-time employment at the casinos while attending McNeese State University, a four year university with about eight thousand students.

To the south side of the train, you can see Interstate Highway 10 which stretches from Jacksonville, Florida to Los Angeles. The highway crosses the Calcasieu River on a tall bridge that can be seen from the south side of the train. The height allows the passage of ocean-going ships and barges to pass underneath on their way to the Gulf of Mexico, some 30 miles away. If you look closely at the guard rail of the bridge, you can see outlines of crossed pistols embedded on the railing. These symbolically reflect the area’s association to the time when pirates such as Jean Lafitte plied these waters. Amtrak crosses the river by way of a draw bridge, so if there is river traffic, the train will come to a stop and you will have a chance to look out over the area and perhaps spot an alligator, great blue heron or brown pelican here in the marsh.

## **Source(s):**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake\\_Charles,\\_Louisiana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Charles,_Louisiana)

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