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Moss cascades from tree branches overhead in this image of the Barataria Preserve.



Photo shows a sign marking Bayou Coquille on a trail in the Barataria Preserve, part of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in Marrero, Louisiana, just outside of New Orleans.



Photo shows a walkway in the Barataria Preserve, part of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in Marrero, Louisiana, just outside of New Orleans. — AFP photos

FROG SYMPHONY AND ANCIENT TREES IN A VERDANT LOUISIANA SWAMP

It was 93 degrees and humid when I set out on a 4-mile stroll through a Louisiana swamp. Crazy, you say? But let me tell you what I found there, in the Barataria Preserve of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. A symphony of frogs. A 700-year-old tree. And a verdant landscape of dripping moss and neon green that seemed to melt with the heat into the woods and wetlands. Fan-shaped palmettos waved hello along the trails. Strange formations of cypress trees known as knees pushed up through the swampland. Moss cascaded from branches overhead. I half-expected to spot a mythical creature like

@JeanLafitteNPS, retweeted it with this message: "That's the way to stand up to a south Louisiana summer - pack a bottle of water & stroll thru the swamp." I had to find out who was behind this empowering never-mind-the-weather message, and a couple of phone calls led me to Kristy Wallisch, a park ranger who handles Jean Lafitte's public information.

Six distinct sites

"Traditionally summer is our low season because it's very hot," Wallisch said. But while locals head to Gulf

led the Americans to a David-versus-Goliath triumph over British forces.

Jackson owed his victory in part to the man for whom the park is named: Jean Lafitte. Lafitte was a privateer - OK, let's just call him a pirate - who supplied Jackson with soldiers, guns and more. Had Lafitte shown up at the docks in New Orleans with his contraband, he would have had to pay taxes on it. Instead, he used the waterways as back roads. Some of his operations were based where the Barataria Preserve is now. My visit included a walk on the Palmetto Trail and the Bayou Coquille Trail. Coquille is the French word for shell, named for an enormous mound of shells discarded by Native Americans who once inhabited the area. A sign marks that spot today.

Lizards and snakes

Another sign showcases the "Monarch of the Swamp," a massive old-growth bald cypress tree estimated to be 700 years old. These trees were prized in the South because they were resistant to termites, so many of them were cut down. "We always wonder why that one survived," Wallisch said of the Monarch, adding that the joke goes that loggers must have encountered it on a Friday afternoon when they were ready to knock off work and said, "We're not starting on that tree today!" Hikers might also see lizards and snakes - but if you do, don't panic: "For the most part, they are not interested in us at all. They just want to go about their snaky business," Wallisch said. And if you see a white-tailed deer, you might notice that it appears smaller than deer in other regions but with bigger feet. "They adapted," Wallisch said. "They evolved with those feet because it's easier to walk on wet ground."

The preserve is a great spot for birding too, especially in fall and spring as millions of birds head south to Central or South America for the winter, then return. For tourists taking a side trip to the park from New Orleans, it's interesting to consider that the preserve "is pretty much what New Orleans looked like" when European settlers arrived 300 years ago. The region's swampy landscape and oppressive weather "may not be what we'd consider prime real estate," Wallisch said, "but the location on the Mississippi River was so perfect they said, 'We'll just tough it out and build a city.'" — AP

“Traditionally summer is our low season because it's very hot”

the rougarou - half-wolf, half-man in Cajun folklore - lurking in the forest. But no werewolves or fairies crossed my path, though I was startled by the creepy sight of a couple of alligators floating motionless and half-submerged in dark waters.

I was also enchanted by the continuous soundscape of creatures baying, chirping and croaking, from bronze frogs that sound like bicycle horns to narrow mouth toads that sound like sheep. That night, back in my air-conditioned hotel room a half-hour drive from the park in New Orleans, I tweeted out a few seconds of a video I'd taken on my cellphone, showing the wet, green world I'd encountered, along with its natural soundtrack. A short time later, the park's official Twitter feed,

Coast beaches this time of year to escape the heat and humidity, the park does get out-of-towners - like me. "Kids are out of school, people are traveling, and they're saying, 'OK, it's going to be hot and humid, but we're also going to see and hear amazing things we're never going to see and hear anywhere else,'" she said, adding: "You'll forget the heat and humidity three days later. But you'll always remember what a wonderful time you had." The Barataria Preserve is one of six distinct sites that make up Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The other sites include a visitor center in New Orleans' famous French Quarter and the Chalmette Battlefield, where the Battle of New Orleans was fought in 1815. It was the final great battle of the War of 1812, in which Andrew Jackson



Visitors taking in the verdant landscape of woods and wetlands at the Barataria Preserve.

History, Hollywood and voodoo all in a New Orleans cemetery

If you've heard about New Orleans' famous cemeteries with their above-ground tombs, chances are you've heard about the gravesite of the so-called voodoo queen. Her name was Marie Laveau and she is buried in St Louis Cemetery No. 1. But visitors looking to visit her grave need to know a couple of things. First, you can't sightsee there on your own. Since 2015, tourists have been allowed into the cemetery only on guided tours.

"We were having so much vandalism in the cemetery, in addition to panhandlers saying they were tour guides and handing visitors markers to mark up the tombs," said Sherri Peppo, executive director of New Orleans Catholic Cemeteries. "It got out of hand." Even with the rules, the cemetery still gets some 200,000 visitors a year on authorized tours. And unlike the sprawling 19th-century garden cemeteries found elsewhere in the country, St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 is tiny and crowded, not much bigger than a square block. Chances are you'll be snaking in a line along the graveyard's cramped and narrow paths, taking turns gawking at the vaults where its most famous denizens are spending eternity.

The second thing to know is that Laveau's story is just one of many fascinating tales connected to this place. You'll also hear the story behind one of America's most famous court cases, Plessy v. Ferguson. You'll get a glimpse of a gleaming white tomb shaped like a pyramid owned by a Hollywood celebrity. And you'll see the vault where a famous scene from a classic 1960s movie was shot.

Architecture and history

New Orleans is celebrating its 300th birthday this year, marking the city's founding by French settlers in 1718. St

Louis Cemetery No. 1, the city's oldest graveyard, dates to 1789. Two explanations are offered for why its burial vaults are built above ground: because of the high water table and flooding, and because it was a European cultural custom. The vaults are laid out like little houses in mazelike aisles that feel like tiny streets. Many are surrounded by black iron fences, as if they have private front yards.

"There is no architecture in New Orleans, except in the cemeteries," wrote Mark Twain in his book "Life on the Mississippi." He described the crypts as "graceful and shapely ... their white roofs and gables stretching into the distance," giving new meaning to "the phrase 'city of the dead.'" Some tombs are decorated with sculptures and crosses. Many are in a picturesque state of decay, revealing layers of paint, brick and stone while weeds sprout through the cracks. Some structures have wall vaults, with family members or individuals connected through various social organizations interred in separate chambers in one large tomb.

The famous inhabitants

A marker on Laveau's tomb calls her the "notorious voodoo queen ... the most widely known of many practitioners of the cult." She died in 1881. Stories that she was also a hairdresser explain why some visitors drop ponytail holders and bobby pins at the site. Before the crackdown on vandalism, visitors asking her spirit to intervene for them would sometimes mark Xs on her tomb. If you're a serious chess fan, you'll want to pay your respects at the burial site for Paul Morphy. He was a child prodigy and the greatest player of his era, dying in 1884.

An important name from US civil rights history also

appears on a tomb here: Homer Plessy. Plessy was born in New Orleans to Haitian parents and was of mixed European and African descent. Because of his light complexion, he was able to pass for white, but he chose to be the Rosa Parks of his time, purposely breaking a law that segregated passengers on trains. Plessy sat in a car reserved for whites while making his race known to challenge segregation, contending that it violated the 13th and 14th amendments of the US Constitution.

Plessy was found guilty by a Louisiana judge, and in 1896, the US Supreme Court upheld that decision in a notorious 8-1 ruling supporting "separate but equal" accommodations. That Plessy v. Ferguson decision stood as a legal justification for segregation until the 1950s.

The Hollywood connection

Actor Nicolas Cage is alive and well but he's built a 9-foot-tall tomb shaped like a pyramid as his future resting place in St Louis No. 1. The pristine white structure bears the words "omnia ab uno," which means "everything from one."

Fans of the 1969 cult classic movie "Easy Rider" will recognize the elaborate Italian Benevolent Society tomb as the backdrop for a scene where actors Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda dropped acid while cavorting with women. The scene was shot without permission and led the archdiocese to ban filming in the cemetery except for authorized documentaries. Fortunately, tourists are still allowed to take photos here - as long as they're on one of those authorized tours. — AP



The title of the book "Little Women," by Louisa May Alcott, is embossed on the cover of an 1869 edition of the book at Orchard House, in Concord, Mass. — AP

Little Women at 150: Visiting Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House

The beloved novel "Little Women" turns 150 this year, and it's a great time to plan a trip to Orchard House, in Concord, Massachusetts, to honor this enduring literary classic. Orchard House is where author Louisa May Alcott lived and where tours offer insight into her life, times and the book.

We'll talk about why "Little Women" still holds so much meaning for readers in the 21st century, and we'll let you know about events planned to celebrate the book's sesquicentennial. And while you're in the area, you might drop by nearby Walden Pond to see the cabin in the woods where one of Alcott's famous neighbors, Henry Thoreau, lived.

New episodes of "Get Outta Here!" are published every Wednesday. Host Beth J. Harpaz is travel editor for The Associated Press, a volunteer Big Apple Greeter and a licensed tour guide in her native New York City. She recently completed a quest to visit all 50 states.

Before becoming travel editor, where most of the news-thank goodness-is about happy people going on nice vacations, Beth covered politics, disasters and all manner of mayhem for the AP. And not to reveal her age, but she also worked for several newspapers way back in the 20th century and even wrote three books. She does not own wheeled luggage but instead carries her belongings around the world in an ancient backpack and various tote bags. — AP



Photo shows tour guide Jeanne Wilson of Save Our Cemeteries with a group of visitors at St Louis Cemetery No. 1 in New Orleans.



Actor Nicolas Cage is alive and well but he owns this gleaming tomb shaped like a pyramid in St Louis Cemetery No. 1 in New Orleans.



Photo shows an offering and plaque marking the tomb for Marie Laveau at St Louis Cemetery No. 1 in New Orleans. — AP photos