

TRAVEL



Keep Shreveport weird

A quest for authentic people and eats in one of Louisiana's up-and-coming cities

By Cynthia J. Drake
Special to the American-Statesman

In Shreveport, there is a No Nonsense Witch who tells fortunes at a voodoo shop, and the daiquiri drive-thru is a rite of passage, an exercise in trying not to laugh while blurt-ing out hand-scrawled drink names like

“Shake the Haters Off” and “Beat Up the Drawers” at the order window.

Perhaps the most endearing part of Shreveport is its weirdness, an electrifying undercurrent that runs through most personal interactions, and its defiance (so far) of the Chipotlization of America.

“I often feel that people just don’t get us,” says Chris Jay, whose day job is public relations manager for the Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A mural at Ki' Mexico. Southern-themed gifts in the Enchanted Garden boutique. Elote (street corn) at Ki' Mexico. A bartender working at Herby K's. Items for sale at Gina Marie's Antiques and Oddities.

[CONTRIBUTED BY CYNTHIA J. DRAKE]



This lodge in the Oregon wilderness is anything but wild

By Dina Mishev
Special To The Washington Post

The friendly pack of dogs gathered around the edge of Minam River Lodge's pole barn has no idea what to make of square dancing, or of the 20 or so people doing it. The dogs, pets of lodge staff and guests, stuck close to their humans until the do-si-doing commenced. Now they watch bemusedly. Soaking in the scene from a string hammock close enough to see sweat glistening on the temples of several dancers but far enough away to be safe from flying elbows, I do the same.

Minam River Lodge is a rare piece of private property within Oregon's 360,000-acre Eagle Cap Wilderness,



The view during the second day of a five-day backpack to Minam River Lodge. The lodge is located in a designated wilderness area within Oregon's 2.3 million-acre Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.
[DINA MISHEV FOR THE WASHINGTON POST]

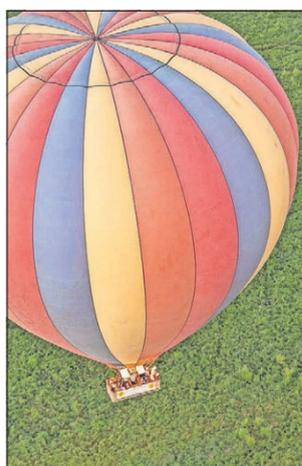
which itself is located within the 2.3 million-acre Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. It was founded as a hunting camp in 1950 and even today

the only ways to get here are to hike, ride a horse or have local rancher Joe Spence fly you there in his three-seat Cessna 206. (Or fly yourself in if you

have a license and similarly small plane; Minam's is not a commercial-grade runway.) Once at the lodge, which is open from late May into October, there is no cellphone reception, Internet or television; power in the cabins and main lodge comes from an array of solar panels near its organic greenhouse and pigpen.

Eagle Cap Wilderness has 535 miles of trails and 17 peaks taller than 9,000 feet. Much of the Wallowa Mountains, called “the Alps of Oregon” and pronounced WAH-lau-waa, are in the Eagle Cap. Four rivers that run through the wilderness are in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System,

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NEXT WEEK

OUT OF AFRICA

Test the limits in Kenya at this safari lodge

SHREVEPORT

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On the side, he and his wife, Sara Hebert, run the podcast “All Y’all,” featuring stories from people in and around the area. He also collects old cookbooks and prides himself on his culinary prowess, which often steers him toward delicious sub-\$10 plates.

Jay is also probably the only PR person who takes visitors to a seedy motel and surprises them with a gourmet Chinese meal inside (more on that later).

“We’ve had our ups and downs,” he says. “But this city is just really full of strange people, and I mean that with love.”

A change is gonna come

If you’re lucky, a visit to Shreveport/Bossier unfolds like a Steinbeck novel. You’re likely to meet some of those strange and intensely interesting people, falling in love with its edges.

“Where I lived before, I feel like I wasn’t really allowed to express what I personally was, and coming to Shreveport, there are so many people who allow you to be who you are, because you allow them to be who they are,” says Jade Thornton, the aforementioned No Nonsense Witch who gives weekly palm readings at Gina Marie’s Antiques and Oddities.

Thornton did an astrological natal chart on Shreveport (“It’s an Aries town,” she told me) and said the city “wants to move forward — there’s so much room for growth. It’s just getting people on the same page.”

That seems to be a common sentiment.

Get away from the casino corridor and take a stroll through downtown Shreveport. If you can see past the crumbling facades, you can imagine some of the proud African



“Once in a Millennium Moon” is one of the largest publicly funded murals in the U.S. It was created in 2001 by artist Meg Saligman, who enlisted the help of 2,500 people in the Shreveport/Bossier community to help paint it.

[CONTRIBUTED BY CYNTHIA J. DRAKE]

American-owned businesses that were the hallmark of Texas Avenue in the early 1900s — the barber shops and specialty stores that were a byproduct of the city’s once-segregated past. In fact, Sam Cooke famously wrote “A Change is Gonna Come” after being jailed in Shreveport in 1963 after checking into a “whites-only” hotel.

After several decades of population decline, artists have begun to move in now, spraying the town’s empty shells with murals that reach to the sky.

“When you have a strong art community, which is what we’re trying to provide, it will turn over a city, because people will start to invest back into it,” says Katy Larsen, owner of the Agora Borealis, an artist market in Shreveport. “I feel like we’re kind of in that peak, where we’re about to turn over and have a new city arise.”

She points to similar cyclical trends in cities that have reinvented themselves, such as Austin and Alexandria, Va.

Hole-in-the-wall heaven

Now we need to discuss the food.

Like so much of its humble exterior, Shreveport’s dozens of hole-in-the-wall restaurants are places that don’t look like much — until you walk in and feel like you’ve found treasure.

If you go on a food bender in Shreveport, it would be perfectly forgivable.

Go to Marilyn’s Place Restaurant and chances are you’ll be warmly greeted by the fedora-wearing chef Boz Baucum overseeing his service station-turned-restaurant, known for po’boys piled high with shrimp, plus whatever unique Cajun creation Boz has dreamed up that day.

This is the site of boozy brunches. “We’ve got the Before Jesus and After Jesus crowd,” says Baucum, putting an arm around me like we’re old friends.

He used to try to segregate the churchgoers from his secular friends at the restaurant’s outdoor picnic tables, but after a while he just decided to let the chips fall where they may and let the community mingle. People are usually a little less judgy after a few drinks, anyway.

For breakfast, lunch or a midday snack, don’t miss the 80-year-old Cotton Boll Grill: inside, wood-grain

laminated booths and homey curtains; outside, a crude drive-thru, where you can order a sack of straight-from-the-fryer hot water cornbread. Hand-pinned to deliver maximum crisp per nugget, it’s a transformative experience for just \$1.

Later, you’ll have to take a little leap of faith to park your car and walk past the “Rooms to Rent, \$195 a Week” vinyl sign with a big red heart on it in Bossier City, walking through a neon-lit lobby and vending machine to get to Lucky Palace.

Inside, you’ll be rewarded with artful and sophisticated Chinese food: duck on scallion pancakes, pan-fried Chilean sea bass and a wine cellar thoughtfully curated by owner Kuan Lim, which has landed his restaurant twice on the James Beard Award semifinalist list for its outstanding wine program.

“You could add a ‘zero’ to the price of any bottle of wine here and it would sell in DFW,” says Jay as I tuck into a piece of duck, crisp on the outside and sweet and tender inside, chased by a swig of Laurent-Perrier Brut.

To your Shreveport culinary scavenger hunt, you must also add a Shrimp Buster from Herby K’s, the tiniest, tchotchke-filled bar that serves up huge goblets of draft beer to complement your fried entree. It’s practically mandatory for visitors.

I ask Jay if he worries about the city’s character changing and all these old and eccentric mom-and-pop diners giving way to chain restaurants. He says he used to worry about things like that, but these days he’s more pragmatic, thinking in terms of job growth and the transformative potential chain businesses could have for the city.

Shreveport/Bossier may well look totally different in the next decade. It appears to be written in the stars, after all.

But may there still be hot water cornbread.

IF YOU GO

Eat

Ki’ Mexico
3839 Gilbert Drive,
Shreveport
318-861-5941
facebook.com/kimexico

Herby-K’s
1833 Pierre Ave.,
Shreveport
herbyks.net

Cotton Boll Grill
1624 Fairfield Ave.,
Shreveport
318-221-9397

Marilynn’s Place Restaurant
4041 Fern Ave.,
Shreveport
marilynns-place.com

Lucky Palace
750 Diamond Jacks Blvd.,
Bossier City
318-752-1888
lucky-palace.com

What to do (besides eat)

Gators & Friends
11441 U.S. 80, Greenwood
(right near the Texas/Louisiana border)
318-938-1199
gatorsandfriends.com
It sounds terrifying (and it kind of is), but you can zipline across a pond filled with live alligators here.

Chimp Haven
13600 Chimpanzee Place,
Keithville
318-925-9575
chimpaven.org
A sanctuary for rescued chimpanzees open to the public four times a year during Chimpanzee Discovery Days.

R.W. Norton Art Gallery
4747 Creswell Ave.,
Shreveport
rwnaf.org
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\$125
per person

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