

Lake Charles, Louisiana

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Lake Charles (French: *Lac Charles*) is the fifth-largest incorporated city in the U.S. state of Louisiana, located on Lake Charles, Prien Lake, and the Calcasieu River. Founded in 1861 in Calcasieu Parish, it is a major industrial, cultural, and educational center in the southwest region of the state, and one of the most important in Acadiana.

As of the 2010 census, the population was 71,993.^[5] Lake Charles is the principal city of the Lake Charles Metropolitan Statistical Area, having a population of 202,040.^[6] It is the larger principal city of the Lake Charles-Jennings Combined Statistical Area, with a population of 225,235. The 2010 population of the five-parish area of Southwest Louisiana was 292,619.^[7]

It is considered a major center of petrochemical refining, gaming, tourism, and education, being home to McNeese State University and Sowela Technical Community College. Because of the lakes and waterways throughout the city, metropolitan Lake Charles is often referred to as *the Lake Area*.

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Lake Charles, Louisiana

City

City of Lake Charles



Clockwise from left: Downtown skyline; Golden Nugget Casino; L'Auberge du Lac Casino; Israel LaFleur Bridge; McNeese State University entrance plaza.



Flag



Seal

Nickname(s): The Lake Area



Location of Louisiana in USA

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History



Ryan Street in Lake Charles, 1903

On March 7, 1861, Lake Charles was officially incorporated as the town of Charleston, Louisiana.^[8]

Six years after the city was incorporated, dissatisfaction over the name Charleston arose; on March 16, 1867, Charleston was renamed and incorporated as the town of Lake Charles. In 1910, a fire, known as the "Great Fire of 1910", devastated much of the city.



Location of Lake Charles in Louisiana

Coordinates: 30°12′53″N 93°12′31″W

Country	United States
State	Louisiana
Parish	Calcasieu
Founded	March 7, 1861 as Charleston
Renamed	March 16, 1867 as Lake Charles
Founded by	Charles Sallier
Named for	Charles Sallier
Government	
 • Mayor	Randy Roach (D)
 • City Council^[1]	Members List
Area	
 • City	44.8 sq mi (116 km ²)
 • Land	42.1 sq mi (109 km ²)
 • Water	2.7 sq mi (7 km ²)
Elevation	13 ft (4 m)
Population (2010)	
 • City	71,993
 • Density	1,711.8/sq mi (660.9/km ²)
 • Urban	132,977
 • Metro	194,138
Demonym	Lake Charlesian
Time zone	CST (UTC-6)
 • Summer (DST)	CST (UTC-5)
ZIP Codes	70601, 70602, 70605, 70606, 70607, 70609, 70615, 70616, 70629
Area Code	337

However, Lake Charles soon rebuilt itself and continued to grow and expand in the twentieth century. The Charleston Hotel was completed in

1929, during the administration of Mayor Henry J. Geary.^[9] During and after World War II, Lake Charles experienced industrial growth with the onset of the petrochemical refining industries. The city grew to a high of some 75,000 people in the early 1980s, but with local economic recession, the population declined.

Current

With the advent of the gaming, manufacturing, and aviation maintenance industries, the city rebounded with a population of 71,993 as of 2010.

Geography

Lake Charles, located at 30°12′53″N 93°12′31″W﻿ / ﻿30.214656, -93.208537﻿ / 30.214656; -93.208537^[10] on a level plain about 30 miles (48 km) from the Gulf of Mexico, has an elevation of 13 feet (4.0 m),^[11] and is located on the banks of the Calcasieu River in southwestern Louisiana. It borders both Lake Charles and Prien Lake. Contraband Bayou, Henderson Bayou, and English Bayou flow through the city. Oak trees and pine trees dot the landscape, as the lumber industry, once the main economic engine of the area, can attest to. The Calcasieu Ship Channel, which allows large ocean-going vessels to sail up from the Gulf, also borders the city.

According to the United States Census Bureau,^[12] the city has a total area of 44.8 square miles (116.0 km²), of which 42.0 square miles (108.9 km²) is land and 2.7 square miles (7.1 km²), or 6.12%, is water.^[13]

Climate

Lake Charles is tied with Port Arthur, Texas, and Astoria, Oregon, as the most humid city in the contiguous United States, and the second-most humid measured location behind unincorporated Quillayute, Washington. The average relative humidity in Lake Charles is 90% in the morning, and 72% in the afternoon.^[14]

Website

www.cityoflakecharles.com
(<http://www.cityoflakecharles.com>)



A view of Downtown Lake Charles, circa 1917



Henderson Bayou

Climate data for Lake Charles, Louisiana													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °F (°C)	87 (31)	87 (31)	94 (34)	95 (35)	100 (38)	106 (41)	103 (39)	107 (42)	105 (41)	103 (39)	93 (34)	89 (32)	107 (42)
Average high °F (°C)	60.6 (15.9)	64.5 (18.1)	71.3 (21.8)	77.4 (25.2)	84.1 (28.9)	88.9 (31.6)	91.0 (32.8)	91.3 (32.9)	87.7 (30.9)	80.5 (26.9)	70.6 (21.4)	63.3 (17.4)	77.6 (25.32)
Average low °F (°C)	41.2 (5.1)	44.3 (6.8)	50.8 (10.4)	57.2 (14)	65.7 (18.7)	72.1 (22.3)	74.3 (23.5)	73.6 (23.1)	69.1 (20.6)	58.6 (14.8)	49.7 (9.8)	43.3 (6.3)	58.33 (14.62)
Record low °F (°C)	12 (−11)	3 (−16)	21 (−6)	30 (−1)	40 (4)	51 (11)	60 (16)	59 (15)	45 (7)	30 (−1)	20 (−7)	11 (−12)	3 (−16)
Average precipitation inches (mm)	5.52 (140.2)	3.28 (83.3)	3.54 (89.9)	3.64 (92.5)	6.06 (153.9)	6.07 (154.2)	5.13 (130.3)	4.85 (123.2)	5.95 (151.1)	3.94 (100.1)	4.61 (117.1)	4.60 (116.8)	57.19 (1,452.6)
Source: NWS Lake Charles Office ^[15]													

Demographics

As of the 2010 census, the population was 71,993.^[5] In 2010,^[17] the population density was 1,711.8 people per square mile (689.7/km²). There were 32,469 housing units. The racial makeup of the city was 47% White, 47% African American, 0.4% Native American, 1.7% Asian, 0.47% from other races, 2.1% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 2.9% of the population.

There were 28,228 households, out of which 26.6% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 37.8% were married couples living together, 18.3% had a female householder with no husband present, and 39.4% were non-families. 33.6% of all households were made up of individuals and 12.1% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.43 and the average family size was 3.13.

In 2010,^[18] the population was spread out with 27% under the age of 18, 8.5% from 20 to 24, 24.8% from 25 to 44, 25% from 45 to 64, and 14.1% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 35 years. For every 100 females there were 90.9 males. The percentage of males was 45.7% versus 54.3% for females.

The median income for a household in the city was \$36,001. The per capita income for the city was \$22,855. 20.9% of the population was below the poverty line.

Historical population

Census	Pop.	%±
1880	838	—
1890	3,442	310.7%
1900	6,680	94.1%
1910	11,449	71.4%
1920	13,088	14.3%
1930	15,791	20.7%
1940	21,207	34.3%
1950	41,272	94.6%
1960	63,392	53.6%
1970	77,998	23.0%
1980	75,226	−3.6%
1990	70,580	−6.2%
2000	71,757	1.7%
2010	71,993	0.3%
Est. 2014	74,889	^[16] 4.0%

U.S. Decennial Census (<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/>)

Economy



Swimming in polluted Lake Charles opposite the Olin Mathieson chemical plant in 1972. Cleanup efforts to Lake Charles' waterways have been so successful that Prien Lake now supports both recreational and commercial fishing, and has a safe public beach.^{[19][20]}

The top employer, the Calcasieu Parish School System, employs approximately 5,000 workers. The second-largest employer is L'Auberge Casino Resort, which has 2,400 workers.

Industry and manufacturing

Several petrochemical plants and an oil refinery are located nearby along the Calcasieu Ship Channel. Turner Industries, Axiall, and Citgo each employ over a thousand engineers.^[21] The Trunkline LNG terminal, immediately southwest of Lake Charles, is one of the United States' few liquified natural gas terminals. It has



Downtown Lake Charles, with Capital One Tower to the left

facilities for LNG receipt, storage, and re-gasification. Other industrial companies include PPG Industries, Phillips 66, Westlake Chemical Corporation, Sasol, and Grace Davison. Local industry also includes a number of manufacturing companies. Chennault International Airport hosts AAR Corp, which services airplanes, and a Northrop Grumman facility. The Shaw Group has a manufacturing facility which manufactures and exports parts for nuclear power plants.^[22]

Commerce and retail

With small businesses, big box stores, and a regional mall, Lake Charles serves as the shopping and retail hub of the five-parish area. Prien Lake Mall, which serves nearly 300,000 people is anchored by four department stores: Dillard's, Sears, Kohl's, and JCPenney. It has over 80 retail options. Retailers include Talbots, Gap, Aéropostale, Bath & Body Works, American Eagle, Buckle, Hollister, and Coach. The Lake Charles Power Center is a shopping area that has 1,000,000 square feet (93,000 m²) of shopping space^[23] The Cottage Shop District supports approximately a dozen small businesses.^[24] L'Auberge du Lac Casino Resort offers upscale clothing boutiques.^[25]

Casinos

The L'Auberge du Lac Casino Resort is a 242 acres (98 ha), 26-story hotel in Lake Charles. It has nearly 1000 guest rooms, as well as a casino, golf course, spa, and meeting center.^[26]

A second casino, the Golden Nugget Lake Charles, opened in late 2014 next to L'Auberge du Lac.^[27] The casino resort has more than 740 guest rooms, a casino, golf course, meeting space, retail corridor and a private beach and marina.^[28]

Education

Universities and colleges

The city has one university and one community college. McNeese State University, located on a 121-acre (0.49 km²) main campus lined with oak trees in the heart of Lake Charles, is a four-year public university in the University of Louisiana System. Contraband Bayou flows through the campus. McNeese was founded



Golden Nugget Lake Charles

in 1939 and named after educator John McNeese. It offers over 80 majors, and includes the colleges of Business, Education, Engineering and Engineering Technology, Liberal Arts, Nursing, Science, Honors College, and the Doré School of Graduate Studies. The university is accredited by the Commission on



L'Auberge du Lac Casino

Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.^[29] Other properties include a 65-acre (260,000 m²) athletic plant and student apartment complex, the Louisiana Environmental Research Center, Burton Coliseum, the 503-acre (2.04 km²) MSU Farm, and nearly 1,600 acres (6.5 km²) of donated farm property used for research, farming, and ranching.^[30] Over 8,500 students attend the university.^[31]

Sowela Technical Community College offers associate degrees, technical diplomas, and certificate programs, as well as general education courses that can transfer to four-year universities.^[32] Finally, Delta School of Business and Technology specializes in vocational courses.^[33]



Entrance Plaza and Shearman Fine Arts Center at McNeese State University

Libraries

The city has four libraries. The first library, financed by Andrew Carnegie, opened in 1904.^[34] It is named the Carnegie Memorial Library after him; it also houses the Southwest Louisiana Genealogical and Historical Library. Lake Charles is also home to Epps Memorial Library in north Lake Charles, and Central Library located off of Ernest Street. The Calcasieu Parish Public Library has thirteen locations throughout Calcasieu Parish.^[35] McNeese State University's Frazar Memorial Library contains over 400,000 volumes.^[36]

Education

Lake Charles' public schools are operated by the Calcasieu Parish Public School System. There are two charter schools, and a number of private schools as well.

Culture

Arts and culture



Historic City Hall Arts and Cultural Center

Lake Charles has a strong Cajun culture because of its location in south Louisiana. The city has its own symphony orchestra, the Lake Charles Symphony. It was founded in 1938 and hosts concerts at the Rosa Hart Theatre,^[37] which has a capacity of over 2,000.^[38]

Lake Charles is home to a number of museums and art galleries. The largest, *Imperial Calcasieu Museum*, features a permanent historic exhibit with artifacts and an art gallery.^[39] Its grounds are home to the Sallier oak tree, which is around 400 years old.^[40] The *Historic City Hall Arts and Cultural Center* is used as exhibition space; moving art exhibits are displayed at this public art gallery each month.^[41] It also hosts the Charlestown Farmers' Market, which provides a venue for local farmers and merchants to sell goods.^[42]

The USS Orleck Naval Museum, a naval destroyer from 1945, is open for public tours as a veterans memorial and museum.^[43]

The *Central School Arts and Humanities Center*, located in the historic Charpentier District, is owned by the city. Charpentier is French for carpenter, a reference to the carpenter-architects who built the Victorian-style homes. Central School features the Black Heritage Art Gallery, which is on the Louisiana African American Heritage Trail^[44] as well as the *Mardi Gras Museum of Imperial Calcasieu*, which features extravagant costumes and an interactive float. It has the largest collection of Mardi Gras memorabilia in the South.^[45] Other studios and cultural activities include the Art Associates Gallery, Studio 347 Gallery, the Lake Charles Symphony, and the Lake Charles Community Band.

McNeese State University annually produces the Banners Series, a series of various musical and theatrical performances. Banners also hosts lectures and presentations from notable persons and academics. Local theaters include the Lake Charles Little Theatre, the Artists Civic Theatre and Studio (ACTS), and the Children's Theatre.

Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras in Lake Charles has a long history dating back to 1882, when Momus, King of Mardi Gras, landed his royal yacht at the foot of Pujoe Street downtown. Throughout the two World Wars, Mardi Gras was downsized which led to a lack of participation by the area's youth. However, an interest to redevelop the festivities arose, and the first Mardi Gras Ball in Lake Charles was staged in 1964. The full revival of Mardi Gras in Lake Charles was not realized until 1979, when several Krewe captains formed the "Krewe of Krewes", with the primary purpose of parading and promoting Mardi Gras for local residents. In 1985, *Mardi Gras of Imperial Calcasieu, Inc.* was formed by a group of civic-minded volunteers to further aid in the preservation of this festival.^[46] Mardi Gras in Lake Charles regularly draws in crowds of 150,000.



Mardi Gras parade in downtown Lake Charles.

Contraband Days

Many festivals are held at the Civic Center. The most popular, Contraband Days, is hosted on the Civic Center grounds and lakefront. Contraband Days is a twelve-day annual festival held during the first two weeks of May. The celebrations are filled with savory Cajun food, family

fun, and live entertainment, including several national acts. The festival is regularly attended by more than 200,000 people, making it one of the largest celebrations in Louisiana. In a reference to the legends of piracy on the lake and Contraband Bayou, the festival begins when the pirate Jean Lafitte^[8] and his crew capture the city and force the mayor to walk the plank.

Cultural events

Some of the city's cultural events include the Martin Luther King Festival, Livestock Show & Rodeo, Black Heritage Festival, Garden Festival, Palm Sunday Tour of Homes, Downtown at Sundown, Memorial Day Avenue of Flags, Crawfish Festival, Asian/American Culturefest, Cajun French Music & Food Festival, Marshland Festival, Gatorman Triathlon, Music & Food Festival, Arts Fest, and Riverside Fall Festival.^{[47][48][49][50]}

Sports and recreation



Cowboy Stadium

Lake Charles is home to the McNeese Cowboys, whose football team hosts games at Cowboy Stadium which has a seating capacity of 17,410.^[51] Burton Coliseum hosts the Cowboys' basketball teams. Golf is popular at the city's Mallard Cove Golf Course. Other golf courses include Gray Plantation Golf Course, Lake Charles Country Club Golf Course, the Contraband Bayou Golf Club, and the Country Club at Golden Nugget. Gray Plantation Golf Course is

featured on Louisiana's Audubon Golf Trail.^[52] The city has 31 parks, many of which include playground equipment, athletic facilities, and walking paths.^[53] Shiver-Me-Timbers Millenium Park, located downtown, was built entirely by volunteers in 2000. Adventure Cove, a state-of-the-art park, was also built by volunteers, and is specifically designed for handicapped children.^[54] The South Lake Charles Little League has had nationally-winning teams televised on ESPN. Hunting and fishing are popular with both residents and visitors to the Lake Area.^[55] An All-American Road, the Creole Nature Trail - *Louisiana's Outback* - brings tourists to Lake Charles and throughout Southwest Louisiana.



Mardi Gras Museum of Imperial Calcasieu



Lake Charles Boardwalk

Government and politics

The City of Lake Charles is governed by a mayor-council form of government. The elected officials include the Mayor, the Clerk of Court, and seven City Council members. Each council member represents a particular district within the city limits. One council member is elected president and presides over each meeting. The mayor serves a four-year term. The current mayor is Randy Roach, a Democrat who has served since 2000.^[56] The city attorney is appointed by the mayor.

The Lake Charles Police Department provides law enforcement and protection for the city. The Police Chief is appointed for a six-year term,^[57] and the Fire Chief is appointed as well.^[58] The Lake Charles Fire Department consists of eight fire stations with fifteen fire companies.^[59] McNeese State University also has its own security, the McNeese Police Department.^[60]



Lake Charles City Court

The Lake Charles City Court's jurisdiction covers all within the city limits as well as Ward 3 in Calcasieu Parish.^[61] The Fourteenth Judicial District Court, located in downtown Lake Charles, covers Calcasieu Parish and includes nine judges who preside over family, juvenile, civil, and criminal trials.^[62] Lake Charles is home to a United States District Court, located downtown.^[63] The Third Circuit Court of Appeals is headquartered in the city.^[64]

Lake Charles is served by Charles Boustany of Louisiana's 3rd congressional district. Much of the city is represented by Senator Ronnie Johns of District 27 in the Louisiana State Senate; however, Dan Morrish's District 25 includes some neighborhoods of south Lake Charles.

Media

Print

The most widely distributed, daily newspaper is *The American Press*. Other popular periodicals include *Lagniappe Magazine*, *The Jambalaya News*, *Gumbeaux Magazine*, and *Thrive Magazine*. *The Contraband* is McNeese State University's student newspaper.

Television

Major television network affiliates include KPLC an (NBC) affiliate, KLTL a (PBS) affiliate, and KVHP a (Fox) affiliate, and KFAM-CD a independent religious channel.

Radio

KRLR, KBAN, KTSR, KHLA, KPPM-LP, KYKZ, KNGT, KELB-LP, KKGB, KBIU, KZWA, KJMH, KJEF, KEZM, KAOK, KLCL, KXZZ, KBYS, KYBG, KSMB, KAJN-FM, KQLK, KYLC, KRVS, W252AQ, KLCJ

Infrastructure

Transportation

The city's streets are laid out primarily in a grid pattern. Interstate 10 passes through Lake Charles, connecting the city with Houston to the west and New Orleans to the east. The Calcasieu River Bridge crosses the Calcasieu River and part of lake. Featuring decorative guns on the railing, it is 135 feet (41 m) high. About 50,000 vehicles pass over it daily.^[65] Despite its age of over 50 years, it is considered safe by the Louisiana DOTD.^[66]

Interstate 210 is an interstate highway bypass that loops through the southern portion of the city. The curving Israel LaFleur Bridge goes over the Calcasieu Ship Channel. This bridge has a 96% rating even after withstanding recent hurricanes. The loop has served Lake Charles commuters for 40 years, and carries about 40,000 vehicles per day.^[67]

Other major highways include U.S. Highway 90, which runs parallel with Interstate 10, and U.S. Highway 171, which connects the city to the north with Moss Bluff, DeRidder, and Shreveport. Highway 165, which runs northeast to Alexandria terminates at Highway 90 just a few miles east of the city. Louisiana Highway 14 ends at a junction with Highway 90, and runs south then east of the city.



Israel LaFleur Bridge



Interstate 10 crossing the Calcasieu River Bridge between Lake Charles and Westlake

Airports

Lake Charles is served by two airports. Lake Charles Regional Airport,^[68] located south of the city, provides commercial airline service to Houston and Dallas. Chennault International Airport,^[69] while a fully operational airport, is an industrial and maintenance center. The latter airport, a former Strategic Air

Command US Air Force base during the Cold War, is named for Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault, the aviator famous for commanding the Flying Tigers fighter group during World War II.

Seaports

The Port of Lake Charles is the thirteenth-busiest seaport in the United States, the fourth-largest liner service seaport in the U.S. Gulf, and a major West Gulf container load center. The City Docks in Lake Charles are the main hub of shipping activity.^[70] The Calcasieu Ship Channel provides direct access to the Gulf of Mexico 34 miles (55 km) downstream. The ship channel, which has a projected depth of 40 feet (12 m) and a bottom width of 400 feet (120 m), intersects the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway just north of Calcasieu Lake.^[71]



Lake Charles Regional Airport terminal

Public transportation

Lake Charles Transit, the city's bus system, provides five routes throughout the city.^[72] It has one Greyhound bus station, and the Amtrak station serves the Sunset Limited train route.

Utilities

Electrical needs are provided by the energy company Entergy. The city provides drinking water and sewage service to residents within city limits. Water is treated at six water treatment facilities in the city.^[73]

Healthcare and medicine

Lake Charles is served by four hospitals: Christus St. Patrick Hospital, Lake Charles Memorial Hospital, Lake Area Medical Center, and Lake Charles Memorial Hospital for Women. Many specialized doctors' offices and medical clinics are located along Dr. Michael E. DeBakey Drive, named after the world-renowned surgeon who was born and raised in Lake Charles.

Religion

Christianity is the predominant religion in the Lake Area. Roman Catholicism is the largest individual denomination, claiming about 50% of the population. Lake Charles is also home to various Protestant Christian denominations, the largest being the Southern Baptist congregation with 30%.^[74] There is a ward of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Lake Charles. There are also religious communities from other faiths such as Islam and Judaism.

Cultural references

- The musical *Caroline, or Change* by Tony Kushner, which was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Musical in 2004, is set in Lake Charles.
- Tony Kushner, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *Angels in America*, grew up in Lake Charles.^[75]

- Lake Charles is mentioned in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. After leaving Sal Paradise in Mexico, Dean Moriarty's car breaks down in Lake Charles.

Music

Lake Charles is the setting and title of a song by Lucinda Williams (a Lake Charles native) on her album *Car Wheels on a Gravel Road*.

- It is mentioned in the lyrics of the song *Continental Trailways Blues* by Steve Earle.
- It is mentioned in Robbie Robertson's lyrics of the song "Up on Cripple Creek" by The Band, sung by Levon Helm:

"When I get off of this mountain, you know where I want to go?
Straight down the Mississippi river to the Gulf of Mexico
To Lake Charles, Louisiana, little Bessie, girl that I once knew ..."

Films

Lake Charles is featured or mentioned in *The Drowning Pool*, *The Beyond*, *A Taste of Louisiana with Chef John Folse & Co.*, *Passion Fish*, *Good Eats*, *UFC 22: There Can Be Only One Champion*, *UFC 24: First Defense*, *Blue Vinyl*,^[76] *Little Chenier*, *Mercy*,^[77] *Split Ends*, *All Over But to Cry*, *Film Hustle*, and *Good Boy*.^{[78][79]}

Sister cities

-  Sioux City, Iowa (1995)^[80]
-  Perpignan, France (1993)^[81]
-  Cobh, Ireland (2008)

See also

- List of people from Lake Charles, Louisiana

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External links

- City of Lake Charles official website (<http://www.cityoflakecharles.com>)

Wikimedia Commons has

- Tourist information on Lake Charles (<http://www.visitlakecharles.org/>)
- LakeCharles.com - community website (<http://www.lakecharles.com/>)
- Lake Charles - Calendar of Events (<http://www.lakecharlesforum.com/index.php?app=calendar>)
- SWLA Chamber-Economic Development Alliance (<http://www.allianceswla.org/>)



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