



Step-On Tour Guides: Creole Nature Trail All-American Road

The Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) is responsible for bringing motor coach tours to our Southwest Louisiana. One of the premier attractions that we tout that they experience is the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road which is (one of only 43 designated All-American Roads in the USA).

Requirements: Knowledgeable and loves to share this knowledge; Ok with speaking in front of a group; Ability to schedule in advance; Available; and Reliable.

If you love to talk to people, are into nature and the great outdoors (birdwatching, fishing, hunting, crabbing, nature photography, etc.) and appreciate the great culture and history of the Southwest Louisiana area, you should consider being a Creole Nature Trail step-on guide for the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau!!

If so, please contact Jamey Kadhim, Group Services Coordinator the with Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau at 337-436-9588 or jkadhim@visitlakecharles.org.

Step-On Guides: In order to ensure that motor coach tours have a full and rich experience the CVB often contracts step-on guides for these tours. Step-on guides are people who step-on to the motor coach and take over the tour, for a set period of time, to provide the kind of information, local knowledge, that the tour escort (who is with the tour from start to finish whether that be 7 days or 30) with the tour cannot provide.

The role of a Step-On Guide is to join a group at a designated location and "step on" the coach to provide guided commentary of the sights, locations, and history of a local place, in this case, the Creole Nature Trail. They then leave the group and the company and tour escort continues on with its itinerary.

Step-On Guides enhance the groups visit to our destination by sharing their expertise, anecdotes, facts and so much more. Essentially, a local perspective providing unique insight on our scenic wonders, coastal splendors, history and culture.

Step-on Guide Training: Our staff help train the potential step-on guide, who already has a working knowledge of the Creole Nature Trail and area's history, culture and flora/fauna, by both taking them on the tour to "shadow" as well as providing numerous resources of information to them such as the script for the Creole Nature Trail personal tour app (yes, we have an app....it's free, available in six languages and, once downloaded, uses just your gps on your device to play audio/video content about the Creole Nature Trail), the Creole Nature Trail brochure, birding guide, etc.

How are step-on guides booked: In Southwest Louisiana, step-on guides for motor coach books are booked thru the CVB. The CVB typically books step-on guides for each tour at least two months in advance of the actual tour date but this can often be longer so you have plenty of advance notice. The CVBs group services coordinator handles all such bookings and also provides the step-on guide with the itinerary and route. The CVB will also re-confirm with the step-on guide a couple of days before the actual tour.

Pay: Step-on guide services are paid by the tour company but these funds are run thru the CVB in order to ensure that guides are paid promptly. Currently, step-on guides are paid \$60 for a tour of less than 4 hours and \$120 for a tour of 4-6 hours. Step-on guide complete a w-9 for the CVB and receive a 1099 form from the CVB if they earn over \$600 during the calendar year.

Example Creole Nature Trail Step-On Guide Itineraries:

Example 1:

8:15 a.m. Creole Nature Trail Tour Guide arrives at group's hotel and boards their motor coach for tour
8:30 a.m. Group departs host hotel for Creole Nature Trail All-American Road tour
9:15 a.m. Group arrives at the Cameron Prairie Visitor Center.
The Cameron Prairie Visitors Center contains state-of-the-art exhibits to learn first-hand about the wildlife and culture of Southwest Louisiana as well as two over marsh boardwalks to view wildlife.
9:50 a.m. Group departs Cameron Prairie Visitors Center for Pintail Wildlife Drive & Boardwalk.
10:00 a.m. Group arrives at Pintail Wildlife Drive & Boardwalk.
Make sure your cameras are ready! Notice the alligators hanging out in the canals, or sunning on the banks. Have your birding guide handy ready to reference a diverse array of waterfowl and birds. Optional: Stop at boardwalk at half mile loop over marsh boardwalk.
10:45 a.m. Group departs Pintail Wildlife Drive & Boardwalk for Rutherford Beach.
11:05 a.m. Group arrives Rutherford Beach for shelling, pics and touching your toes in the Gulf of Mexico
Part of 26 miles of accessible Gulf beaches perfect for picnicking, swimming, shelling or surf fishing.
11:45 a.m. Group departs to return guide to host hotel
12:30 p.m. Group drops off guide at host hotel and proceeds to Seafood Palace, 2218 Enterprise Blvd. Lake Charles, LA 70601, 337-433-9293 for lunch

Example 2:

8:15 a.m. Tour Guide arrives at hotel.
8:30 a.m. Group departs host hotel for the Creole Nature Trail Tour.
9:10 a.m. Group arrives at the Cameron Prairie Visitor Center.
10:00 a.m. Group departs Cameron Prairie Visitors Center for Pintail Wildlife Drive & Boardwalk.
10:05 a.m. Group arrives at Pintail Wildlife Drive & Boardwalk.
11:00 a.m. Group departs Pintail Wildlife Drive & Boardwalk for box lunch at Jetty Pier Park.
11:30 a.m. Group arrives at Jetty Pier Park for boxed lunch and viewing (step-on guide lunch included with group)
12:15 p.m. Group departs park to continue Creole Nature Trail Tour.
12:25 p.m. Group arrives at Cameron Ferry.
1:25 p.m. Group arrives at Holly Beach.
2:15 p.m. Group departs beach for Wetland Walkway.
2:45 p.m. Group departs walkway for host hotel
3:45 p.m. Arrive host hotel/step-on guide departs

Here are some *great ways to improve your tour guide skills*:

1) Know your audience: A good tour guide will learn about visitors between stops and use visitor and universally relevant information to make examples more personal as well as help them have the best experience during their tour and stay.

2) Manage the group: When dealing with a group of tourists whether it be a large or small group, management skills are very important. As a guide you must:

- Be well organized and prepared for the group you will guide
- Watch the group as you are talking to them. Did they seem interested and engaged? Terrific. Are their eyes glazing over or are they checking their phones? Might be time to move to a different topic that seems to peak the groups interest.
- Make sure everyone can see, hear well, and understand so the information you are presenting is received and no one is left out
- Assure visitors safe passage by being aware of all surroundings and the best ways to take advantage of the terrain free from danger
- Handle unexpected situations such as medical attention if someone gets hurt or if there is a conflict within the group