

UNIQUE DELTA TOUR

By Susan Whitesell Photos by Doris Noriega

Think you know the Delta? Think again. If you enjoy local wineries, history, breathtaking scenery of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Rivers, or just like to soak up the quirky ambiance that is the Delta, jump on board a Delta Heartbeat tour. Wine taste at boutique wineries, sample the best ice cream on the Delta, explore prohibition era hotels or contemplate stunning religious statues at dusk in quiet solitude. In short, take a Delta Heartbeat tour and fall in love again with the Delta.



In existence about two years, Delta Heartbeat Tours is headquartered in Walnut Grove. Owner and tour guide Barbara Daly is an engaging combination of historian, Delta advocate, storyteller and tourism cheer leader. The customized tour described in this article begins

in Rio Vista, taking a circuitous route through nine legacy towns.

First stop is the Dutra Museum in Rio Vista, where Barbara launches into the significance of clamshell dredging to the evolution of the Delta. She's quick to point out several other points of interest and to extol the wonderful restaurants in town such as Foster's and The Point.



Bing Kong Tong Society Building in Isleton.

Founded in 1874 by Josiah Pool, nearby Isleton has many preserved 19th-century era storefronts along its main street, some of which show distinct Chinese influences. Chinese began immigrating to Isleton around 1875, and at its peak, the Chinese section of the city had about 1,500 people. A little known fact, Delta levees were actually designed by highly experienced Chinese, not American, engineers. Isleton was the "Asparagus Capital of the World" in the early 1900s

with many canneries. The town hosts a Cajun Festival every Father's Day weekend.

The Ryde Hotel, built in 1927 at the peak of prohibition, complete with an underground levee tunnel used to smuggle illegal alcohol, was frequented by film stars such as Cary Grant and Elizabeth Taylor.

Veering onto Highway 220, the Grand Island Mission and former Beaver Union Elementary School, is being renovated into a retreat and Christian conference center.

Boarding the J Mack Ferry, Barbara discusses how Steamboat Slough was a six hour short cut for Forty-niners traveling from San Francisco, eager to reach gold fields near Sacramento and how Delta towns emerged as a result of their trek north. She



A scenic slough on the Delta.

describes the Sacramento River during the Gold Rush as "The Interstate 5 of California."

Next, the tour stops at the stately Grand Island Mansion and then meanders

past quaint homes and miles of pear trees swathed in brilliant yellows, oranges and reds. Here, Delta farmers are attracting tourism such as farm stays. At Steamboat Landing across from the Steamboat Slough Bridge on Sutter Island, tourists soak up attractive grounds, a barn sporting pear shaped door handles and tin can wall plugs, and soon, a new restaurant.

Once over the Steamboat Slough Bridge at Steamboat Acres, the tour pauses where the slough diverges from the Sacramento River.



The barn at Steamboat Landing.

Crossing the Paintersville Bridge, Barbara points out pear packing sheds and pear farms owned by multi-generational farming families.

Near Hood Barbara stops at the River Road Vintners & Brewery Exchange/Antique shop, formerly a cold storage produce facility, and discusses its planned

Continued on next page.

UNIQUE DELTA TOUR (CONTINUED)

renovation to an open air market, shops and wine tasting and how ventures such as this attract tourism. Pear orchards transition to vineyards.



Tour operator Barbara Daly at Husick's BBQ in Clarksburg.

Elk Slough near Clarksburg is one of the last remaining natural sloughs in the Delta. Continuing on county roads, the tour stops at the tranquil Bogle Vineyard and Wine Tasting facility then continues to Husick's BBQ Proper and Taphouse, which

oozes country charm and good eats. Homey commentary continues about people and points of interest as the tour explores the quaint town of Clarksburg and then passes the attractive Heringer Estates Family Vineyards and Winery.

Along Clarksburg Road, the tour dallies at the new and delightful Julietta Winery and grounds. Continuing on to the Old Sugar Mill, wine tastings beckon at several tasting rooms representing local wineries. Continuing north past the Dinky Diner, "The best burger on the Delta," the tour stops at the charming Miner's Leap Winery, noting the great atmosphere for outdoor wine tasting.



Historic Imperial Theatre/Iron Works in Walnut Grove.

Evident throughout the tour is Barbara's passion to save the Delta and its way of life. In addition to her business, she is an Action Committee Member of North Delta C.A.R.E.S., a grass roots organization working to ensure the Delta community is considered in all public plans and opposing Governor Jerry Brown's twin tunnels initiative. Reaching Freeport and the Intake Facility there, she expresses her concern about the two additional proposed intake facilities in Locke and Walnut Grove with planned capacities 50 times greater than this one in Freeport.



Our Lady of Chau Son Monastery.

Freeport got its name when clever farmers and miners requested merchandise drop off south of Sacramento at the "free port," thus avoiding the Sacramento levee taxes. After lunch at Mi Pueblo Mexican Restaurant

in Freeport, the tour turns south past Scribner Bend Vineyards, Crystal Brook Winery and R. Kelley Farms, then lingers in front of the romantic pink Victorian Rosebud Ranch, which lights up at the holidays like a "fairy tale."

The tour meanders through Courtland, once the "Pear Capital of the World." The town still holds the Pear Fair on the last Sunday in July. The tour continues on to



Ning Hou Fine Art Gallery in Locke.

Locke, the only remaining authentic Chinese village in the United States. The town is celebrating its 100 year anniversary and houses various art galleries, a Chinese medicine shop, five different museums and other points of interest. At the confluence of the Sacramento River and Georgiana Slough, Barbara points out the two possible intake sites and how their construction will disrupt the beauty and way of life for these bucolic towns.

Heading into Walnut Grove, the tour passes charming shops, galleries, restaurants, Iron Works and the Miyazaki Bath House and Gallery, the only remaining and functioning historical Japanese bath house in the country. Established in 1850, Walnut Grove is one of the earliest settlements along the Sacramento River and has the distinction of being the only river town to occupy both the east and west riverbanks.

The final stop is the little known Our Lady of Chau Son Monastery, run by Cistercian monks from Vietnam, where you can walk through the Stations of the Cross at sunset and marvel at one last gem in the Delta, a place of community, history and nature.

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