

## The Nottoway Plantation, Restaurant, and Inn: The White Castle of Louisiana

In early 1994, Faye Russell, marketing director, and Cindy Hidalgo, general manager, considered the future of Nottoway Plantation of White Castle, Louisiana. Nottoway, which was listed in the *National Registry of Historic Places*, was an enterprise in the hospitality industry, attracting visitors to tour the mansion that contained many original furnishings. In addition to tours, the plantation offered overnight accommodations, dining and banquet facilities, and a gift shop. Nottoway competed with several other plantations for tourist trade along the Mississippi River, seven of which provided similar tours and elegant bed-and-breakfast facilities.

Although Cindy and Faye felt that Nottoway was operating “in the black,” they thought they were missing an opportunity; tour groups visited the plantation homes, but stayed overnight in the nearby cities of Port Allen or Baton Rouge in a Holiday Inn or similar facility. Couldn’t Nottoway expand its facilities to provide enough overnight accommodations for bus tours and other groups?

### BACKGROUND

Nottoway plantation home, constructed in 1859, was the largest existing Southern antebellum residence in 1994. John Hampden Randolph, the son of a prominent man from Nottoway County, Virginia, built Nottoway plantation to house his growing family. Randolph, who left Virginia in 1841, was an

enterprising businessman. He first settled in Woodville, Mississippi. Six years later he moved to Iberville Parish, Louisiana, where he built a sugar empire on the Mississippi River. A series of expansions resulted in a plantation of over 7,000 acres. The crown jewel of the plantation was the magnificent home Randolph built for his wife, Emily, and their four sons and seven daughters, six of whom would later marry there. The complete home consisted of a 53,000 square foot, 64-room mansion surrounded by graceful grounds, including formal gardens, a carriage house, and a caretaker’s cottage (20 years older than the mansion itself). Nottoway was a gem of Italianate and Greek Revival style. The mansion reflected the splendor, luxury, and innovation of its time, featuring coal fireplaces, gas lighting, and indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water.

As Union troops approached during the Civil War, Randolph, who never officially declared allegiance to the Confederacy, left Nottoway for Texas, taking his slaves. During his exile, his wife remained at Nottoway. Despite a shelling from a gunboat on the Mississippi, the plantation home was spared from total destruction by a Union officer who had been a guest of the Randolphs. However, Mrs. Randolph did endure a three-week encampment by Union troops.

Randolph died in 1883 at age 70. Mrs. Randolph continued to run the plantation until she auctioned it for \$100,000 in 1889.

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This case was prepared by Caroline M. Fisher, Loyola University New Orleans, and Claire Anderson, Old Dominion University. This case was originally presented at the annual conference of the North American Case Research Association. Management cooperated in the field research for this case, which was written solely for the purpose of class discussion. All events and individuals are real, but financial data has been disguised at the request of the organization. The authors thank Brandi Abraham, Tricia Bollinger, and Jason Murphy for their assistance in collecting information for this case. Copyright (c) 1996 by the *Case Research Journal* and Caroline M. Fisher and Claire Anderson. It is reprinted here by permission.

## RESTORATION

Nottoway remained in private use until 1980, when Arlin Dease purchased and restored it. As part of the purchase agreement, the prior owner negotiated the rights to continue to live in a suite in the mansion until her death; she was still living there in 1994. In 1981, Dease opened the plantation to the public for the first time in its 122-year history. In 1985, Paul Ramsay of Sydney, Australia, acquired the property and continued the restoration.

Ramsay grew up in Australia. After attending a university for a year, he left school to join his father in a series of real estate ventures. Over the years, he acquired many different types of real estate, and by 1985 he had become a wealthy man. He also owned a large health care company in New Orleans, which included a medical center. By 1995, he was highly respected in the health care community, and had received an honorary doctorate in mental health from Louisiana State University.

Ramsay bought Nottoway, a small investment by his standards, with plans to restore and expand it. As general manager of Nottoway, Ramsay brought in Cindy Hidalgo, who had been assistant administrator of the medical center owned by Ramsay for the prior three years. They both felt that the transition from managing the medical center to managing Nottoway would be easy. Hidalgo perceived the two operations to be “very similar” since both were service organizations and offered gift shops, food service, and overnight accommodations. Together Ramsay and Hidalgo made significant changes in both the physical plant and the operations of the plantation.

First, they constructed a new building to house a gift shop and restrooms. Previously, the only gift shop was operated by the former owner in a small room on the first floor of the plantation home itself, where it was frequently missed by visitors. The new building, which was strategically placed between the parking area and the mansion, provided greater space for display of the gift inventory.

To further encourage its use, Cindy decided to sell tickets for the mansion tours in the gift shop.

The new building also served as a gathering area for tour groups at both the beginning and the end of their visits.

Another significant change was the upgrading of the menu offered at the restaurant. Under the prior management, the restaurant offered three menu choices at both lunch and dinner: chicken, shrimp, or jambalaya. Cindy hired an executive chef John Percle, away from a competitive plantation, and brought in the chef’s wife, Terry Percle, to manage the restaurant. Under their management, the restaurant flourished and developed an outstanding reputation for fine food and service.

## TOURISM IN LOUISIANA

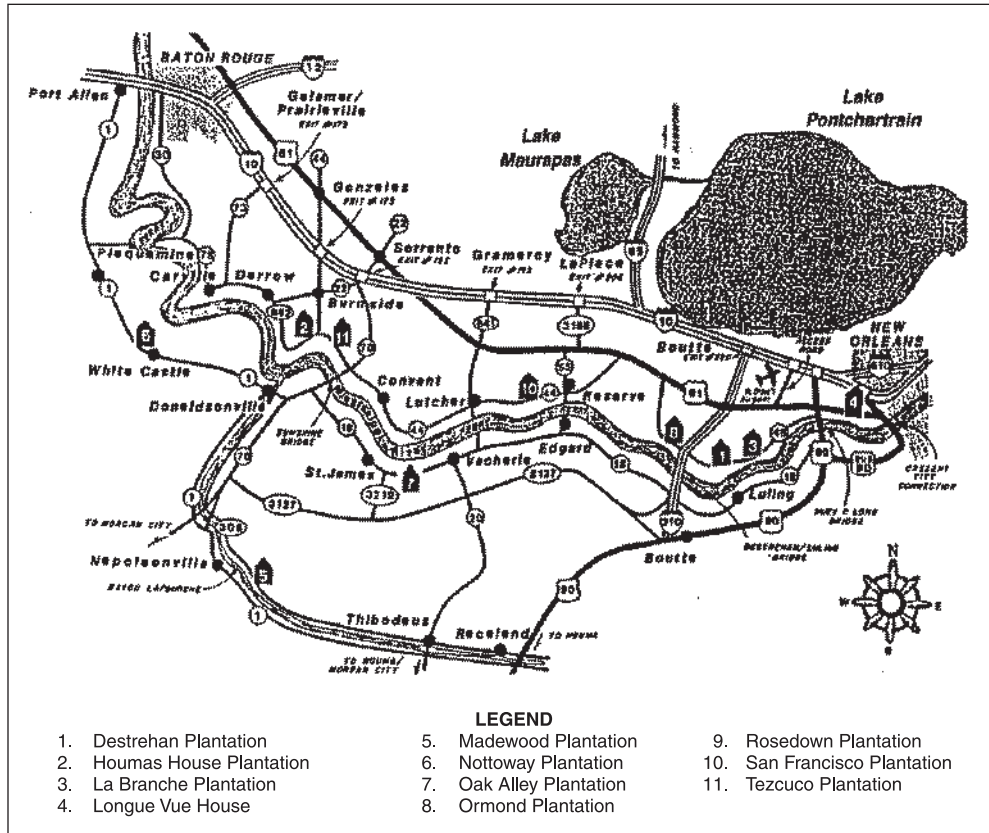
The state of Louisiana had suffered severely from the oil-patch depression of the 1980s; the economic downturn continued well into the 1990s. One industry that withstood the spillover effects from the oil industry was tourism. While New Orleans was a well-established international attraction, Louisiana conducted a nationwide media promotion in the 1980s and 1990s to lure additional leisure trade to the rest of the state with appeal to such attractions as Cajun cuisine and the “Bayou lifestyle.”

The heart of tourism in Louisiana in the 1990s remained New Orleans. Over 7.6 million visitors flocked to New Orleans in 1992, attracted by its charm, its festivals, and its superior convention facilities. October through May was the peak time for conventions, but individual tourists, combined with a smaller number of conference attendees, kept the city busy throughout the year.

For the visitor satiated with the attractions of downtown New Orleans, an alternative side trip was to visit the nostalgic, historic plantations along the “mighty Mississippi.” A number of antebellum homes competed for the tourist trade through tours and overnight accommodations. (See **Exhibit 1** for a listing and a map of the major plantation homes near New Orleans.)

Visits to these plantations required special efforts. Tourists who owned or rented a car had to

EXHIBIT 1  
 Map of Plantations in Southeast Louisiana



plan their excursions carefully. The plantations were not located near expressways, and required considerable backroads driving. A map, like that shown in Exhibit 1, was a necessity. For tourists without their own transportation, organized tours were the only way they could get to the plantation homes.

A visitor could obtain specific information about the plantation tours in two basic ways. First, the tourist might contact a travel agent either specifically inquiring about a plantation visit or wanting general information on the attractions available in the New Orleans area. The travel agent would then provide information and make reservations for the

tourist. Second, upon arriving in New Orleans, the visitor might pick up information on the plantation tours from a hotel concierge or a tourism office. They could then contact the tour agencies directly to make reservations.

The 1994 New Orleans Yellow Pages contained 40 listings under the "tour" category, and another four listings under limousines mentioned plantation tours. Most of those offering tours were small local organizations that contracted with groups which wanted to offer tours to their members. Convention organizers who wanted to include plantation tours among the activity choices for

attendees were important customers. Two organizations offered regularly scheduled tours which individuals could join. New Orleans Tours offered two half-day plantation tours seven days a week. These \$24 bus tours visited the Destrehan, Ormond, and San Francisco plantations. While capacity on the bus was 49, the tours averaged about 35 people, with the number varying depending on the convention activity in New Orleans.

Grayline Tours offered two different plantation tours. The first, an all-day tour, cost \$35 and visited Nottoway Plantation and Houmas House. The second was a half-day tour for \$27 to Oak Alley Plantation. The full-day tour ran three days a week; the half-day tour ran four days. Both operated all year. Bus capacity was 43 passengers.

#### NOTTOWAY PLANTATION, 1994

Nottoway was located 18 miles (about 30 minutes) south of Baton Rouge and 69 miles (approximately 1.5 hours) from New Orleans. Facilities were open daily all year, with the exception of Christmas Day.

Plantation tours provided Nottoway's prime source of profit. Other sources were its elegant dining, overnight accommodations, and gift purchases. (See Exhibits 2, 3, and 4 for financial data.) Exhibit 5 shows a diagram of the facilities.

#### Tours

Nottoway was open for public viewing with guided tours available from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. seven days a week. Evening candlelight tours required reservations. The guided tour lasted 45 minutes.

Visitors entered the mansion, just as in John Randolph's time, through immense 11-foot doors into a spacious entrance hall with a 16-foot-high ceiling. Looking at Nottoway's original intricate lacy plaster friezework, hand-painted Dresden porcelain doorknobs, and hand-carved marble mantels, visitors could sense the splendor of a bygone era in the old South. The grand white ballroom and dining room, which contained a 17-foot-long American Empire table with Chippendale chairs, attested to

#### EXHIBIT 2 NOTTOWAY PLANTATION

*Budget July 1, 1993-June 30, 1994  
(Dollar Figures in Thousands)*

<b>Revenues</b>	
Rooms	\$ 439
Tours	\$ 742
Restaurant	\$ 964
Gift Shop	\$ 373
Total Revenues	<u>\$2,518</u>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Rooms	
Salaries	\$ 38
Housekeeping	\$ 56
Other	\$ 52
Total Rooms	<u>\$ 146</u>
Tours	
Salaries	\$ 64
Landscaping	<u>\$ 5</u>
Total Tours	<u>\$ 69</u>
Restaurant	
Salaries	\$ 279
Food	\$ 231
Liquor	\$ 32
Linen	\$ 29
Other	\$ 26
Total Restaurant	<u>\$ 597</u>
Gift Shop	<u>\$ 249</u>
Overhead	
Administrative Salaries	\$ 164
Maintenance Salaries	\$ 74
Advertising	\$ 62
Insurance	\$ 120
Credit Card	\$ 25
Property Tax	\$ 25
Security	\$ 29
Benefits	\$ 86
Utilities	\$ 69
Maintenance	\$ 38
Other	\$ 76
Total Overhead	<u>\$ 768</u>
Total Expenses	<u>\$1,829</u>

Source: Nottoway Plantation.

**EXHIBIT 3**  
**NOTTOWAY PLANTATION**

*Income Statement*  
 Year Ending June 30  
 (Dollar Figures in Thousands)

	1994	1993
<b>Income</b>		
Restaurant	\$ 852	\$ 844
Guest Rooms	\$ 410	\$ 405
Tours	\$ 648	\$ 740
Gift Shop	\$ 316	\$ 351
Revenue from Operations	\$2,226	\$2,340
Other Income	\$ 9	\$ 45
Total Income	\$2,235	\$2,385
<b>Expenses</b>		
Cost of Sales	\$ 455	\$ 471
Operating Expenses	\$1,994	\$1,929
Total Expenses	\$2,449	\$2,400
Net Gain (Loss) before Taxes	(\$214)	(\$15)
<b>Income Taxes</b>		
Current	\$ 31	\$ 37
Deferred	\$ 31	\$ 38
Net	\$ 0	(\$1)
Net Gain (Loss)	(\$214)	(\$14)

Source: Nottoway Plantation.

Randolph's commitment to opulence. Most of the mansion's furnishings were authentic period pieces, many of them original pieces that Arlin Dease had retrieved from around the country.

**Accommodations**

The Nottoway Plantation Restaurant and Inn offered accommodations in the mansion itself and in the overseer's cottage (circa 1839). The visitor could choose among six rooms and three suites in the mansion and four rooms in the overseer's cottage. Guest rooms were individually decorated with period

**EXHIBIT 4**  
**NOTTOWAY PLANTATION**

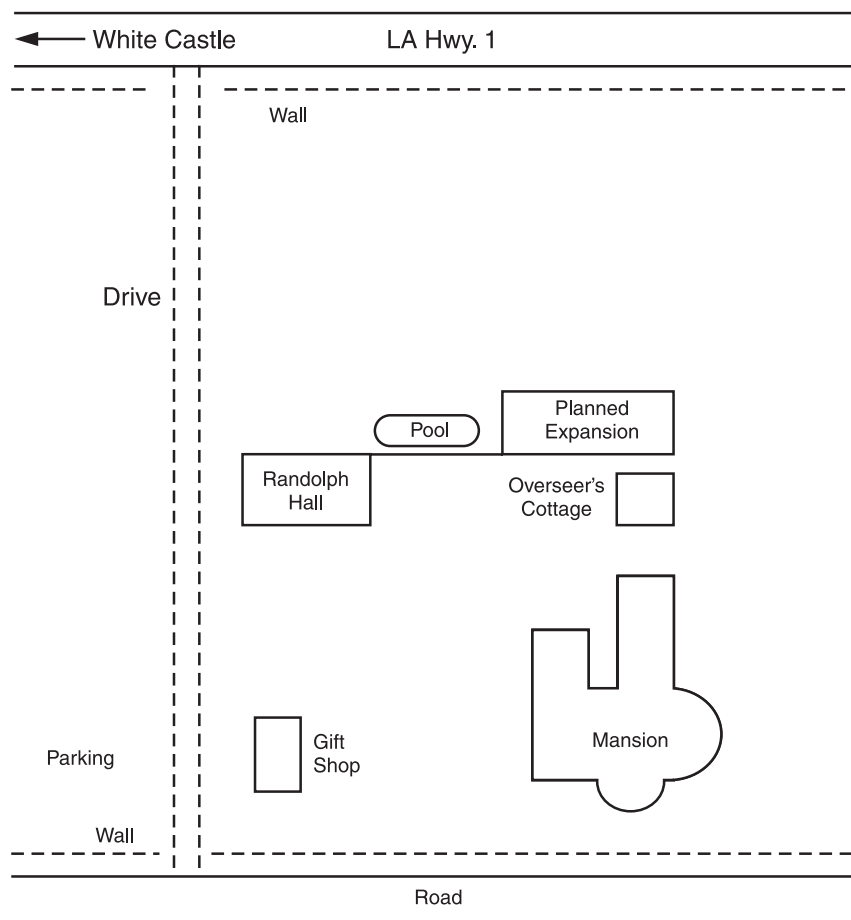
*Balance Sheet*  
 Year Ending June 30  
 (Dollar Amounts in Thousands)

	1994	1993
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash	\$ 399	\$ 348
Accounts Receivable—Trade	\$ 41	\$ 71
Accounts Receivable—Insurance	\$ 0	\$ 79
Inventory	\$ 130	\$ 128
Prepaid Insurance	\$ 33	\$ 27
Total Current Assets	\$ 603	\$ 653
Buildings	\$3,595	\$3,559
Building Improvements	\$ 424	\$ 413
Furniture and Fixtures	\$ 323	\$ 302
Automobiles	\$ 12	\$ 27
Accumulated Depreciation	(\$1,013)	(\$ 893)
Net	\$3,341	\$3,408
Land	\$ 323	\$ 323
Restricted Cash	\$ 7	\$ 7
Deferred Income Tax	\$ 69	\$ 38
Other Assets	\$ 3	\$ 0
Total Noncurrent Assets	\$3,743	\$3,776
Total Assets	\$4,346	\$4,429
<b>Liabilities and Stockholders' Equity</b>		
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts Payable—Trade	\$ 52	\$ 50
Accounts Payable—Affiliates	\$ 150	\$ 83
Room Deposits/Gift Certs.	\$ 59	\$ 52
Notes Payable—Affiliates	\$3,660	\$3,406
Income Tax Payable	\$ 21	\$ 35
Other Accrued Liabilities	\$ 100	\$ 114
Notes Payable with 1 Year*	\$ 797	\$ 172
Total Current Liabilities	\$4,839	\$3,912
Notes Payable Over 1 Year	\$ 0	\$ 797
Total Liabilities	\$4,839	\$4,709
<b>Stockholders' Equity</b>		
Common Stock (100 Shares @\$1)	\$ 0	\$ 0
Additional Paid in Capital	\$ 445	\$ 445
Accumulated Deficit	(\$ 938)	(\$ 725)
Total Net Equity	(\$ 493)	(\$ 280)
Total Equity and Liabilities	\$4,346	\$4,429

\*Represents money owned to Paul Ramsay which will be rolled over.

Source: Nottoway Plantation.

**EXHIBIT 5**  
*Nottoway Plantation Ground and Facilities*



furnishings, each unique. (Exhibit 6 describes these rooms and their rates.)

Room rates included sherry (champagne in the bridal suite), a tour of the mansion, an in-room wake-up breakfast, and a full plantation breakfast served on the veranda. The plantation breakfast consisted of "pain perdu" (French toast), eggs, ham or sausage, grits, toast, and fresh fruit.

Swimming and tennis facilities were available. Nightly room prices ranged from \$95 to \$175 for a single; \$125 to \$175, double; and \$155 to \$190, triple. Suites ranged from \$200 to \$250.

#### *Dining and Banquet Facilities*

Randolph Hall, a 300-seat dining facility, provided on-site dining services, and was also available for banquets and receptions. Other banquet facilities included the Magnolia and the Camellia Rooms on the ground floor of the mansion, which seated 50 and 20 respectively. Randolph Hall was open for lunch 11 A.M. to 3 P.M., and dinner, 6 P.M. to 9 P.M. Reservations were recommended for dinner.

The cuisine included Cajun and other traditional local dishes. Among the specialties were alligator



**EXHIBIT 6*****Nottoway's Rooms and Rates***

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All rooms include sherry, tour of the mansion, full plantation breakfast, and use of the pool. Rates are effective January 1, 1992 and do not include 7.66 percent tax.

**Mansion and Wings**

- Room 1\* Cornelia's Bedroom: Third floor of mansion overlooking the river, mahogany four poster double bed and three-quarter day bed. \$175 single or double; \$190 triple.
- Room 2\* Third floor of mansion, mahogany half-tester double bed and three-quarter day bed, view of the gardens from the veranda. \$175 single or double; \$190 triple.
- Room 3\* Second floor of boy's wing, queen size bed with canopy, view of the gardens from the veranda. \$95 single, \$135 double.
- Room 4\* Second floor of boy's wing, antique brass double bed, view of the gardens from the veranda. \$95 single, \$135 double.
- Room 5\* Ground floor of girl's wing, antique double sleigh bed. \$95 single, \$135 double.
- Room 6\* Ground floor of girl's wing, antique walnut double bed, twin day bed. \$95 single, \$135 double, \$155 triple.

**Overseer's Cottage (Circa 1839)**

- Room 7\* Ground floor of cottage, antique brass queen bed, twin day bed, view of duck pond. \$95 single, \$135 double, \$155 triple.
- Room 8\* Ground floor of cottage, antique brass queen bed, three-quarter day bed, view of patio with fountain. \$95 single, \$135 double, \$155 triple.
- Room 9\* Second floor of cottage, antique brass queen bed, three-quarter day bed, view of duck pond, private veranda. \$95 single, \$135 double, \$155 triple.
- Room 10\* Second floor of cottage, rosewood double bed, overlooks patio and pond, private veranda. \$95 single, \$135 double.

**Suites**

- Master Bedroom† Third floor of mansion, only bedroom furniture original to Nottoway, rosewood half-tester double bed, twin bed in sitting room. Room is on tour. \$200 single or double, \$215 triple.
- Randolph Suite† Third floor of mansion, wicker morning room, four poster double bed, overlooks the river. Room is on tour. \$200 single or double.
- Bridal Suite† Ground floor of boy's wing, three-room suite with half-tester canopy queen bed, parlor, wet bar, sleeper sofa, jacuzzi, and private pool. \$250 single, double, or triple.

\*Check in: 2:30 P.M.; check out: 11:00 A.M.

†Check in: 5:00 P.M.; check out: 9:00 A.M.

sauce picante, medallions of veal, prime rib, homemade gumbo, and a "Cajun two-step: a levee of jambalaya surrounded by a river of shrimp creole."

Dining was leisurely and elegant. Guests sat on hand-carved mahogany chairs, and light was provided by crystal and bronze chandeliers. A regular pianist performed on a hand-carved concert grand piano produced by Webber of London in 1896.

***Other Offerings***

Hidalgo offered a variety of other activities at Nottoway to attract and satisfy visitors and supplement revenues. After the guided tour, besides enjoying a meal at the restaurant, visitors could stroll on the levee (the protective barrier between the Mississippi River and the plantation grounds), picnic on the grounds, or visit the gift shop. The

gift shop offered antique accessories, Louisiana specialty foods, books, and other fine gifts.

To attract visitors other than tourists, the facilities were available for receptions, dinner parties, banquets, business meetings, or other special events. Weddings were performed in the Ballroom followed by a reception in the mansion or Randolph Hall.

## ORGANIZATION

When Cindy Hidalgo was hired as general manager in 1985, she was 27 years old with an accounting degree, a start on an MBA, and three years of management experience. She did not become a CPA because she “felt that it would be a waste of time to study for the exam” while she could be concentrating on climbing the corporate ladder. Her goal for Nottoway was continual improvement. Ramsay essentially left the running of Nottoway to Hidalgo, visiting four to six times a year for reports.

Hidalgo directed a staff of five: an assistant manager/marketing director, Faye Russell; a restaurant manager, Terry Percle; an executive chef John Percle; a maintenance engineer, Randy LaPrairie; and a gift shop manager, Susan Rockforte, who also acted as bookkeeper. Three others reported to the marketing director: a house manager who was responsible for tours, a housekeeping supervisor, and a sales manager. Assistant restaurant managers (*maître d’s*), reporting to the restaurant manager, supervised the bellmen and the wait, banquet, and service staff.

Faye Russell, the assistant manager and marketing director, had been with Nottoway since 1987. She came to Nottoway with a degree in communications and 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years of experience with the Louisiana Office of Tourism. Her experience in the destination marketing field included meeting and convention planning, managing special projects and trade shows, and developing brochures.

The administrative offices were housed in the attic of the overseer’s cottage above the two floors of rooms rented to the public for overnight accommodations. The offices were cramped, with Cindy

sharing one office with the reservationist, files, and a microwave oven. Faye shared the other office with the sales manager and another salesperson. In total, Nottoway employed 85 people in the restaurant, gift shop, and mansion.

## OPERATIONS

Like much of the hospitality trade, Nottoway’s business was seasonal, reflecting the locale’s tropical climate. (Although the home was not air-conditioned, it did benefit from breezes which came in through large windows.) Room occupancy ranged from less than 45 percent in January up to 90 percent in the peak months. (See **Exhibit 7**.) Tours, accommodations, and the gift shop experienced peak months in March through May; January was the slowest month. Exhibit 7 shows projected visitors by month. In addition to the March through May peak, the dining facilities also enjoyed a second peak in October. The dining business, and the tours, died off in January.

The largest revenue producer was the restaurant. Lunch and special events (weddings, receptions, and business meetings) made up most of its income; dinner accounted for only a small portion, mostly generated by overnight guests. Tours were the second most important source of revenue. Budgets were determined from historical data and conventions scheduled for the coming year in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. (Exhibit 2 shows the budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1994, and Exhibits 3 and 4 provide financial statements.)

## COMPETITION

Several historic Louisiana plantations, inns, or cottages vied for the bed-and-breakfast trade. The famous Oak Alley Plantation of Vacherie (just outside New Orleans) featured overnight cottages on its grounds, which included a quarter-mile alley of 28 sheltering oaks that were over 250 years old. Rosedown Plantation in St. Francisville included magnificent formal gardens. Tezcuco in Burnside offered bed and breakfast in one two-bedroom



## EXHIBIT 7

*Nottoway Plantation—Projected Visitors by Month, 1994*

	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Dec.</i>	<i>Jan.</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>March</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>Total</i>
Tours (Number of People)													
Group	2150	2330	3020	5550	4000	2600	1550	2950	4250	5400	6100	2700	42600
Individual	7850	7450	4825	6050	5350	4950	3725	5000	7800	7675	7550	6250	74475
Candlelight	75	250	50	450	300	600	50	200	200	500	600	350	3625
Weddings	50	200	0	200	200	0	150	0	0	100	350	100	1350
Total	10125	10230	7895	12250	9850	8150	5475	8150	12250	13675	14600	9400	122050
Weddings (Number of Guests)	50	200	0	200	200	0	150	0	0	100	350	100	1350
Rooms (Number Rented)	260	285	230	330	300	200	175	200	330	345	350	275	3280
Meals (Number Served)													
Lunches	3275	3050	3250	4350	3550	3600	1900	3200	4500	5100	5300	3475	44550
Dinners	750	620	550	700	700	850	450	600	750	700	800	700	8170
Functions	300	400	400	450	525	1000	175	600	400	900	800	500	6450
Weddings	50	200	0	200	200	0	150	0	0	50	400	100	1350
Total	4375	4270	4200	5700	4975	5450	2675	4400	5650	6750	7300	4775	60520

Source: Nottoway Plantation.

suite in the main house or one of ten cottages on the plantation estate, which also included a chapel, blacksmith shop, museum, and gazebo. (**Exhibit 8** lists the major competitors and their features.)

Cindy and Faye considered the competition to be a challenge. While the elegance of the mansion

itself was a distinctive feature, the two women also tried to provide first-class service. For example, weddings were limited to no more than one a day, even on Saturday, to make the wedding party feel that they were special, that this was their “mansion” for the day.

## EXHIBIT 8

### *Major Competitors*

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**Destrehan Plantation.** Destrehan is the oldest plantation in the Mississippi valley, originally constructed in 1787. Tours daily 9:30–4:00. Nominal admission fee. Group tours welcome, gift shop. Closed holidays. 22 miles from New Orleans.

**Houmas House.** Houmas House is one of Louisiana’s most imposing Greek Revival plantation homes; known for its distinctive three-story spiral staircase. Tours with costumed guides 10:00–5:00. Fee: \$6.50 adults, \$3.25 children, \$4.50 13–17 years. Special arrangements for large groups. Gift shop. 60 miles from New Orleans.

**La Branche Plantation Dependency House.** La Branche Plantation is known for its exceptional display of Federal woodwork and its rarity as a plantation dependency. Grounds tour includes slave quarters, gazebo, restaurant, and more. Fee: \$5 adults, \$3 children, \$4 seniors. Open all days except major holidays, 10:00–4:00. 20 miles from New Orleans.

**Longue Vue House and Gardens.** Greek Revival style mansion, original furnishings, 8-acre garden, changing exhibits. Self-guided tour of gardens. Guided tour of the house. Fee: \$6 adults, \$3 children, \$5.40 seniors. Open Mon.–Sat. 10:00–4:30, Sun. 1:00–5:00. Closed major holidays. In New Orleans.

**Madewood Plantation.** Magnificent 1846 Greek Revival style home with period furnishings. Group lunches and dinners can be arranged. Overnight guests sleep in canopied beds and dine by candlelight in formal family dining room. Scheduled tours. Fee: \$5 adults, \$3 children, \$3.50 seniors. Open 10:00–4:30 daily; closed Thanksgiving and Christmas. 72 miles from New Orleans.

**Nottoway Plantation.** Largest plantation home in the South. Daily tours, gift shop, weddings, award-winning

restaurant serving lunch and dinner. Fee: \$8 adults, \$3 children, \$8 seniors. Group rates available. Open 9:00–5:00 daily except Christmas day. 69 miles from New Orleans.

**Oak Alley Plantation.** Antebellum home and grounds famous for its alley of 28 evenly spaced live oaks. Overnight cottages. Scheduled tours. Fee: \$6.50 adults, \$3.50 13–18 years, \$2 6–12 years. Group rates available. Open 9:00–5:30 daily. 60 miles from New Orleans.

**Ormond Plantation.** Colonial plantation furnished with various periods of antique furniture. Available for private parties. Scheduled tours. Fee: \$5 adults, \$2.50 children, \$4 seniors. Group rates available. Dining on-site. Overnight accommodations. 23 miles from New Orleans.

**Rosedown Plantation Home and Gardens.** Antebellum home restored to museum quality with original furnishings and 28 acres of formal gardens. Scheduled tours 9:00–5:00. Fee: \$9 adults, \$4 children. 110 miles from New Orleans.

**San Francisco Plantation.** One of the most elaborate homes of the period. Guided tours daily 10:00–4:00. Fee: \$6.50 adults, \$2.50 6–11 years, \$3.75 12–17 years. Group rates available, gift shop. Closed main holidays. 45 miles from New Orleans.

**Tezcuco Plantation.** One of the last plantations built before the Civil War in 1856, Tezcuco is a Greek Revival style raised cottage. Tours daily 9:00–5:00. Closed major holidays. Fee: \$5.50 adults, \$2.75 children, \$4.50 seniors and teens. Group rates available; bed and breakfast cottages. Antique and gift shop. Restaurant open daily 8:30–3:00. 60 miles from New Orleans.

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Similarly, they wanted all of their guests to feel special, even those receiving a discount as part of a tour group. "I tell my people that there are no second-class citizens at Nottoway, even though they aren't paying full price," declared Cindy.

## MARKETING

Cindy and Faye were concerned with Nottoway's ability to serve the tourism market, their main source of guests. "We're looking at where we want to go to fully serve our clients," stated Cindy. "We want to provide a well-rounded, balanced product. Currently, we can't fully service motor coaches or business groups."

Faye had no data concerning the source of individual visitors (local, out of state, etc.) or how visitors learned of Nottoway, but she believed that most people learned about the plantation directly from prior visitors. They did know, however, that slightly over 96 percent of tour visitors were adults. The majority came by private automobile, although all the major tour lines offered trips to Nottoway. Grayline, the prime tour line that brought visitors to Nottoway, offered the only regularly scheduled tour which included the plantation. Grayline's tour was offered three times a week.

Walk-in guests, including both tourists and people who worked in the area, made up approximately 65 percent of the luncheon trade; tour groups accounted for the remainder. Special event promotions for holiday meals such as Easter Sunday and Thanksgiving dinners were directed at local residents, who were also thought to be a significant part of the lunch and dinner trade.

Promotion was primarily aimed directly at the end consumer, although Nottoway was also promoted to tour operators. Advertising budgets were \$59,000, \$61,000, \$73,000, \$55,000 and \$62,000 for fiscal years ending June 1990 through June 1994, respectively (exclusive of salaries and travel). These costs included advertisements in local media such as *New Orleans Magazine*, the *Baton Rouge State-Times/Morning Advocate*, the *Acadiana Dining*

*Guide*, *LeGuide-What's Happening in Acadiana*, and various American Automobile Association publications. The Nottoway plantation was listed in the promotional materials of the Greater New Orleans Tourist Commission; national publications such as *The Annual Directory of American Bed & Breakfasts* and the *Christian Bed & Breakfast Directory*; and books such as *Plantation Homes of Louisiana and Natchez Area* (David King Gleason, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Brochures were provided to all New Orleans hotels and tourism offices.

Advertising materials billed Nottoway as "The largest plantation home in the South!" The message in the print media was one of refinement and elegance. Print advertisements appealed to customers to "step back in time and marvel at how the ravages of war and time could not mar the beauty of the White Castle of Louisiana-Nottoway." Another suggested "19th Century charm and elegance for all bridal celebrations," offering bridal luncheons, honeymoon accommodations, rehearsal dinners, weddings, and receptions.

## FUTURE PLANS

Cindy and Faye realized that tour operators represented an essentially untapped market for Nottoway. While many groups stopped to tour the mansion, few actually dined at Nottoway or stayed overnight. Most group tours required significantly more rooms, usually 22 to 24 rooms to handle 44 to 46 passengers, than were available at Nottoway or any one plantation for overnight accommodations. "We just can't service the motor coaches with our current facilities," stated Cindy in frustration.

Other groups required larger facilities as well. "Why just last week I had to turn away three reservations from groups who needed rooms for 40 people," noted the reservationist.

Small business meetings were one other type of group needing more rooms. "We're in the middle of the oil industry; they are our potential clients too. They look for facilities for housing visitors

and conducting off-site meetings and retreats," Faye stated.

One option that they were considering was to add another building on the mansion grounds that would provide 22 to 28 additional units. Construction costs typically ranged from \$30,000 to \$50,000 per room, according to industry statistics. They felt that they needed to make some strategic decisions before they could present their idea to the owner, Paul Ramsay. Faye and Cindy investigated small hotels that serviced motor coaches and business meetings, and found that most of the rooms in these hotels had two queen-sized beds, and a few had king-sized beds.

A motel-quality building would be the lowest-cost alternative. The units could be rented slightly below the low end of their current rate schedule to the general public, and at even lower rates to the tour operators. Many tour operators were looking for discounts and lower room rates; Faye thought they might need to offer tour operators rates in the \$50 to \$70 range to attract any significant business away from similar facilities in nearby cities.

To stay with something closer to their current type of accommodations would require considerably more capital; based on some preliminary discussions with an architect, Cindy estimated a cost of

\$1.5 million. just obtaining period furniture would be very expensive, and they didn't know if they could attract tour operators if they charged even the low end of the current rate structure.

The additional building could also house office space and "meeting rooms designed to be meeting rooms." With the existing facilities, meetings had to be held in Randolph Hall or in rooms in the basement of the mansion. Neither option was fully satisfactory to Faye and Cindy.

While the grounds surrounding the mansion were spacious, the most likely place to build the additional rooms was on the far side of the pool from the mansion, running from Randolph Hall to the pond. Initial consultations with an architect suggested that three connected buildings could easily house the needed rooms.

Cindy and Faye wanted to develop a marketing strategy and plan for the additional rooms that they could present to Ramsay. They did not want to destroy the image of Nottoway in the process of trying to create additional business. Could they develop a reasonable plan to add rooms? What sort of rate structure would be needed to cover the costs? Were they missing some alternative way to increase revenues? The challenge of developing a workable plan excited them.