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### Drinking Down Kentucky's Bourbon Trail

by Kenny Gallo



For those imbibers looking for something a little stiffer than a wine tasting tour, consider a sipping trip to The Bluegrass State where bourbon whiskey and hospitality are as Kentuckian as The Derby and Louisville Slugger. If you didn't know already, Kentucky is Bourbon Country. Numbers don't lie. More than 95 percent of the world's bourbon whiskey is made in Kentucky<sup>1</sup> and its Bourbon Trail is home to many of the world's finest bourbon makers: Jim Beam, Wild Turkey, Maker's Mark, Bulleit, and Evan Williams, to name a few. Getting thirsty? If whiskey and boozy Americana wet your whistle, touring the historic distilleries on the Bourbon Trail might be in your best interest.

#### Brief History

The Bourbon Trail, a moniker bestowed on the area by the Kentucky Distillers' Association in 1999, has its deep roots in Kentucky's Bourbon County, where as early as the 1800s bourbon whiskey's distilling and distribution process was being shaped and shipped by enterprising entrepreneurs up the Ohio River. Way back yonder, THAT whiskey became known as Bourbon whiskey. That is, whiskey from Bourbon County. (It's been disputed that the actual term "Bourbon whiskey" originated in New Orleans on "Bourbon Street").<sup>2</sup>

#### Planning Your Trip



The distilleries that make up the official Bourbon Trail lie between Louisville and Lexington and points south. A good plan would be to start in one or the other. Major airports make both cities easily accessible with many of the distilleries off of Route 65 (from Louisville) and the Bluegrass Parkway and Route 64 (from Lexington). The Bluegrass Parkway and Route 65 connect in Elizabethtown, which is 50 miles south of Louisville. (Check out this detailed map on [kybourbontrail.com](#) to get the big picture).

Depending on how much time you want to spend with your whiskey, it may be worth your while to turn a day-trip into an extended stay. You certainly don't need to visit every distillery, but with some creative planning and a GPS, you could tame the trail. California's Napa Valley may have its rolling hills and vineyards, but a gander out the car window in Bourbon Country is just as majestic with its horse farms and captivating calmness.

#### Where to Stay in Louisville and Lexington



You can find decent deals in both Louisville and Lexington at local chain hotels, but if you wanted to have an altogether authentic experience on your trip try the historic [Brown Hotel](#) or unique [21c Museum Hotel](#) in Louisville (a hotel in Museum in one). In Lexington, check out the [Gratz Park Inn](#), a cozy boutique hotel downtown. Before a trip down the trail of whiskey, it would also be a good idea to enjoy Kentucky's Native Cocktail, the mint julep. In Louisville, [Proof on Main](#) and [The Silver Dollar](#) make the meanest mjs around, in Lexington you can't go wrong at the [Bluegrass Tavern](#), which also stocks over 200 Kentucky bourbons for your drinking pleasure.<sup>3</sup>

#### B&Bs Off the Grid

If you're interested in snoozing along the way, perhaps a Bourbon themed Bed and Breakfast is your speed. The historic [Bourbon Manor Bed and Breakfast Inn](#) in Bardstown (near Heaven Hill Distilleries and Bourbon Heritage Center) features a wild bourbon bar, tapas lounge and day spa. [Historic Beaumont Inn](#) in Haroldsburg (nearest to Wild Turkey) offers first class dining and a superior bourbon bar, [The Old Owl Tavern](#), where they have festive bourbon tasting four times a week!

#### Bourbon Trail Distilleries

Double check the below distillery addresses, operating times, and tour schedules before you go. Most distilleries have gift shops, cafes, museums, or other historical tidbits to bide the time.

**Evan Williams Bourbon Experience**  
528 West Main Street  
Downtown Louisville, KY 40202  
[evanwilliams.com](#)

**The Bulleit Frontier Whiskey Experience at Stitzel-Weller**  
3860 Fitzgerald Road  
Louisville, KY 40216  
[bulleit.com](#)

**Jim Beam American Stillhouse**  
526 Happy Hollow Road  
Clermont, KY 40110  
(26 miles from Louisville)  
[jimbeam.com](#)

**Heaven Hill Distilleries (Bourbon Heritage Center)**  
1311 Gilkey Run Road  
Bardstown, KY  
(42 miles from Louisville)  
[bourbonheritagecenter.com](#)

**Makers Mark**  
3350 Burks Spring Road  
Loretto, KY 40037  
(60 miles from Louisville, 65 miles from Lexington)  
[makersmark.com](#)

**Wild Turkey Distillery**  
1417 Versailles RD  
Lawrenceburg, KY 40342  
(20 miles from Lexington)  
[wildturkeybourbon.com](#)

**Four Roses Distillery**  
1224 Bonds Mill Road  
Lawrenceburg, KY 40342  
(25 miles from Lexington)  
[fourrosesbourbon.com](#)

**Woodford Reserve Distillery**  
7855 McCracken Pike  
Versailles, KY 40383  
(20 miles from Lexington)  
[woodfordreserve.com](#)

**Town Branch Bourbon (Alltech Lexington Brewing and Distilling)**  
401 Cross Street  
Lexington, KY 40508  
[kentuckyale.com](#)

#### Bourbon 101

Don't get caught in whiskey no-man's land whatever you do. A friendly spirited spirit conversation may turn ugly if you're bourbon ignorant. Ok, maybe not. It does get complicated though depending whom you chat with. Not knowing the difference between rye, bourbon, and scotch whiskey, or whiskey and whisky (there isn't one), is not a sin.

Before you hit the distilleries on your tasting tour, you should at least know this: all bourbon is whiskey, but not all whiskey is bourbon. Bourbon whiskey, in order to earn its name, is generally American produced, contains 51% corn, and is aged in new oak charred barrels (where it gets its color from).<sup>4</sup> Your tour guides will certainly not be shy about dishing out the skinny on their bourbons.

Remember to savor the flavor and be safe in your bourbon tasting sojourn by taking Allianz Travel Insurance with you. Happy whiskey tasting!

*Kenny Gallo is a writer living in Richmond, VA.*

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#### Citations

1. KentuckyTourism.com
2. SmithsonianMagazine.com
3. GoBourbon.com
4. CNBC.com

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