

Bourbon, Bluegrass and Horse Country

Tennessee - Kentucky - Ohio - Indiana



Nashville, Tennessee

Start off your trip in Nashville, Tennessee, with a tour of Ryman Auditorium. A historical marker by the Tennessee Historical Commission notates the Ryman Auditorium as the “Birthplace of Bluegrass.” This auditorium was the site of Bill Monroe’s 1945 performance, a performance that became what we now know as bluegrass. Bill Monroe is the father of bluegrass and his performance here with the Blue Grass Boys was a monumental moment for the genre of bluegrass and music as a whole.

Nashville has many places to hear bluegrass music while you are in town. Ryman Auditorium hosts “Bluegrass Nights” every summer and Friends of Warner Parks has “Full Moon Pickin’ Parties” throughout the year. Or, head to the Station Inn, an intimate venue that has played host to some major musical talent. Pair your musical experiences with a tour of Nelson’s Green Brier Distillery. Learn about the distillery’s German founder and taste some of the hand-crafted Tennessee whiskey. *Accommodation: Nashville, Tennessee*

Nashville, Tennessee, to Tullahoma, Tennessee

Depart Nashville, and drive for one-and-a-half hours to your first stop, the Jack Daniel's Distillery in Lynchburg. Select a tour that fits your taste and then explore the town. Lynchburg is a small town that is big on hospitality. Don't pass up the chance to eat down-home cooking at Miss Mary Bobo's Boarding House and Restaurant or to see memorabilia at the Lynchburg Hardware General Store.

On your way to Tullahoma, take a half-hour detour to Short Springs Natural Area. Lush scenery and lively waterfalls make this a great spot to stretch your legs and get some photos. From Short Springs Natural Area, drive for 10 minutes to Tullahoma, where it's time to visit another distillery. Cascade Hollow Distilling Co. is where George Dickel Tennessee Whiskey is handmade by a small team. Tour the distillery and learn the history of this Tennessee brand.
Accommodation: Tullahoma, Tennessee



Tullahoma, Tennessee, to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

Drive three hours to Knoxville, Tennessee, where you can stop by the Knoxville Visitor Center and watch a live radio performance. The WDVX Blue Plate Special is always free and has broadcast everything from blues and bluegrass to Celtic and funk.

From Knoxville, drive an hour to Pigeon Forge, the home of Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country, an Appalachian-inspired theme park founded by singer and songwriter Dolly Parton. The park holds music-centered events throughout the year and dinner shows that showcase horses and country music. Bluegrass musicians also play some of the genre's most well-known tunes at the park's Showstreet Gazebo. If you visit during the holiday season, don't pass up the Christmas in the Smokies Bluegrass Festival. Bluegrass musicians pack the schedule and the town is fully decorated for the holidays.

Accommodation: Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

Renfro Valley, Mount Vernon, Kentucky



Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, to Lexington, Kentucky

Bluegrass and bourbon are both inextricably tied to the land. As you head north into Kentucky, explore the natural beauty that inspired bluegrass musicians with a detour through the Daniel Boone National Forest. Then, drive two-and-a-half hours to Mount Vernon, Kentucky. The Kentucky Music Hall of Fame and Museum recognizes Kentucky natives who have made a significant contribution to the music industry. There are more than 50 inductees, representing bluegrass, country and other genres of music. Inductees include Boots Randolph, Dwight Yoakam, Wynonna and Naomi Judd, Crystal Gayle, Ricky Skaggs, Loretta Lynn and Rosemary Clooney. Go even deeper into the heart of the Kentucky bluegrass to learn about racing champions. Drive an hour north from Mount Vernon to Kentucky's horse capital, Lexington, where you will spend two days. *Accommodation: Lexington, Kentucky*



Darby Dan Farm, Lexington, Kentucky

Lexington, Kentucky

Start your first full day in Lexington meeting thoroughbred horses at Darley at Jonabell Farm, where Kentucky Derby winning stallions have been bred. Tour the stables and see three Kentucky Derby winners, Nyquist, Animal Kingdom, and Street Sense. Only a couple of minutes away is internationally renowned racecourse, Keeneland. Catch a race or take one of the behind-the-scenes tours of the racetrack and auction house that include the horse barns, winner's circle and auction ring. Wrap up your day with house-smoked barbecue at Blue Door Smokehouse. *Accommodation: Lexington, Kentucky*

Lexington, Kentucky

Continue your journey in horse country at Claiborne Farm, where famed stallion Secretariat lived after retiring from racing. Soak in more than 100 years of thoroughbred racing history and see some of today's champion racehorses in the barn. Then, pay a visit to the cemetery where over 20 champions are buried, including the legendary Secretariat. After paying homage to one of the greatest racehorses of all time, learn about horse racing culture and history at the Kentucky Horse Park. Walk through the hall of champions, see different breeds at the parade of breeds show and take a walking barn tour. *Accommodation: Lexington, Kentucky*

Lexington, Kentucky, to Versailles, Kentucky

Soak in the beauty of horse country on the half-hour drive from Lexington to Versailles. Make a stop at WinStar Farm, a top force for thoroughbred breeding and racing that's home to award-winning stallions. Tour the farm and see the stallion barns and breeding sheds, and learn about the farm's history. If you visit during the spring or summer, you may see young foals in the pastures. Next up in horse country is Lane's End Farm. Meet their thoroughbreds and visit a statue made in honor of A.P. Indy, the Belmont Stakes and Breeders' Cup Classic champion.

All of your travels will have worked up quite an appetite and Kentucky cuisine won't disappoint. Eat lunch at Melissa's Cottage Café and then make the 10-minute drive to Lawrenceburg's Wild Turkey distillery. Situated high above the Kentucky River, this distillery offers spectacular views and premium Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey. Take a tour and watch bourbon poured into hand-crafted oak barrels, then relax and enjoy a tasting of Wild Turkey and Russell's Reserve.

Accommodation: Versailles, Kentucky



Versailles, Kentucky

A half-hour drive outside of Versailles is one of Kentucky's most revered distilleries: Buffalo Trace. This distillery has won more than 500 accolades worldwide and is a National Historic Landmark. Although the distillery offers a selection of different brands, two of the most famous are Buffalo Trace and Van Winkle. Buffalo Trace Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey pays homage to the native buffalo and pioneers. This bourbon whiskey has been made the same way for over 200 years. If there's such a thing as bourbon royalty, it's the Van Winkle line. One of the rarest bourbons there is, there are only around 7,000 cases each year of Pappy Van Winkle. The Buffalo Trace tour includes a history of the distillery as well as a visit to the renowned Blanton's bottling hall to see signature bourbons being bottled. Top off the tour with a tasting of some award-winning whiskeys.

Return to Versailles, and gear up to visit another iconic distillery. The Woodford Reserve distillery is also a National Historic Landmark and one of Kentucky's oldest and smallest distilleries. Take in a panoramic view of the scenic horse country grounds while enjoying a glass of bourbon in the tasting room. Afterwards, indulge in a late lunch at the distillery at Glenn's Creek Café before departing for Ashford Stud farm.

Ashford Stud farm is the U.S. base of Coolmore Stud, the largest thoroughbred racehorse breeding operation in the world. Tours must be pre-booked and are only available at specific times, so plan ahead to see these majestic animals. Behind the historic stone walls is a rich racing legacy that includes some of the most famous stallions in the world like American Pharaoh, Justify and Kentucky Derby winner Fusaichi Pegasus.

Accommodation: Versailles, Kentucky



Versailles, Kentucky, to Cincinnati, Ohio

Take a break from bourbon and drive for two hours to Cincinnati, Ohio. Once there, walk across the “Purple People Bridge,” a pedestrian walkway that connects Cincinnati to Newport, Kentucky. At just over half a mile long, this pedestrian bridge is the longest connector of its kind in the country. The riverfronts of these Ohio and Kentucky cities are linked with options for entertainment, dining, nightlife, festivals, parks and attractions.

Once you’ve settled in, it’s time for a drink. New Riff Distilling offers a range of craft whiskeys. Schedule a guided tour of the distillery and learn about the urban bourbon landscape. Distillery tours begin outside, where you get to see the full height of the 60-foot-tall, 24-inch-diameter copper still, visible through a glass enclosure. Afterward, find a spot at the lobby tasting bar. *Accommodation: Cincinnati, Ohio*

Cincinnati, Ohio, to Indianapolis, Indiana

Immerse yourself further in the new urban craft distillery scene after the two-hour drive from Cincinnati to Indianapolis, Indiana. Start your exploration of the city at 12.05 Distillery, named for the date prohibition was repealed. This small batch distillery uses locally sourced ingredients. Tours are offered on request and include a walk around the distillery, lessons on the basics of distilling and product samples.

Next up on your bourbon trail is West Fork Whiskey Co. Founded by “three ordinary guys from Indianapolis who sought out to make extraordinary whiskey,” this distillery produces spirits in its own fashion with ingredients from Indiana. The facility offers distillery tours, tastings and seasonal hand-crafted cocktails.

Continue your tour at Hotel Tango artisan distillery – the first artisan distillery in Indianapolis since Prohibition. The name comes from the military roots of its founder, Travis Barnes. This distillery is located in the historic Fletcher Place neighborhood of downtown Indianapolis and serves craft cocktails that continue the military theme with names like Bravo Bourbon. The tasting room is a renovated carriage house where you can enjoy a giant stone fireplace in the winter or patios in the summer. Once you’ve had your fill, head to another Fletcher Place neighborhood favorite, Bluebeard, for dinner. *Accommodation: Indianapolis, Indiana*



The Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, Louisville, Kentucky

Indianapolis, Indiana, to Louisville, Kentucky

Drive two hours to the mecca of American horse racing in Louisville, Kentucky. Churchill Downs is the home of the famous Kentucky Derby horse race. Look out for the iconic twin spires that sit atop the grandstands and then head to the Kentucky Derby Museum. The museum preserves the history of the Kentucky Derby with various exhibits, films and photographs. Churchill Downs offers a selection of tours, depending on the time of year and race schedule. You may be able to tour the horse barns, where you can see where Secretariat was housed before his historic victory, the jockey club and the Millionaires Row seating area.

After a day at the track, what's better than some bourbon? The whiskey experience at Stitzel-Weller Distillery is located just 5 miles from downtown Louisville. This historic distillery opened on a derby day in 1935. Home to the Bulleit Bourbon brand, Stitzel-Weller Distillery gives visitors the opportunity to tour the warehouse where the rickhouse barrel storage system was invented in 1879. For dinner, try Doc Crow's, which is located in the historic Whiskey Row of downtown Louisville and blends American southern cuisine and classic Kentucky cooking. And if you haven't had enough Kentucky bourbon, you'll enjoy its large selection. *Accommodation: Louisville, Kentucky*

Louisville, Kentucky, to Owensboro, Kentucky

Drive half-an-hour south to the rolling foothills of Clermont, Kentucky, home of the Jim Beam American Stillhouse. Learn about the bourbons on a complimentary, self-guided walking tour or an in-depth guided tour that covers the entire distilling process. For lunch, grab a meal at bourbon-inspired café, Fred's Smokehouse.

Next up is the Oscar Getz Museum of Whiskey History, a 20-minute drive away. This museum has a collection of rare whiskey artifacts from the pre-colonial period to post-Prohibition days.

View Abraham Lincoln's liquor license, rare antique bottles and a moonshine still. After the museum, drive half-an-hour south to visit the Maker's Mark distillery in Loretto. Considered the oldest working distillery on its original site, the grounds of this distillery are also an arboretum. Tours take guests through the entire bourbon-making process, including the process of hand-dipping each bottle in a signature red wax seal. You can even hand-dip your very own bottle. After enjoying the beautiful grounds and delicious whiskey, drive two-and-a-half hours to Owensboro, Kentucky. *Accommodation: Owensboro, Kentucky*



Owensboro, Kentucky

Get ready for more bluegrass history in Owensboro, home of the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum. Here, you can explore interactive exhibits, posters, costumes, live instrument demonstrations and more. Check the museum's schedule for live music too. Wrap up the day with a visit to the O.Z. Tyler Distillery. The distillery has around 130 years of history in Owensboro where it started as the Green River Distillery.

Accommodation: Owensboro, Kentucky

Owensboro, Kentucky, to Nashville, Tennessee

On your way back to Nashville, drive 45 minutes to Rosine to tour the Bill Monroe Museum, home to the legacy of Bill Monroe, the "father of bluegrass." The museum pays homage to his life and career and Rosine is only a short distance from his birthplace and boyhood home, which you can also tour. Afterward, drive two hours and wrap up your journey back in Nashville, Tennessee. *Accommodation: Nashville, Tennessee*