

Cruising the Kentucky Bourbon Trail

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In Kentucky, bourbon isn't just a drink. It's part of the state's culture and history. The Kentucky Distillers' Association created the Kentucky Bourbon Trail in 1999 to showcase bourbon's heritage. As you hit the road to discover America's only native spirit, you'll get to know the major bourbon brands, sample classic Kentucky cuisine, learn a bit of history, and enjoy miles of scenic rolling hills and bluegrass fields along the drive.

Experience More Than Just Bourbon

Because the distilleries on the trail are located throughout the state, you'll need three or four days to visit them all. If you want to tour additional distilleries that aren't on the official [Kentucky Bourbon Trail](#), then plan even more time.

"Taking the Kentucky Bourbon Trail route allows you to see all of Kentucky," says bourbon expert and Wall Street Journal best-selling book author, [Fred Minnick](#). "It's beautiful country that still has a lot of untouched natural scenery," he adds. And, because Kentucky bourbon always has to go into new charred barrels, you'll see those as part of the landscape, too.



Source : Shutterstock

If you're not a bourbon drinker, but enjoy American history, this tour is still for you. Many distilleries are on old farms that have changed very little since the 1850s, so walking the grounds is like taking a trip back in time.

Navigating the Trail Route

Several tour companies offer structured itineraries to help you discover [Bourbon Country](#), but driving leaves room for leisure, customization, and spontaneity during your trip. Expect most of your driving to be on rural roads with low traffic, although you will make your way through a few cities, such as Louisville.

If you aren't familiar with the tour route and end up lost, don't be afraid to ask for directions. Locals are accustomed to giving directions, given the nearly one million annual bourbon tour takers.

Touring the Distilleries

The 10 stops along the official Kentucky Bourbon Trail are Angel's Envy, Maker's Mark, Bulleit Frontier, Four Roses, Jim Beam, Town Branch, Evan Williams, Heaven Hill, Wild Turkey, and Woodford Reserve. Many of the distilleries along the tour hearken back to the 1800s, but they are also major brands – meaning busy, working businesses.

"You're seeing employees and owners in fully working distilleries making whiskey," says Minnick. You'll tour the facility, look into the distillery's history, and get to touch, feel, and see historic buildings.

Make sure you pick up a [Kentucky Bourbon Trail Passport](#) so you can collect stamps from each distillery along the tour and pick up a complimentary souvenir after your 10th tour.



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Venturing off the Trail

It's easy to expand your route to include sites that aren't on the official tour map, lengthening your journey into a whiskey enthusiast's dream drive. Discover the growing [craft distillery industry](#) by visiting up-and-comers like the Barrel House Distilling Co. in Lexington or Corsair Distillery in Bowling Green. You can spend days in downtown Louisville, following the [Urban Bourbon Trail](#), which consists of well stocked bars, some with over 100 types of bourbon, such as ultra-modern The Bar at Blu and the historic Old Seelbach Bar.

Staying Safe

At the end of each distillery tour, you'll get just a sip of bourbon, not a full shot. "Kentucky distilleries take drinking responsibly seriously," says Minnick. "You'll see signs everywhere for cabs, and distillery and bar workers are formally taught how much to pour." Nevertheless, you do need a designated driver for each day of your tour, and you should identify places where you can get a safe ride should you need one.



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Dining Along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail

One of the best ways to sample Kentucky bourbon is with the state's excellent food. Dining is a major part of the bourbon experience, and you'll run across some of the state's finest food in unexpected places.

"You'll find some of the best country ham in gas stations or small stores along the back roads on route to distilleries," Minnick explains, but there are plenty of upscale offerings too. Here are a few Kentucky must-eats and where to get them.

- **Three-course southern-style breakfast** (featuring bourbon granola) at the Chateau Bourbon bed and breakfast in Prospect
- **Burgoo** (spicy stew with a side of cornbread) at the Old Talbot Tavern in Bardstown
- **Hot brown sandwich** (open-face turkey sandwich topped with bacon and Mornay sauce) at its birthplace, [The Brown Hotel](#) in Louisville
- **Country ham and Swiss sandwich** with house-made bourbon mustard at Wallace Station in Versailles
- **Bourbon maple salmon** at Addie's Restaurant inside the Woodford Inn in Versailles
- World-famous **bourbon truffles** at [Art Eatables](#) in Louisville

What are your favorite stops on – or off – the Kentucky Bourbon Trail? Share them with us on [Twitter](#).

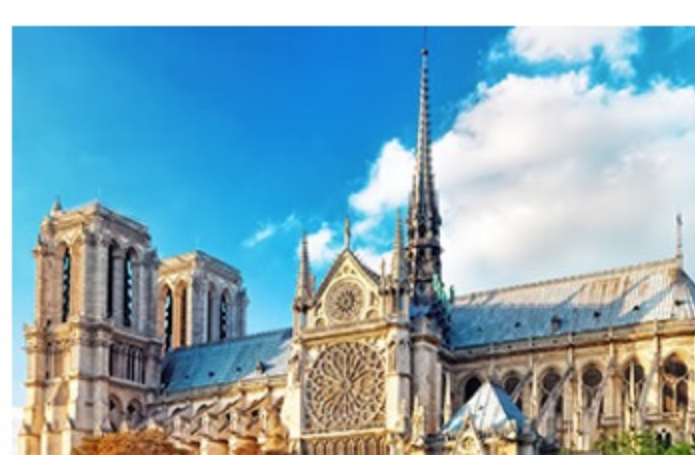
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