

*Kentucky*

# Kentucky

is ready for premier  
meetings and events





Beyond bourbon and horses, the Bluegrass State offers enhanced meeting facilities, culinary creativity and so much more.

**BY BLAIR POTTER**

K

entucky's larger cities such as Louisville and Lexington, as well as northern Kentucky, are well known for hosting meetings and conventions," says Mike Mangiot, commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Tourism. "Each has world-class convention centers, with the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville and the Central Bank Center in Lexington recently undergoing major renovations, as well as a number of new hotels and newly renovated hotel rooms."

The state's proximity to and drivability for a large portion of the U.S. population—a drive of no more than six hours—also makes Kentucky convenient for meeting groups, according to Mona Juett, deputy commissioner for the Kentucky Department of Tourism.

"As our economy and tourism industry rebound, there is a critical need for meetings and conventions to return to bring in more visitors to the commonwealth," she says, noting that in addition to the ability of large cities to host meetings and events, smaller and mid-size cities such as Pikesville, Owensboro and many others also have a lot to offer groups.

### What's new for meetings

Louisville's Whiskey Row entertainment district—which once housed offices and warehouses for the bourbon and tobacco industries in Revivalist- and Chicago School-style buildings—offers restaurants, bars, shops, hotels and more near the KFC Yum! Center. Juett says the district will debut the Cambria Hotel Louisville Downtown in winter 2022 with 128 guest rooms, 2,000 square feet of meeting space and an indoor heated pool.

Shelbyville recently debuted a new conference center central to historic downtown and scenic parks and less than an hour's drive from Louisville and Lexington.

"This state-of-the-art conference and welcome center offers more than 16,000 square feet of space spread over one floor, offering seating for 500 people banquet-style or broken into three smaller rooms, as well as a rentable outdoor patio, an onsite prep kitchen and pre-function space," Juett says.

The Owensboro Convention Center was included in the "30 Centers of Excellence for 2022" list by EXHIBITOR magazine.

### The bourbon experience

Bourbon and horses likely first come to mind when you think of Kentucky. And, in fact, there are many group activities that allow you to capitalize on two of the state's undeniable strengths. But there's so much more to do, from live music to craft beer to chef-driven cuisine to exploring the outdoors. But first, let's talk about bourbon.

"With 95 percent of the world's supply crafted in Kentucky, bourbon is more than a drink here—it's a lifestyle," Juett says. "The bourbon industry is booming right now,



with distilleries expanding production and enhancing visitor experiences."

One popular way to get the real bourbon experience: the Kentucky Bourbon Trail, which starts at Louisville's Frazier Museum and takes you to 18 iconic distilleries for behind-the-scenes tours, meetings with master distillers and tastings of select bourbons that can't be found in stores.

But the trail is just the beginning, Juett says, noting that meeting groups can actually visit more than 65 distilleries across the state. One can't-miss stop is Heaven Hill Distillery, which, as part of a multimillion-dollar renovation, added a two-story wing, expanded the visitor center to approximately 30,000 square

feet and offers three new themed tasting rooms.

"One room pays homage to Prohibition times and John Fitzgerald, another is more rustic and designed to invoke thoughts of Elijah Craig and the third is a new retail area meant to have visitors feeling like they've been invited into the owner's home," Juett says. "A new wing features a new restaurant—the Five Brothers Bar and Kitchen—a lounge-type area and a hands-on experience called 'You Do Bourbon' where guests receive product education before getting to select, fill and label their own bourbon to take home."

### Welcome to horse country

Lexington is the "Horse Capital of the

## Kentucky Meetings Facts

More than 30,000 guest rooms and 1.7 million square feet of convention space.

Modern meeting spaces and amenities along with historic (The Seelbach, The Brown Hotel) and unique boutique (21C) hotels offer a wide range of styles sure to please groups of all sizes.

The Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville covers more than 1.2 million square feet of indoor exhibition space—the sixth-largest facility of its kind in the U.S.

Two international airports: Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International and Muhammad Ali International (Louisville).

World." Shelbyville is the "Saddlebred Capital of the World." Indeed, Kentucky is synonymous with horses—perhaps more so than anyplace else on earth. Groups can experience horse culture for themselves via legendary racing tracks, equestrian activities and picturesque farms.

The wide range of farms includes the 1,200-acre Kentucky Horse Park, billed as the world's only park devoted solely to the relationship between man and horse and featuring 35 different breeds, and Old Friends Retirement Farm, where you can visit pampered retired racehorses and stay at a bed and breakfast surrounded by 52 acres of bluegrass countryside.

"From Keeneland racecourse to Churchill Downs, the Kentucky Horse Park and all the beautiful horse farms in between,

your meeting or convention won't want to miss all the great experiences surrounding our equine industry," Juett says. "Horse Country Inc., through their tours, offers an exclusive glimpse at what goes into breeding, raising, training and caring for these gorgeous horses!"

#### **Culinary variety**

You knew about the bourbon and the horses, but did you know that Kentucky is on the culinary cutting edge? World-class chefs offer farm-to-fork cuisine, sourcing products from local farmers. Be on the lookout for Hot Browns (a hot sandwich with turkey, ham and bacon and creamy Mornay sauce) and bourbon balls (bourbon-soaked pecans, butter and powdered sugar covered in chocolate).

Juett says mixed-use spaces seem to be very popular culinary destinations.

"The long vacant bus terminal, Greyline Station, in Lexington has been transformed into a year-round public marketplace featuring a farmer's market, local restaurants, retail shops, office space and an outdoor entertainment venue," she says. "The \$5 million-plus project involved a complete restoration of the 65,000-square-foot building. A 23,000-square-foot section called the Julietta Market has stalls that entrepreneurs can rent during special events and other times to help serve as a steppingstone to a brick-and-mortar business."

*Learn more from the Kentucky Department of Tourism at [www.kentuckytourism.com](http://www.kentuckytourism.com).*

## **Perfect Adventures, Aboveground and Underground**

**Mona Juett, deputy commissioner for the Kentucky Department of Tourism, offers some insider suggestions for groups visiting the state for meetings and conventions.**

"With it being the International Year of Caves, you'll definitely want to check out Mammoth Cave National Park, which offers extensive underground adventures in the longest cave system on the planet!"

"The Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Owensboro features incredible exhibits tracing the history and influence of bluegrass music and a pickin' parlor where groups can pick up an instrument to play. Groups can also arrange a special bluegrass performance to enjoy while there."

"The Portal 31 Exhibition Mine Tour in the Harlan area takes visitors into the underground world of coal mines and an old mining town. Renfro Valley Entertainment Center, which reopened Nov. 5, is a popular destination for groups to see great musical acts and performances.

"The Kentucky Artisan Center in Berea is a great place for groups, as it features a wide range of Kentucky's outstanding artisan works, as well as a large parking lot, great restroom facilities and a restaurant."

"And, last but not least, Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill near Harrodsburg will take a group back in time as they wander through the 34 original Shaker structures and learn about the spirit of the Kentucky Shakers."



**Mammoth Cave National Park**



**Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame**



**Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill**