

## IDEA GUIDE



## VISITLEX

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# KENTUCKY DERBY TRADITIONS

*Louisville Has the Race,  
But Lexington Has the Reason*

Louisville has the race, but Lexington is the place where Derby dreams originate — and where Derby legacies continue long after the horses have crossed the finish line at Churchill Downs. Those who have been to Louisville's Churchill Downs on the first Saturday in May know that the Kentucky Derby is the "most exciting two minutes in sports." But you haven't really experienced it until you visit Lexington, the Bluegrass city 68 miles east of Louisville.

As the center of the world Thoroughbred horse industry, Lexington is where the world's top racehorses are bred, born, trained, officially registered, bought and sold, retired and buried. And it's been that way since before there even was a Kentucky Derby.

In Lexington and the surrounding Bluegrass region, you can visit previous Derby champions or perhaps catch a glimpse of a future winner on the world's most famous and beautiful horse farms.

You can see firsthand how Thoroughbreds are readied to make their run for glory. Join sheiks, millionaires and royalty at the world's most prestigious horse auctions. See, feel and even taste Derby traditions. And enjoy a special vantage point on America's most famous horse race.

### What about the race?

Many of the Bluegrass traditions that relate to the Kentucky Derby — such as horse farm tours and the Kentucky Horse Park — can be enjoyed throughout the year. The race itself, of course, happens just once a year, always on the first Saturday in May.

If you're planning to attend the race in Louisville, keep in mind that on Derby Day, Louisville's Churchill Downs is packed from the infield to the rafters with an eclectic mass of humanity — usually about 140,000 people. So expect long lines for any endeavor, including just getting to your seat. Actually, unless you are a box-holder or know someone who is, you probably won't have a seat. Most clubhouse and grandstand boxes are renewed from year to year, and the track receives tens of thousands of competing requests for the few that become available each year.

(If you want to try, sign up with Churchill Downs on their website. But don't hold your breath waiting. This is a real longshot.)

For most people, the Derby Day option in Louisville is \$80-per-person general admission. This means standing-room-only near the paddock area or braving the infield. If you are planning to attend the race in Louisville, it's a good idea to check out accommodations in Lexington. You're likely to find more options, and

**Bluegrass Note:** A Derby horse carries with it down the homestretch the hopes and efforts of dozens of people who have been a part of its life: the night watchman at the foaling barn; the stable hand who helped pull the foal; the attendant who led the horse into the sales ring; the groom who feeds and cares for the horse daily; and the exercise rider. The Kentucky horse industry is responsible for nearly 80,000 direct and indirect jobs, from artists to veterinarians.

more reasonable prices — and it's only a little over an hour's interstate drive to Louisville.

## Enjoy the Derby the Bluegrass way.

As an alternative to battling the throngs at Churchill Downs on Derby Day, many locals enjoy attending races earlier in Derby week, and then find a more civilized vantage point for the Run for the Roses.

The world's largest Derby party is at Lexington's famous Keeneland Race Course (4201 Versailles Road, 859-254-3412) and has become a tradition itself. The track's pastoral setting and relaxed atmosphere is a perfect place to enjoy

the race. The betting windows are open, and official souvenir mint julep glasses are available. You can view all the races of the day on monitors indoors, or super large-screen TVs outside. Of course,

**Bluegrass Note:** Although Thoroughbred horse farms are located state-wide, by far the largest concentration—not only in Kentucky, but in the world—is in Lexington and the surrounding Bluegrass counties of Bourbon, Scott, Jessamine and Woodford. The 2015 Kentucky Thoroughbred Farm Directory listed 466 farms in those counties.

you won't see any live horses thunder past, but then, neither do a lot of the people at that other track on the first Saturday in May.

Spread a picnic blanket in the paddock or walking ring and enjoy barbecue or chicken from the outdoor grills. Or, if picnicing is not your style, tables can be reserved in one of the dining rooms or at the Keeneland Entertainment Center, where many partygoers dress their tables with elaborate decorations.

A great outing for the whole family, Derby Day at Keeneland has popcorn and special activities for the kids, a hat contest for the adults and live music for everybody throughout the day.

You might want to participate in the late-morning handicapping seminar before you lay down your bet on the big race. Experts will teach you the science, or art, of picking a winner. If all you need is a place to bet on the race, try out a unique wagering experience --

Keeneland offers "drive-through" betting on Derby Day.

## And how about a Derby Day celebration with the Governor?

No matter how late you party Derby Eve, you'll want to get up in time for the first race — and maybe even earlier than that. The Governor of Kentucky is expecting you.

A big public Derby celebration in Kentucky's capital, Frankfort (27 miles west of Lexington via I-64), has been a Kentucky tradition since the 1930s. This year, the Old Capitol is the focus of activity, and downtown restaurants are offering breakfast specials. A free concert features bands from across the Commonwealth on the stage directly in front of the Old State Capitol. Kentucky artists will be exhibiting and selling their work. The event usually runs from around 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Call the Franklin County Tourism and Convention Commission at 502-875-8687 for more information.

## Year-round, spot a slew of past winners.

Derby Day isn't the only time to see a Derby winner in Lexington. Just as Hollywood has its "homes of the stars," the Bluegrass has the homes of the champions. Most of the living Kentucky Derby winners are stabled at the beautiful farms surrounding Lexington.

Policies on viewing celebrity horses vary from farm to farm. Some farms are open only to breeders. Others are

open to general visitors *by appointment*. But with a little planning, you can see most of the Derby champs. Just be sure to call first — and as far in advance as possible. Make arrangements through a local tour company or through [www.visithorsecountry.com](http://www.visithorsecountry.com)

**Bluegrass Note:** Lexington is home to the official registry of all Thoroughbred horses, The American Stud Book kept by The Jockey Club. One of the most high-profile aspects of the registry is the naming process. Name applications go through comprehensive screening processes to make sure they meet Jockey Club rules. ([www.jockeyclub.com](http://www.jockeyclub.com))

Here's where you'll find past Derby winners in the Bluegrass:

- ❑ Silver Charm (1997) and War Emblem (2002), Old Friends at Dream Chase Farm near Georgetown (502-863-1775);
- ❑ Monarchos (2001), Nuckols Farm near Midway;
- ❑ Go For Gin (1994) and Funny Cide (2003), both

reside at the Kentucky Horse Park;

❑ American Pharoah (2015), Fusaichi Pegasus (2000) and Thunder Gulch (1995), are at Ashford Stud near Versailles;

❑ Street Sense (2007) stands at stud at Jonabell, home of the Darley stallions in America. Animal Kingdom (2011) and Nyquist (2016) are also at Jonabell;

❑ Super Saver (2010) is at WinStar Farm;

❑ California Chrome (2014) makes his home at Taylor Made;

## Ponder Derbies past and future on the world's most famous and fabulous horse farms.

Even if they aren't currently the home of a former champion, Bluegrass horse farms are a sight worth seeing, both for their beauty and their tradition.

The red and white buildings of Calumet Farm, for example, are as essential a part of Derby history as the twin spires of Churchill Downs. From Whirlaway in 1941 to Strike the Gold in 1991, Calumet bred a record nine Kentucky Derby winners (and owned a record eight). The late Henryk de Kwiatkowski, a Polish-born aviation executive purchased the farm in 1991, vowing to maintain its glorious reputation, and promising that it would never be "developed". The farm is now owned by Calumet Investment Group and operated by Thoroughbred owner and breeder Brad Kelly, rumored to be one of the 10 largest land owners in America.

Even if you only drive by its Versailles Road location, you'll get a sense of the ingredients of a quintessential Bluegrass horse farm – lush pastures, lovely barns, and miles of plank fencing. Calumet's famous trophy collection is on display at the Kentucky Horse Park's International Museum of the Horse.

It isn't just nostalgia for great horses of the past that makes visiting Bluegrass horse farms so thrilling. There's also the exciting possibility of spotting a future champi-

on amid the gangly-legged foals frolicking in the spring meadows.

Derby time is at the height of the January to July foaling season. Three years down the road, one of these frisky youngsters could be standing in the winner's circle at Churchill Downs. Through today, from Aristides, first Derby winner in 1875, to 2016 winner Nyquist, about 80 percent of Derby winners were bred in Kentucky.

Contact VisitLEX, Lexington's convention and visitors bureau, about guided and do-it-yourself tours of horse farms.

## Go for history at the world's first park devoted to the horse.

You can look at a variety of Derby-related exhibits at the Kentucky Horse Park. This 1,200-acre farm com-

plex devoted to all breeds of horses attracts over 900,000 visitors each year.

Near the park entrance, there's a life-size statue of 1973 Triple Crown winner Secretariat (right across from a statue of the other horse known as "Big Red," Man o' War, the greatest Thoroughbred who DIDN'T run in the Derby). Secretariat's Kentucky Derby trophy is on display at the Horse Park museum, along

with memorabilia from Seattle Slew and other winners.

The grave of jockey Isaac Murphy at the park is a reminder of the important role African-Americans played in the early days of the race.

Fourteen of the 15 riders in the first Derby were African-American, and African-American jockeys won 15 of the race's first 28 runnings. Murphy, who lived in Lexington,

**Bluegrass Note:** Fine horses and horse racing have always been important in Lexington (in 1789 there were more horses than people). The area's central role in the Thoroughbred industry began during the Civil War, when horse breeders in Maryland, the Carolinas and Virginia moved their horses "west" for safety. They discovered that their horses thrived in the Bluegrass, thanks to lime inherently in the soil, the gently rolling terrain and the favorable weather conditions. By the 1930s, the Lexington Herald-Leader had a standing offer to give subscribers free papers on any day that no horse bred within a 50-mile radius of Lexington won a race at a major track – an event that no one can remember ever happening.

**Blue Note:** The Maxwell H. Gluck Equine Research Center, on the University of Kentucky campus in Lexington, is one of the leading equine research facilities in the world. Tours for researchers and others with serious interest in equine science can be arranged. (859-218-1089)

was the winning Derby rider in 1884, 1890 and 1891. No other rider in history has even come close to matching his record of winning 44 percent of the races in which he rode.

## Enjoy a taste of Derby tradition.

Even candy comes in a Derby flavor in the Bluegrass. You can take home some old-fashioned bourbon balls, chocolate Thoroughbreds and Kentucky Derby mints from Old Kentucky Chocolates, 450 Southland Drive in Lexington. Kitchen tours are available (859-278-4444).

Another Derby-related treat is served in local restaurants and sold in specialty food stores: Derby Pie™. This really is a trademarked pie, with a very secret recipe. (However, chocolate, nuts and sugar seem to be involved.) Kerns Kitchen of Louisville invented the pie decades ago. Only those serving the real thing are allowed to use the name “Derby Pie” on menus. So when you see names like “Famous Horserace Pie” or “Bluegrass Pie” on restaurant menus, it means they’re serving their own version of this Bluegrass classic.

Another Derby taste you may want to try while you’re in Kentucky is the mint julep. “The very dream of drinks,” as 19<sup>th</sup> century Lexington lawyer and literary stylist J. Soule Smith called it, is a mixture of shaved ice, Kentucky bourbon, sugar, water and fresh mint and is a tradition long associated with the Kentucky Derby.

Despite Smith’s contention that one “who has not tasted one has lived in vain,” some modern day drinkers consider the mint julep better talked about than drunk. Despite its few ingredients, a proper julep takes time and patience to make. Here’s a recipe from a famous Bluegrass hostess, Anita Madden:

*First*, make a mint syrup. Bruise (crush with the hands) a “whole handful” of mint leaves and combine them with 1/3 cup sugar and 1 cup water. Boil for five minutes, then strain. You should end up with about 2

tablespoons of mint syrup.

*Pour* the mint syrup into your glass (preferably a sterling silver julep cup), add 1 1/2 to 2 ounces of bourbon and mix.

*Now* fill the cup with crushed ice. Rub fresh mint around the rim of the cup and garnish with fresh mint dipped in powdered sugar.

If you would prefer to leave the mixing to someone

**Blue Note:** Derbygoers often agonize over what to wear, but leading stables around the world look to Lexington’s Silks Unlimited to create their jockey silks. Each stable’s jacket and cap features its unique and registered combination of design and colors. Not actually silk, these one-size-fits-all outfits are available in nylon, a nylon-satin blend, and the latest wrinkle in Derby fashion – aerodynamic designs and fabrics.

else, you can find mint juleps offered at many Lexington restaurants and bars at Derby time. Try Dudley’s, 259 W. Short Street, or Merrick Inn, 1074 Merrick Drive, both favorite hangouts of the horsey set. Or, of course, The Julep Cup, at 111 Woodland Avenue, facing Main Street. Kentucky distillers Buffalo Trace and


Makers Mark bottle ready-to-drink mint julep beverages, available at local liquor stores.

## Carry back a unique souvenir.

In the Bluegrass, there are entire shops devoted to horse-related items. Name it, you can find it with a horse on it.

**Blue Note:** Need a hat for your Derby festivities? Don’t panic. Beautiful hats are Anne Sawyers specialty, and she’s been creating hats for Derbygoers for years. (859) 457-1281. Burlington Coat Factory on Richmond Road always carries a large selection of hats. (859) 268-2905.

Gift shops at the Kentucky Horse Park and Keeneland are equine-souvenir havens. Your Frame of Mind, downtown at the Lexington Center Shops, also holds horsey treasures. Stop in at the Lexington Visitors Center at 401 West Main for something related to Lexington’s famous blue Big Lex!

Each year, Churchill Downs issues an official Kentucky Derby glass. You’ll find the current year’s glass and other “official” souvenirs in Lexington gift shops around Derby time. Derby glasses from past years, by the way, are quite collectible, as are silver and silver plate mint julep cups. Check out local antique malls and shops for these and other mementos from Derbies past. 

**For more information  
contact VisitLEX at (800) 845-3959.**

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