



BLAZING THE BOURBON TRAIL

As the cocktail culture explodes once again, bourbon is making a comeback. Some fans say it never left as millions of people have journeyed along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail® to learn more about this truly American spirit

STORY: MARY ANN DESANTIS



As a wine lover, I do not drink much bourbon. Something about the holidays, though, draws my palate to the caramel, vanilla, licorice and sweet oak flavors that good bourbon offers. Maybe it's reminiscing about my first taste of bourbon in one of my favorite Christmas delicacies: Bourbon Balls.

Even if you are not a liquor drinker, bourbon is a great American story and there is no better place to hear that story than on the famed Kentucky Bourbon Trail®, where nine distilleries dot the roads between Louisville and Lexington in north Central Kentucky.

You can start in Louisville or in Lexington, and travel along some of the most beautiful roads in America, including the famed Bluegrass Parkway. The Kentucky Distillers' Association created the Bourbon Trail tour in 1999 to educate visitors about the history and tradition of the state's signature spirit. Visitors also get an up-close-and-personal look at the art and science of crafting Bourbon—which is virtually unchanged from the way 18th century settlers did it.

Those early settlers had a hard time getting crops to market over trails and mountains, and soon they realized that converting corn and other grains to whiskey were more transportable and kept excess grain from rotting. Farmers shipped the whiskey from Bourbon County, one of Kentucky's original counties, down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The long trip made for natural aging in oak barrels that were stamped "from Bourbon County." Connoisseurs began asking specifically for Bourbon County whiskey because of its distinct mellow flavor and amber color.

Today, the aging barrels are among the first things you see when you tour a Kentucky distillery. At Four Roses

Bourbon, established in 1888, you can even peer inside a 16,000-gallon fermenting tank made from Florida Red Cypress. At Woodford Reserve, which makes the official bourbon of the Kentucky Derby, you can also see the copper pot stills where bourbon is triple distilled.

The distilleries along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail® offer tours and tastings to those 21 years and older. It's impossible to visit them all in one day, so pick your favorite brand and start there. Or plan to spend at least three days cruising along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail® to sample all nine.

For a list of distilleries and more information, visit kybourbontrail.com.



Closer to Home: Palm Ridge Reserve

If a trek to Kentucky is not in your plans, you can learn about the whiskey distilling process firsthand with Palm Ridge Reserve, an award-winning Florida whiskey created by Dick and Marti Waters of Florida Farm Distillers.

The Umatilla

couple created the micro-distillery in 2008 to create a traditional 90-proof, bourbon-style whiskey in small batches. Their annual production has grown to 6,000 bottles, and they still pay close attention to details.

"We make the whiskey here, from start to finish," said Dick Waters. "We smell it, taste it, bottle it, and even put our own unique labels on the bottles."

Twice a month, the couple hosts free open houses at the distillery so "visitors can taste the whiskey fresh from the still," said Waters.

In December, tours are scheduled from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 3, and on Saturday, Dec. 17. For information, please visit palmridgereserve.com or call 352.455.7232.

ENHANCE YOUR HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Bourbon can add a little zing to your favorite holiday recipes and cocktails.

Classic Kentucky Bourbon Balls

Source: *The Kentucky Bourbon Cookbook* by Albert W.A. Schmid

Ingredients:

1 cup fine graham cracker crumbs
1 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup chopped pecans
2 tablespoons cocoa
2 tablespoons honey
1/4 cup Kentucky bourbon
1 cup superfine sugar

Directions:

Combine the graham cracker crumbs, confectioners' sugar, vanilla, pecans, and cocoa and mix well. Add the honey and bourbon and mix well. Shape into 3/4-inch balls and coat in the superfine sugar. Store in an airtight container until ready to serve. Yields about 48 balls.



Kentucky Mulled Cider

Courtesy of Maker's Mark on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail®

Ingredients:

1-1/4 parts Maker's Mark Bourbon
Hot apple cider
1 thinly sliced lemon with rind
1 dash allspice
1 tall cinnamon stick

Directions:

Add bourbon to a footed mug. Fill mug with hot apple cider and the dash of allspice. Garnish with tall cinnamon stick and lemon slice.



ABOUT THE WRITER

Mary Ann DeSantis is a fellow of the Symposium for Professional Wine Writers, Napa Valley, and recently received WSET Level 1 certification from the Wine & Spirits Educational Trust. An award-winning journalist, she has written for *Lake & Sumter Style* since 2006.