

Neat & Noteworthy™

An inside look at Kentucky's bourbon scene

Straight Up Louisville

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Kentucky Journey LLC

In This Series: Louisville, Large Distillers; Craft Distillers; Fine Dining; Side Trips; Horse Racing; Exceptional Museums

Louisville, Kentucky, is a vibrant city where history and culture intertwine with a thriving music and arts scene, as well as a rich culinary and bourbon heritage. As the gateway to the Kentucky Bourbon Trail®, Louisville serves as a central hub for America's native spirit, boasting a distilling tradition that spans over two centuries. The city is home to iconic distilleries like Old Forester, Angel's Envy, and Michter's, offering visitors an immersive bourbon experience that includes historic distillery tours, modern speakeasies, and bourbon-infused cuisine. With the revitalization of Whiskey Row and the annual Bourbon & Beyond festival, Louisville affirms its status as the ultimate destination for bourbon enthusiasts from around the globe.

There are many options for those looking to spend a day in Louisville on their bourbon journey. This city is one of my favorite urban locations because it offers so much to its visitors. Here's a glimpse of what your day in Louisville might look like.

10:00 a.m. Arrive at the Frazier Museum

Start your day at the Frazier Museum, the official kickoff point of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail®. Conveniently located in the heart of Whiskey Row, the museum is just a block away from Kentucky Peerless and Michter's, and less than two miles from Old Forester, Angel's Envy, Buzzards's Roost, Rabbit Hole,

and Whiskey Thief NuLu. If street parking is taken, ample parking is available in the lot off Ninth Street behind the museum, located beneath the interstate.

As Kentucky's largest history museum, the Frazier offers a rich cultural experience in downtown on Main Street. Its extensive collection includes notable weaponry, historical artifacts, and a Lewis & Clark exhibit. It also features items such as Teddy Roosevelt's "Big Stick," Geronimo's bow and arrows, and one of George Washington's rifles.



Figure 1 - The Frazier Museum on Main Street on Whiskey Row is the perfect place to start your bourbon journey.

Originally opened in 2004 as the "Frazier Historical Arms Museum," it rebranded to better reflect its focus on Kentucky, adopting the slogan "Where the world meets Kentucky." Founded by local philanthropist Owsley Brown Frazier—whose grandfather, George Garvin Brown, established the Brown-Forman Corporation in 1870—the museum has strong ties to the bourbon industry, with Brown-

Forman owning renowned brands like Woodford Reserve, Old Forester, and Jack Daniel's. Owsley Brown Frazier served on the board for Brown-Forman until his passing in 2012 at the age of 77.

Plan to spend an hour exploring the museum and learning about Kentucky history, bourbon distillation, and the cultural significance of bourbon, as well as viewing an impressive collection of arms. Be sure to visit their bourbon-themed gift shop at street level.

11:30 a.m. Tour Kentucky Peerless Distilling Co.

After exiting the museum, head west under the interstate to reach Kentucky Peerless Distilling, just one block away. Aim to arrive by 11:15 a.m. for the 11:30 tour, and be sure to make reservations, as it can get quite busy. If you were to select distillery visits based solely on online reviews, Kentucky Peerless would likely top your list. In 2020, TripAdvisor honored Kentucky Peerless with the Travelers' Choice Award, recognizing it as one of the top 10% of attractions worldwide—a distinction they have maintained every year since. Most ratings on Google and TripAdvisor are also very positive, typically hovering around a perfect 5 stars out of 5. This recognition is well-deserved, as it's a fantastic place to spend an hour or two.



Figure 2 - Kentucky Peerless is loved by everyone that has visited and produces many award-winning bourbons.

Keep an eye out for Corky Taylor, the founder of Peerless. He has an approachable demeanor and an infectious personality. His desk is in the middle of the gift shop, making it easily accessible to all visitors. I've had the pleasure of meeting this recent Bourbon Hall

of Fame inductee several times, and I have always enjoyed our conversations. The tour takes an hour and 15 minutes. Peerless is closed on Sunday.

1:15 p.m. Have Lunch at Vincenzo's or Repeal

Both Vincenzo's and Repeal are within easy walking distance from Kentucky Peerless. Vincenzo's is an upscale Italian restaurant at the corner of 5th and Market, offering an elegant yet surprisingly affordable menu. Be sure to try their Smoked Salmon or Calamari Siciliani appetizers; both the Veal Marsala and Crepes Agostino are excellent entrée choices. Since opening in 1986, Vincenzo's has been one of my top recommendations for visitors to Louisville, and no one has been disappointed with my suggestions.

If you don't mind a bit of a walk, Repeal Oak Fired Steakhouse is located eight blocks east along Main Street, about a 15-minute stroll. Situated in the Hotel Distil, a Marriott Autograph Collection property, I've enjoyed lunch here twice in the past year, and both experiences were exceptional. I recommend starting with the French Onion Gratinée, followed by either the Wagyu Flat Iron Steak or the Brush Creek Ranch Wagyu Burger. The Ora King Salmon, served with sweet pepper bruschetta, is also an excellent option. Both Repeal and Vincenzo's are closed for lunch on Sunday; Repeal is also closed for lunch on Saturday.

If you find yourself in Louisville on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, consider having lunch at La Bodeguita de Mima, especially if you enjoy Cuban cuisine. Mima Martinez, originally from Cardenas, Cuba, has an incredible story about her journey to the U.S. on a homemade raft with her son Fernando in 1994. Fernando created the restaurant with his cousin Yaniel Martinez, offering a variety of traditional Cuban dishes in a beautiful setting on Market Street. Located just under two miles away, it's advisable to drive. They open for lunch these three days at noon.

3:00 p.m. Experience Old Forester or Michter's Fort Nelson Distillery

Both Old Forester and Michter's offer tours and experiences that consistently impress. Each brand produces outstanding bourbons and provides ample opportunities for tasting and exploration.

Let's start with Old Forester. As part of Brown-Forman, the parent company of Woodford Reserve

and Jack Daniel's, this relatively small downtown location showcases all stages of bourbon production, though it is not their main production area, unlike many other distilleries you will visit in Bourbon Country. For instance, their fermentation tanks hold 4,500 gallons, significantly smaller than the 50,000-gallon tanks at Bardstown Bourbon. Additionally, barrel storage here is limited to 750 barrels.

While their primary production facilities are located nearby in Shively, that location does not offer tours. A standout feature of the downtown location is its small working cooperage, which produces a limited number of barrels each day. This is the only distillery I've visited that makes its own barrels and incorporates the process into the tour, making it unique.



Figure 3 – Old Forester has a small working cooperage in their downtown location, and I appreciate learning about this art from the demonstration.

Old Forester offers two tours: the "Nothing Better in the Market" Tour and a standard Old Forester Tour. The former includes a VIP tasting experience featuring the highly sought-after Old Forester Birthday Bourbon, available only in limited quantities, so be sure to check for availability on their website. Old Forester is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Just a few blocks away, Michter's excites in every aspect. It boasts more prestigious awards across various journals and associations than any other distillery that I am aware of. These accolades include the 2024 Most Admired Whiskey in the World by

Drinks International, Best American Whiskey by Food & Wine Magazine, and Whisky of the Year by The Whisky Exchange. Fred Minnick has also praised it as "quite simply the best bourbon I've had all year." Like Old Forester, Michter's is a "demonstration" production facility, with its main production occurring at a larger distillery in Shively.

I have a valuable tip for you: head to the second floor and enjoy a cocktail at their bar. In my opinion, it is one of the two most beautiful bars in the state, sharing that distinction with Watch Hill Proper in nearby Prospect, which I will discuss when planning your evening. Be sure to make reservations in advance, as it can be difficult to get in, especially during peak seasons.

The base Discovery Tour lasts one hour and concludes with a guided tasting of five Michter's expressions, along with a mystery pour. I highly recommend the Founders Tour, available on Thursdays and Fridays. This tour lasts an hour and a half and includes a tasting of seven Michter's bourbons, including Bomberger's and Shenk's. If you're in Louisville on the one day each month that the Legacy Tour is offered, be sure to fit it into your schedule and book early, as it fills up quickly. Michter's is open every day of the week.

5:00 p.m. Enjoy Bourbon at Watch Hill Proper

Next, stop at Watch Hill Proper, located in Prospect just outside Louisville. As I mentioned earlier, I believe this is one of the two most beautiful bars in the state, sharing that distinction with the bar at Michter's Fort Nelson Distillery downtown. This venue is the world's largest American whiskey bar, featuring an impressive selection of around 2,200 unique whiskies, including over 1,600 bourbons. During my first visit, I was amazed by the variety available to suit every palate and budget. Among these options, 272 pours are priced at \$10 or less, while 104 exceed \$100. Opened in 2022, the bar is situated in the Norton Commons neighborhood, a sprawling 600-acre mixed-use development that includes traditional homes, shops, schools, parks, and green spaces.

Please note that Watch Hill is closed on Sundays and Mondays and does not serve lunch, as it opens at 4 p.m. Guests can enjoy an extensive selection of bourbon, rye, and other American whiskeys,

complemented by a curated wine list; however, beer and clear spirits are not available. This venue also offers an excellent dinner experience in one of the most unique atmospheres in the state, so you may choose to skip my next dinner recommendations and stay right here. While memberships are available, you do not need to be a member to enjoy an evening here. If you are dining downtown, you may want to opt for Michter's Bar to save the travel time.

6:30 p.m. Dine at Jack Fry's, Seviche, or 610 Magnolia

Jack Fry's is one of Louisville's most recognized fine dining destinations. Its roots trace back to 1933 when Jack and Flossie Fry opened it as a casual dining bar. The couple operated the business more as a sports bar than a fine dining establishment until 1972 when the restaurant was closed. The location then functioned as a Mexican restaurant for about ten years until Jack Fry's was revived at the end of 1981. Susan Seiller purchased the restaurant in 1985, two years before Jack Fry's death. She oversaw the transformation from a tavern to a fine dining venue and ran the restaurant for just over 20 years before selling it to Stephanie Meeks in 2008.

For appetizers, try the Escargot or Shrimp and Grits. For entrées, consider the Brie Salad, Bourbon-Braised Short Ribs, or Lamb Chops, the latter served with caramelized shallot potato gratin and rosemary-Dijon compound butter. Jack Fry's is open for lunch from 11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and for dinner every day from 5:30 to 10:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and from 5:30 to 11:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Chef Anthony Lamas discovered Louisville in his culinary journey in 1992 and established his award-winning restaurant, Seviche, in the Highlands neighborhood on Bardstown Road, about a mile from Jack Fry's. This Latin-inspired restaurant features an innovative menu that fuses Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Southern cuisine. He has been honored as a James Beard semifinalist for the Best Chef: Southeast award in 2010, 2011, and 2012, and has cooked at the James Beard House five times.

For appetizers at Seviche, try the Kentucky Bison Empanadas or Ostiones a la Lamas. For entrées, consider the Ahi Tuna Seviche, made with coconut

ginger broth and jalapeños, or the Grouper and Crab "Cigar" or Churrascos de Argentina. Seviche is open every day from 5:00 p.m. until close, depending on the clientele for the night.

No list of dining recommendations for Louisville would be complete without mentioning 610 Magnolia. Edward Lee, a celebrated Korean-American chef, has crafted a unique dining experience in Old Louisville. You may recognize him from various shows on the Food Network, and he has also cooked at the White House. His tasting menus focus on locally sourced, seasonal ingredients, and you'll be amazed by the brilliance of his chef-curated prix-fixe courses, which change weekly. 610 Magnolia is closed Sunday through Tuesday and open from 5:30 to 9:00 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. It is pricey, but extraordinary.



Figure 4 - Watch Hill Proper is one of the most beautiful bars in the state and has an award-winning chef that has created an innovative menu.

Options for your Day

You may notice the absence of notable distilleries in downtown Louisville, such as Angel's Envy, Rabbit Hole, Bardstown Bourbon, Evan Williams, Whiskey Thief NuLu, Buzzard's Roost, and Stitzel-Weller in Shively. Selecting distilleries for a single day of activities in the city was an impossible task, as I could easily advocate for each of the alternate stops above. I encourage you to conduct your own online research on these distilleries. Consider adding them for a second day in the area or swapping one of my previous recommendations to include them in your first day's itinerary.

I also recommend taking side trips to special locations near the suggested distilleries. As Kentucky's largest city, Louisville offers many opportunities for such excursions. Two notable sites are the Muhammad Ali Museum and the Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory. If you love baseball, the Louisville Slugger Museum is a must. Even those who aren't baseball fans will appreciate the sport's history, the bat-making process, and the connection of Hillerich & Bradsby (H&B) to the game. The museum is centrally located on Whiskey Row, directly across Main Street from Michter's and close to other attractions.

Today, H&B's corporate headquarters is situated at this location. If you're not familiar with H&B, they are the makers of Louisville Slugger bats. They offer guided tours, so be sure to call ahead to make a reservation. Don't miss the world's largest bat outside their facility, weighing an impressive 68,000 pounds—a perfect backdrop for photos after your tour.

Speaking of baseball, if you love the game and are in town from March to September, check to see if the Bats are at home. The Louisville Bats are the AAA affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds and play at Louisville Slugger Field near downtown.

Muhammad Ali is often regarded as the greatest boxer of all time. Born Cassius Clay in Louisville, he is one of the most significant sports figures of the 20th century, with an impact that extended beyond boxing. Ali began his boxing career at the age of 12, quickly showcasing his talent. He won a gold medal in the light heavyweight division at the 1960 Olympics in Rome when he was just 18 years old and turned professional later that same year.

Ali concluded his boxing career with an impressive record of 56 wins and five losses, 37 of which were by knockout. He was the undisputed heavyweight champion from 1974 to 1978 and held titles from the World Boxing Association and Ring Magazine in 1978 and 1979. Beyond the ring, Ali made significant contributions to many aspects of life, including religion, race, civil rights, and war. He was also actively involved with the Special Olympics and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. In 2005, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Muhammad Ali Center serves as a tribute to his legacy.

Ali struggled with Parkinson's disease for the last three decades of his life. While some attribute this to

his boxing career, the connection is unproven. He passed away from septic shock, a condition common among those with weakened immune systems. He is buried in Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville.

The Muhammad Ali Center offers a range of attractions, including videos of some of Ali's greatest fights, Civil Rights-era footage, a five-screen orientation film, two art galleries, and activities aimed at engaging young visitors.



Figure 5 - Rich Strike extends his lead down the homestretch on his way to winning the 148th running of the Kentucky Derby as an 80 to 1 longshot. Photo courtesy Churchill Downs.

If you find yourself in Louisville during the racing season at Churchill Downs, consider spending an afternoon at the track. Churchill Downs hosts the Kentucky Derby, the first leg of horse racing's Triple Crown, on the first Saturday in May. While tickets for this event and the Kentucky Oaks the day before are notoriously difficult to obtain, other race dates throughout the season are much more accessible.

For More Information

If you have questions or comments, feel free to reach out to me at:

mark@kentuckyjourney.com

Visit our website for more useful information about bourbon tourism and Central Kentucky.

www.kentuckyjourney.com

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