



Woodford Reserve in Versailles is the only bourbon distillery to use a triple-copper post distillation process.

Sip From the Source

Get a look at the bourbon distilleries that make the classic Kentucky drink.

by Leslie Guttman

Bluegrass and bourbon — a match made in ... limestone? Yes: The reason Kentucky bourbon tastes so smooth and complex is the region's geology. The uniquely limestone-rich land acts like a natural water filter, eliminating minerals that would harm the smooth taste. With few ingredients — water, yeast and a blend of grains that must be at least 51 percent corn — craftsmanship and purity count. Visitors come from around the world to taste the potent potable that forms the base of mint juleps and old fashioned. The Lexington area is home to four of the seven bourbon

distilleries on the state's famous Bourbon Trail; all are about a half hour from the city.

David Lord, president of the Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau, estimates the four distilleries receive approximately 148,000 visitors each year, including a group of Baptists recently who, although they don't drink, wanted to experience bluegrass history.

"These distilleries are tied to the history of the land," Lord says. "Bourbon making is authentic, historical, and real, and people are craving that. It's also fun. A lot of fun."

Northwest of Lexington in Frankfort, Buffalo Trace incorporates three centuries of architecture; the facility was the first in the 1800s to pump steam into its warehouses in winter to make for a more balanced taste. Further south, in Lawrenceburg, marvel



at the dramatic Spanish Mission architecture at **Four Roses** and learn about how the allure of a Southern belle gave the place its name. At **Wild Turkey**, also in Lawrenceburg, master distiller James C. Russell



— call him Jimmy — is a Kentucky legend, having worked there since 1954. And in Versailles, **Woodford Reserve**, which creates bourbon in small batches, likes to think of itself as a place where bourbon is crafted rather than made.



"Bourbon is indigenous to Kentucky, and what it has really evolved to is an art," says Wayne Rose, brand director for Woodford Reserve. "Bourbon has never been better than it is today, and we have such a cultural pride ...

that we live here in the homeland of bourbon."

Drinking is not the only way to get your fill of this Bluegrass creation. Chocolate bourbon balls are a favorite of countless Lexingtonians. Try Rebecca Ruth Candies—formed by two teachers during Prohibition—in Frankfort or Old Kentucky Chocolates in Lexington. Woodford Reserve is publishing a cookbook that incorporates bourbon into such dishes as corn and crab fritters and pecan-crusted red snapper.

To really immerse yourself in the world of bourbon, visit the annual Kentucky Bourbon Festival, held each September in Bardstown, an hour west of Lexington. Among the dozens of events at this year's festival (Sept. 16–21): a bourbon tasting, an auction of bourbon items, seminars, concerts and a bourbon breakfast (try the pancakes with bourbon butter and syrup).

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