



## What's New in Kentucky

### Arts & Culture

**Kentucky Opera releases schedule for 2026-2027** - Kentucky Opera's 2026-27 season marks an early homecoming to the Brown Theatre with a lineup centered on family and community. The season features Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and the powerful contemporary work *Cotton*. Closing in May, a collaborative semi-staged production of *Salome* features the Louisville Orchestra. CEO Ben Robinson emphasizes that these four mainstage productions reflect Louisville's spirit through timeless classics and poignant modern narratives. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/theater/2026/02/26/kentucky-opera-reveals-2026-27-season-what-to-see/88881065007>

**Shakespeare Festival returns to Louisville** - Kentucky Shakespeare has unveiled the schedule for its 66th summer season in Louisville's Central Park, running May 27 through August 9. The professional mainstage features *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Julius Caesar*. The festival also includes a community production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the Globe Players' *King Lear*, and late-night comedy. With 60 performances across 11 weeks, it remains the oldest free Shakespeare festival in the United States. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/louisville/article/Kentucky-Shakespeare-Announces-66th-Season-of-Free-Kentucky-Shakespeare-Festival-in-Central-Park-20260208>

**Museum in Louisville announces America250 lineup for 2026** - The Frazier Kentucky History Museum is celebrating America's semiquincentennial throughout 2026 with the "Frazier250" initiative. The museum will feature America250-themed exhibitions, gallery updates, guided tours, programs, family and homeschool days, pop-up camps, podcasts, and more. The intent is for these diverse stories reflect Kentucky's substantial impact on United States history. <https://adairvoice.com/stories/frazier-kentucky-history-museum-to-celebrate-america250.65964>

**Ashland to build conference facility near historic Paramount Arts Center** - Ashland officials recently reviewed designs for a new 52,000-square-foot conference center neighboring the Paramount Arts Center. Developers emphasized that the theater's historic interior, including its famous murals, will remain untouched. The project features flexible meeting rooms, a ballroom, and a commercial kitchen. Strategic firewalls will protect the Paramount, avoiding invasive sprinkler installations. Construction begins soon with adjacent demolition, targeting a November 2027 completion while ensuring the theater remains operational and preserved throughout. [https://www.herald-dispatch.com/news/project-aims-to-complement-paramount-arts-center-without-altering-historic-interior/article\\_74128147-2baf-4a64-a598-089d9026d151.html](https://www.herald-dispatch.com/news/project-aims-to-complement-paramount-arts-center-without-altering-historic-interior/article_74128147-2baf-4a64-a598-089d9026d151.html)

**Historic Lexington Church added to National Park Service's Underground Railroad list** - First African Baptist Church in Lexington has been officially recognized as an Underground Railroad site by the National Park Service's Network to Freedom. Founded in 1790 by Peter Durrett, the historic congregation played a vital role in aiding enslaved individuals seeking freedom. This designation honors the church's courageous legacy and secures its place in the national narrative of resistance, highlighting Lexington's significant contributions to the abolitionist movement and African American history in Kentucky. <https://fox56news.com/news/local/lexington/historic-downtown-lexington-church-confirmed-as-underground-railroad-site/>

**Louisville selected as the new site of youth drama festival** - The International Thespian Festival (ITF), an annual gathering for middle and high school theatre students, will move to Louisville, Kentucky, beginning in 2027. The Educational Theatre Association (EdTA) relocated the event from Indiana due to outgrowing its former venue. Louisville was chosen for its downtown walkability, cultural richness, hospitality, and capacity for growth. The move will allow the eight-day festival to potentially double its programming, utilizing venues like the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts.

[https://www.kentuckytoday.com/news/international-thespian-festival-moving-to-louisville/article\\_a3655ee6-70b6-43ab-a688-7922c41cf4c9.html](https://www.kentuckytoday.com/news/international-thespian-festival-moving-to-louisville/article_a3655ee6-70b6-43ab-a688-7922c41cf4c9.html)

**New Kentucky African American Heritage Trail includes nearly 50 sites** – Launched in June 2025, the Kentucky African American Heritage Trail features nearly 50 historic sites statewide and highlights significant locations such as the Muhammad Ali Center and Camp Nelson National Historic Monument. The trail's purpose is to celebrate the individuals and communities who shape Kentucky's Black history. The trail is accessible via Apple Maps and the Kentucky Tourism website, providing an educational and comprehensive look at the state's diverse heritage. The Kentucky Department of Tourism plans to announce new additions to the trail in Spring 2026. <https://www.travelandleisure.com/kentucky-new-african-american-heritage-trail-11755124>

**Restoration of historic Louisville clock tower complete** - The restoration of the historic Cave Hill Cemetery Clock Tower and Bell in Louisville is officially complete, announced by the Cave Hill Heritage Foundation. The project, funded by private donors and preservation partners, returned the clock and its bell to full working order after decades of disrepair. This restoration ensures the landmark, which has "marked time for generations of Louisville families," will continue to ring out, safeguarding a critical piece of the city's local and cultural heritage. <https://www.wave3.com/2025/11/04/restoration-cave-hill-cemeterys-clock-tower-is-complete/>

**Military history museum in Kentucky capital reopens after renovation** - The Kentucky Military History Museum in Frankfort officially reopened its doors on Veterans Day 2025, following a year of major renovation and restoration. The project, which included the addition of a new HVAC system, ensures the preservation of Kentucky's military treasures within the historic State Arsenal building. The redesigned exhibits focus on personalizing history by highlighting the individual stories and sacrifices of Kentuckians who have served the Commonwealth and the nation. The museum is now open Tuesday through Saturday. <https://fox56news.com/news/local/kentucky-military-history-museum-reopens-its-doors-on-veterans-day/>

**Kentucky Center for Performing Arts renovation nears completion** – Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts is nearly finished with a \$4 million renovation of the venue's front plaza. Despite weather delays caused by winter weather, the project is slated to be completed by Summer 2026. The two-phase project addresses 40 years of wear on the 1983-opened venue. The center has remained open, ensuring continued access for patrons. This structural replacement aims to enhance pre- and post-show experiences, with future plans for "behind the scenes" updates to benefit performers at this top Louisville attraction. <https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/05/16/kentucky-center-details-4m-renovations.html>

**Ouita Michel added to Kentucky State Capitol's "Kentucky Women Remembered" exhibit** – Gov. Andy Beshear and Lt. Gov. Jacqueline Coleman helped announced Chef Ouita Michel has been added to the "Kentucky Women Remembered Exhibit in the Capitol. Michel is a six-time James Beard Foundation Award nominee, including nominations for Outstanding Restaurateur and Best Chef Southeast. Michel and her restaurants are regularly featured in local and national media. The exhibition features portraits honoring inspiring women who have significantly contributed to the Commonwealth's history and development. <https://www.whas11.com/video/news/local/kentuckys-women-remembered-exhibit-has-a-new-inductee/417-cd037b64-ee49-414e-97ed-ead9b5758688>

## **Attractions**

**Sons of the American Revolution to open museum in Louisville** - On July 4, the Sons of the American Revolution Education Center will debut a \$30 million immersive Revolutionary War experience. The museum will feature digital displays and large-scale multimedia productions, as well as exhibits from the extensive SAR archival collection. <https://www.pridejourneys.com/post/louisville-s-new-lgbtq-welcoming-attractions-in-2026-the-dot-experience-sar-education-center-fly>

**Downtown Louisville welcomes new Cigar shop, bar** - Havana Jack's Cigar Factory recently opened as Kentucky's only venue producing hand-rolled cigars on-site. The Whiskey Row destination features a walk-in humididor, live music, and a full bar specializing in spirit pairings. Benefitting from Louisville's updated indoor smoking laws, guests can watch artisans roll cigars while enjoying cocktails. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/life/food/spirits/2026/02/12/havana-jacks-cigar-factory-bar-downtown-louisville-location-opening/88219358007/>

**Combination bookstore and wine bar to go in NuLu Marketplace North** - NuLu Marketplace North, a \$15 million expansion of NuLu Marketplace, will feature Yer Mom's Bookstore & Wine Café on its ground floor. The store will have a curated book collection alongside approachable wines and small bites. The second floor will provide 4,500 square feet of high-end coworking offices. Grand opening for the mixed-use development is expected to be late Spring 2026. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2026/02/04/yer-moms-bookstore-wine-bar-and-cafe-opening-in-nulu-in-louisville/88412293007/>

**Kentucky Kingdom theme park to open new roller coaster** - Kentucky Kingdom is debuting "Flying Fox" in Spring 2026, its first new roller coaster since 2019. This family-friendly suspended coaster features riders hanging beneath the track, reaching speeds of 37 mph and heights of 65 feet. Part of a \$33 million park investment, the \$14 million ride celebrates Kentucky's agricultural roots with a crop-dusting theme and a red barn-inspired queue. With a 38-inch height requirement, it is designed to be accessible for younger thrill-seekers. <https://parade.com/news/kentucky-kingdom-adds-flying-fox-suspended-coaster-2026>

**Savannah Bananas scheduled to play in Lexington** - The Savannah Bananas are bringing their Banana Ball World Tour to Lexington's Legends Field for a weekend series from September 11-13, 2026. The tour will feature the league's two newest teams, the Indianapolis Clowns and the Loco Beach Coconuts, who will play in the Bluegrass. Due to high demand, tickets will be allocated via a lottery system, though Lexington Legends season ticket holders will receive priority access to purchase seats. <https://fox56news.com/news/local/lexington/banana-ball-to-make-first-ever-stop-in-lexington-during-2026-world-tour/>

**Newport's waterfront development adds new bar** - The Northern Kentucky megaproject Ovation, a large-scale, mixed-use waterfront development in Newport, has celebrated the opening of Market Bar. The opening is a key milestone, and it coincides with the launch of the project's Entertainment Destination Center, a common consumption area that allows patrons to carry drinks within designated zones. Market Bar, which joins the rooftop bar High Note, offers handcrafted cocktails and features a flexible indoor/outdoor seating area near the MegaCorp Pavilion, furthering Ovation's goal of becoming a dynamic riverfront destination. <https://www.lanereport.com/184164/2025/10/nky-megaproject-ovation-adds-market-bar-to-launch-entertainment-destination-center/>

**Louisville home to new UFL football team** - The United Football League (UFL) is expanding to Louisville, with the new Louisville Kings calling Lynn Family Stadium home starting in spring 2026. Single-game ticket sales for their inaugural 10-game season are currently on sale on the team's website. The home opener is scheduled for March 27 against the Birmingham Stallions. <https://www.theufl.com/news/kings-single-game-tickets-on-sale-now>

**National Corvette Museum announces expansion** - The National Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, Kentucky, announced a major expansion with a new 66,000-square-foot Collections facility, set to open in Fall 2026. This facility will significantly increase capacity for preserving historic vehicles and artifacts, like the 1967 Corvette Sting Ray once owned by Neil Armstrong. Starting in early 2027, the building will offer

behind-the-scenes guided tours, effectively doubling the number of Corvettes accessible to the public. [www.gmauthority.com/blog/2025/10/national-corvette-museum-expanding-with-new-collections-facility/](http://www.gmauthority.com/blog/2025/10/national-corvette-museum-expanding-with-new-collections-facility/)

**American Printing House for the Blind to open The Dot Experience museum** - The Dot Experience, a new innovative museum experience planned for Louisville, will open in October 2026. The final phase of exterior construction is planned to start in early 2026. Developed by the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, The Dot features a hands-on approach to education by encouraging visitors to learn through touch. It will include exhibits on living with blindness, a dedicated section on the life of Helen Keller, and factory tours showing how Braille books are made. The goal is to raise awareness about disabilities and challenge biases. <https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/10/03/the-dot-experience-construction-update.html>

**Malibu Jack's indoor theme park to open in Owensboro** - A portion of the former Towne Square Mall in Owensboro, Kentucky, is being converted into a new Malibu Jack's indoor entertainment hub. The multi-million dollar, 109,000-square-foot project, a partnership with TS Entertainment LLC, will be the third largest Malibu Jack's facility. Construction and renovation on the vacant retail space will begin immediately. The new attraction will feature go-karts, laser tag, mini-golf, and a variety of arcade games. Development on the site began in spring 2025 and is projected to conclude by April 2026, aiming to draw a significant portion of visitors from outside Kentucky. <https://www.lanereport.com/183430/2025/09/ts-entertainment-bringing-malibu-jacks-to-former-owensboro-mall/>

**Louisville's Mega Caverns debuts updated tram tour** - Louisville's Mega Cavern has introduced a revamped Historical Tram Tour as a perfect escape from summer heat. The guided, educational ride takes visitors on an immersive journey through the cavern's history, highlighting how its limestone shaped Kentucky's past, from filtering water for bourbon to nourishing the bluegrass for racehorses. The tour maintains a steady 58 degrees year-round. Tickets are \$19.99, and the cavern is open seven days a week. <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/articles/looking-cool-thing-louisville-mega-090303111.html>

**National Corvette Museum puts corvette designer's personal car on display** - After a multi-year preservation effort, the only Corvette ever owned by Zora Arkus-Duntov is making its public debut at the National Corvette Museum. Nicknamed the "Godfather of the Corvette," his personal 1974 Stingray, a retirement gift from Chevrolet, has been meticulously preserved as a historical artifact. It will be the centerpiece of a new exhibit, offering visitors a unique look into the life of the man who helped shape the iconic sports car. <https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a65450840/zora-arkus-duntov-only-corvette-restored/>

**Indoor pickleball facility opens in Lexington** - PKL LEX, a new indoor sports facility, has opened in Lexington, offering a mix of activities for the growing number of pickleball enthusiasts. Located on Walton Avenue, the venue features nine pickleball courts, including three championship-sized courts. Beyond pickleball, it also provides golf simulator bays, a full bar, and a restaurant in partnership with Country Boy Brewing. The facility aims to be a social hub where people can play, eat, and drink, with a goal of appealing to diverse interests. It operates from 6 a.m. to midnight and offers various membership and pay-as-you-go options. <https://fox56news.com/news/local/lexington/pkl-lex-brings-indoor-fun-to-lexington-amid-pickleball-mania/>

**Newport to overhaul public parks on Ohio River** - The City of Newport has unveiled a \$15 million plan to overhaul its riverfront, focusing on enhancing public spaces and accessibility. The project, which is a community-driven effort, will begin by revamping General James Taylor Park to include a dog park, pickleball courts, and a kayak launch. This phase is expected to break ground by summer 2026. The plan also addresses concerns about pedestrian and traffic safety to ensure the riverfront is easily accessible for all residents. <https://www.fox19.com/2025/06/18/newport-debuts-overhaul-plans-riverfront-parks/>

**Kentucky Black Sports Hall of Fame to move to Roots 101 Museum in Louisville** - The Kentucky Black Sports Hall of Fame is relocating to downtown Louisville. The move is scheduled for 2026, with the Hall of Fame taking up residence in the Roots 101 African American Museum. This relocation is intended to better support the organization by moving it to a metropolitan area. Inductees include notable athletes

such as Muhammad Ali and Wade Houston. [https://www.wdrb.com/news/business/kentucky-black-sports-hall-of-fame-to-relocate-to-downtown-louisville/article\\_67a94ce3-7aeb-4d6e-b95a-9e2e91462b7f.html](https://www.wdrb.com/news/business/kentucky-black-sports-hall-of-fame-to-relocate-to-downtown-louisville/article_67a94ce3-7aeb-4d6e-b95a-9e2e91462b7f.html)

## **Bourbon**

\*See the separate document, [What's New in Kentucky Bourbon](#), for a list of new and expanded bourbon experiences.

## **Culinary**

**Kentucky Chefs, and Bar nominated for James Beard Awards** - Two Kentucky based chefs and one bar have been named 2026 James Beard Award semifinalists. Noam Bilitzer of MeeshMeesh Mediterranean and David Willocks of The Baker's Table earned nods for Best Chef: Southeast. Additionally, Watch Hill Proper in Prospect was recognized in the Outstanding Bar category. Finalists will be announced March 31, with winners revealed June 15. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/foodanddrink/cocktails/3-kentucky-area-chefs-1-bar-named-semifinalists-for-2026-james-beard-awards/ar-AA1UFLP7>

**New pizzeria opens in downtown Louisville** - A new pizza parlor opened near Louisville Slugger Field in December 2025. Classico Pizzeria, located on East Main Street, offers European-style pies, including the popular Argentinian Fugazzeta. Owner Tommie Mudd, who also owns Classico Empanadas on Preston Street, aims to contribute to downtown Louisville's growth as the NuLu district expands westward. While the empanada shop remains a weekday staple, the pizzeria serves the stadium crowd Wednesday through Saturday. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/dining/restaurant/2026/01/23/owner-of-classico-empanadas-opens-pizzeria-in-downtown-louisville/88089029007/>

**New Coffee Trail launches across Kentucky** - Launched in late 2025, the Kentucky Coffee Trail highlights 32 local shops, from Louisville's Fante's Coffee to the rural Kangaroo Ridge Farms. Inspired by the Bourbon Trail, founders Jenni Kaus and Mike Johnson created the initiative to draw travelers "off the beaten path" to discover Kentucky's unique coffee culture. A dedicated mobile app is currently in development to help enthusiasts navigate the trail and support small businesses across the commonwealth. <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/articles/looking-way-explore-state-meet-100319802.html>

**Ramen restaurant opens in new location in Louisville** - After eight years in Mid City Mall, Louisville's Ramen House has relocated to a larger, permanent home at on Spring Street in September 2025. Previously the restaurant had been located in the Mid City Mall. The new space features a bar, patio, and private parking. [https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/10/02/ramen-house-finds-new-home-after-challenges.html?utm\\_source=st&utm\\_medium=en&utm\\_campaign=BN&utm\\_content=LO&ana=e LO\\_B N&j=43518393&senddate=2026-01-13](https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/10/02/ramen-house-finds-new-home-after-challenges.html?utm_source=st&utm_medium=en&utm_campaign=BN&utm_content=LO&ana=e LO_B N&j=43518393&senddate=2026-01-13)

**7 Brew opens new location in Northern Kentucky** – Popular coffee chain, 7 Brew, has recently set up shop in Florence on Turfway Road. This is 7 Brew's second location in Northern Kentucky after opening one in Newport in 2025. Known for its high-energy, drive-thru-only model, 7 Brew lacks indoor seating or a full food menu. Instead, it focuses on rapid service and customizable drinks, including coffee, smoothies, and their signature "muffin tops." <https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/viral-coffee-shop-dropped-yes-143147622.html>

**Millstone casual fine dining restaurant opens in Lexington** - A longtime Lexington location in Dudley Square, formerly Dudley's, has reopened as Millstone, a new casual upscale restaurant led by Executive

Chef Tyler Murray. Following a major renovation that included a new dining room and patio, Millstone offers a menu rooted in "Kentucky hospitality and modern flavor." The kitchen emphasizes high-quality, in-house dishes using local suppliers, with entrée highlights like braised short rib and seared salmon. The restaurant is currently open for dinner service every night.

<https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article312979453.html>

**New restaurant, Mill Iron to open in Louisville-** The owners of popular Louisville restaurants North of Bourbon and MeeshMeesh are collaborating on a new venture called Mill Iron 4, opening in early 2026 on Frankfort Avenue in the Clifton neighborhood. The project is a partnership between Noam Bilitzer (a James Beard Award chef finalist for MeeshMeesh) and Dustin Olsen, along with Stacy and Daniel Holyfield and Eric Jennings. The restaurant's concept is centered on whole-animal butchery, live-fire cooking, and hospitality, with its name referencing Olsen's family cattle ranch.

[https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/10/22/meeshmeesh-north-bourbon-new-restaurant.html?utm\\_source=st&utm\\_medium=en&utm\\_campaign=BN&utm\\_content=LO&ana=e\\_LO\\_BN&j=42119825&senddate=2025-10-22](https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/10/22/meeshmeesh-north-bourbon-new-restaurant.html?utm_source=st&utm_medium=en&utm_campaign=BN&utm_content=LO&ana=e_LO_BN&j=42119825&senddate=2025-10-22)

**The Hen House Cafe re-opens with new theme -** Chef David Danielson is transformed his former restaurant space into The Hen House Cafe and Provisions, a casual, chef-driven brunch concept. The rethought eatery opened in early November on Brownsboro Road. The new cafe offers an extensive menu featuring fresh pastries, homemade biscuits, seasonal salads, sandwiches, cocktails, and Danielson's popular fried chicken. This new direction allows Danielson to pivot his business, keep his staff employed, and fulfill his goal of providing a high-quality breakfast and brunch option to the Louisville community.

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/dining/restaurant/2025/10/21/ata-restaurant-louisville-rebrands-hen-house-cafe-brunch/86805824007/>

**Neighborhood bar and restaurant opens in Lexington -** Southern Cookhouse & Bar opened a new neighborhood tavern in September 2025 in the BLVD Apartments clubhouse in Lexington. The spot features a menu of Southern comfort food and late hours for sports fans. Highlights include Kentucky Proud burgers made with Critchfield Meats beef, bourbon-glazed filet tips over cheddar grits, and pizzas. The full-service bar features eight beers on tap, six from local breweries, and is equipped with multiple large TVs for watching games.

[https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article312118434.html#campaignName=lexington\\_morning\\_newsletter](https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article312118434.html#campaignName=lexington_morning_newsletter)

**Esters Farm Cafe opens in Park City -** Esters Farm Catering and Café recently found a new home in Park City, Kentucky, at 4900 Park City-Bon Ayr Rd. The café relocated from Bon Ayr after five years of operation, setting up in a larger space to help boost local tourism. The new restaurant features a menu of homemade "comfort food" classics like meatloaf and chicken and dumplings. The location provides seating for about 100 guests inside and on the patio and employs around 25 staff members.

<https://www.wcluradio.com/2025/10/06/esters-farm-cafe-finds-new-home-in-park-city/>

**Local Italian restaurant to open new location in Northern Kentucky airport -** VV The Italian Experience, a Cincinnati-based family restaurant, is set to open a new location at the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG) near Gate B17 in Concourse B in early 2026. The new dining concept will feature all-day Pugliese-style Italian cuisine, including piadinas and signature pastas like Bolognese and Genovese. Co-founder Andrea Stefano stated the expansion with SSP America will share their family's authentic culinary heritage with travelers passing through the international airport.

<https://www.wlwt.com/article/vv-italian-experience-cvg-airport/67958957>

**Louisville opens a spate of new restaurants -** Louisville's dining scene was home to several notable restaurant openings: Cinnaholic, a gourmet, plant-based cinnamon roll chain, opened its first Kentucky location on Shelbyville Road. Chef Lawrence Weeks, formerly of Ensō, announced he will open his new

concept, Murray's Creole Pub, this fall in the current Pints & Union space. Additionally, the popular Garage Bar in NuLu reopened under new ownership. Finally, Yafa Bakery & Market, a family-owned Middle Eastern bakery and grocery, debuted on Breckenridge Lane. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/dining/restaurant/2025/08/29/restaurants-open-close-louisville-august-enso-cinnaholic-garage-bar-mashup-food-hall/85682094007/>

**New Filipino restaurant to open in Louisville** - Chef Emil David is opening a new Filipino restaurant called Maynila in the former Come Back Inn space at 909 Swan St. in Louisville. The restaurant will be a new concept for David, who is also known for his Italian and European cuisine at Perso. Maynila will focus on Filipino-style small plates, offering a more approachable, sharable dining experience. The restaurant is expected to open in Spring 2026. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/dining/restaurant/2025/08/20/chef-emil-david-to-open-filipino-restaurant-at-former-come-back-inn/85682226007/>

**LGBTQ+ centered food tour now offered in Louisville** - A new walking food and queer history tour, "Pride Plates," is now offered in Louisville. The tour takes participants through the Highlands, one of the city's historic gayborhoods, blending tales of Kentucky's LGBTQ+ community with local culinary traditions like fried chicken and spoonbread. Likely the only queer food tour of its kind in the country, the experience draws from extensive archives to highlight moments of queer joy and activism. It aims to showcase Kentucky's rich and often-overlooked queer history. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/life/food/2025/06/23/louisville-food-tours-launches-pride-plates-queer-food-tour/83951650007/>

**Louisville Thai restaurant debuts in-house bakery** - Chef Katherine Aphaivongs-Harrod, owner of Louisville's popular All Thai'd Up restaurant, has opened a new bakery inside her existing location. Dubbed "The Bakery Inside," the counter offers an array of homemade pastries, cakes, and cookies. The restaurant will continue opening at 11 a.m. for lunch and dinner, but the bakery opens for business at 8 a.m. daily. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/dining/restaurant/2025/07/25/all-thaid-up-restaurant-opens-the-bakery-inside-in-louisville/85322809007/>

**Popular NuLu restaurant awarded huge grant** - Locals Food Hub & Pizza Pub, a restaurant and small grocery in Louisville's Smoketown neighborhood, has received a \$50,000 grant. The funding comes from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express through their Backing Historic Small Restaurants program. Locals was one of 50 historic restaurants chosen across the U.S. to receive the grant, which aims to help them renovate and grow their businesses. Owners opened the restaurant in a historic building in late 2024, offering wood-fired pizzas and local products. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/dining/restaurant/2025/08/25/locals-food-hub-pizza-pub-in-louisville-earns-historic-grant/85742133007/>

**Historic Boone Tavern debuts revamped dining room** - The Historic Boone Tavern Hotel & Restaurant in Berea has unveiled its newly rebranded dining room, now called "Crafted at Boone Tavern." The renovation blends historic charm with a fresh design, featuring handcrafted furnishings by Berea College students. The new space includes a full-service bar for the first time, along with a private dining room. Its farm-to-table menu highlights locally sourced ingredients from the Berea College Farm, and the restaurant continues to be staffed in part by students. <https://www.lanereport.com/182714/2025/07/boone-tavern-hotel-reopens-its-crafted-restaurant/>

**Hybrid bar and outdoor space opens in Meriwether section of Louisville** - A new bar and outdoor event space, The Jubilee Field Bar, opened for business in September in Louisville's Meriwether neighborhood. Located next to The Bard at 529 E. Burnett Ave., the nearly one-acre venue is owned by Isaiah and Courtney Dietrich. It features a full-service bar, a large green space for games and live music, and an indoor area for private events. The venue is designed to be a community hub with room for up to

eight food trucks, aiming to create a unique entertainment corridor.

[https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/06/23/jubilee-field-bar-opening.html?utm\\_source=st&utm\\_medium=en&utm\\_campaign=EX&utm\\_content=LO&ana=e\\_LO\\_EX&j=40422847&senddate=2025-06-24](https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/06/23/jubilee-field-bar-opening.html?utm_source=st&utm_medium=en&utm_campaign=EX&utm_content=LO&ana=e_LO_EX&j=40422847&senddate=2025-06-24)

**Lexington opens several new restaurants** - Several new restaurants are now open in Lexington. First Watch recently opened its fifth location on Towne Center Drive. Son of a Burger is now serving smashburgers at Greyline Station. Jasmine Rice Thai and Vietnamese Restaurant has reopened in a new location on Lima Drive. Additionally, a new event space, Alpha Reserve, has debuted on Cedar Street, offering a spot for private parties and social gatherings.

<https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article310767715.html>

## **Horses**

**2026 Breeders Cup to return to Kentucky** - Tickets for the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships at Keeneland Race Course will go on sale to the public on April 21. The two-day thoroughbred racing festival is set for October 30-31. This will be the fourth time in the event's 43-year history that Keeneland has hosted. <https://www.lanereport.com/186025/2026/02/how-and-when-to-get-your-2026-breeders-cup-tickets/>

**Keeneland Spring Meet to offer record stakes purses** - Keeneland's 2026 Spring Meet, running April 3–24, will feature a record \$9.55 million in stakes purses. The schedule includes 19 stakes, headlined by the \$1 million Blue Grass Stakes, a major Kentucky Derby qualifier. Purses for the Maker's Mark Mile and Jenny Wiley have both increased to \$700,000. This season celebrates the track's 90th anniversary, coinciding with the debut of the new \$100 million Paddock Building hospitality spaces.

<https://www.americanhorsepubs.org/newsgroup/keeneland-offers-season-record-9-55-million-for-2026-spring-meet-stakes/>

**Hallmark movie filmed at Churchill Downs to debut on Kentucky Derby Day** - Churchill Downs is the setting for a new Hallmark movie. "Kentucky Roses," an original movie filmed on location, premieres May 2, the same day as the 152nd Kentucky Derby. Starring Andrew Walker and Odette Annable, the romance spans two timelines—1932 and the present day. The story follows a greenhouse worker dreaming of creating the iconic garland of roses and the man hired to repair the Twin Spires. It streams the next day on Hallmark+. <https://www.wlky.com/article/hallmark-kentucky-derby-movie-churchill-downs/70173213>

**Keeneland to debut new paddock during Spring Meet** - Keeneland Race Course is debuting its \$100 million Paddock Building for the April 3–24 spring meet, marking its largest capital project in over 90 years. The three-story expansion adds over 1,000 new public dining tickets. Featured spaces include the "1936 Room," the high-end Sycamore Room, and a rooftop bar. Tickets are on sale, ranging from \$100 to \$200. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/horses/horse-racing/2026/01/28/keeneland-to-debut-new-paddock-dining-areas-at-2026-spring-meet/88379349007/>

**Calvert City welcomes new horse racing venue** - A new historical horse racing venue has opened for business in Calvert City. Marshall Yards Racing & Gaming debuted February 2026 and is a subsidiary of Churchill Downs Inc. This \$43 million facility is the company's eighth historical horse racing venue in Kentucky. The 23,000-square-foot site features 225 racing machines, a sportsbook, and simulcast wagering. Operating as an annex of Oak Grove Racing, Gaming & Hotel, Marshall Yards is designed to boost regional tourism and support purse funding for Southwestern Kentucky's horse racing industry.

<https://www.gamingintelligence.com/sectors/land-based-gaming/225169-churchill-downs-readies-opening-of-8th-historical-racing-venue-in-kentucky/>

**Churchill Downs secures \$1.2 billion in incentives for upgrades to track** - Churchill Downs is set to begin a \$1.2 billion renovation project, named "Victory Run." The project includes the construction of a four-story premium hospitality venue, located on the first turn, replacing older seating with private suites,

indoor/outdoor dining, and covered box seats. Construction will begin after the 2026 Kentucky Derby and is scheduled for completion by the 2028 Derby, expanding capacity in that section from 6,400 to approximately 7,800 guests. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/2025/12/03/churchill-downs-louisville-deal-would-keep-pilot-payments-with-jcps/87083928007/>

**Horse rescue facility opens in Eastern Kentucky** - The Appalachian Horse Center officially opened in Perry County, Kentucky, on the 80-acre Miniard Farm. A collaboration between the Appalachian Horse Project and local foundations, the facility serves as a rescue and evaluation hub for the region's iconic free-roaming horses. Beyond animal welfare, the center promotes regional tourism and economic development through guided tours, equine-assisted therapy, and workforce training programs designed to celebrate and preserve Eastern Kentucky's unique horse culture. <https://www.lanereport.com/185003/2025/12/center-for-freeroaming-appalachian-horses-opens-in-perry-county/>

**Kentucky Horse Park unveils new statue** - The monument, "The Bond: Two Hearts - One Spirit," was dedicated at the Kentucky Horse Park, in Lexington, to honor the extraordinary relationship between racehorse Cody's Wish and teenager Cody Dorman. The centerpiece is a life-size bronze statue of Cody's Wish, created by Jocelyn Russell, intentionally leaving space for visitors to pose where Cody Dorman would have been in his wheelchair. <https://www.wuky.org/wuky-news/2025-10-15/monument-dedicated-to-codys-wish-cody-dorman-and-their-special-bond>

**Keeneland Library opens exhibit highlighting Latino horse racing community** - The Keeneland Library unveiled "Raíces: The Making of Latino Legacies in Racing," a landmark bilingual exhibit highlighting the impact of 100 Latino trailblazers in Thoroughbred racing and breeding from the late 1800s to the present. The free showcase features biographical vignettes, rare images, and artifacts, celebrating industry professionals across the Americas, including jockeys, grooms, and veterinarians. The exhibit is presented in English with a Spanish audio guide and was developed through a multinational collaboration. Raíces can be seen at the Library, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. <https://paulickreport.com/news/the-biz/keeneland-library-unveils-exhibit-highlighting-the-latino-communities-impact-on-horse-racing>

**Dates set for Three Day Defender Event at the Kentucky Horse Park** - tickets for the 2026 Kentucky Three-Day Event, scheduled for April 23–26, are currently available. The event is an internationally renowned, Olympic-level equestrian competition held annually at the Kentucky Horse Park. It is one of only seven five-star events in the world, making it a major test of horse and rider athleticism and skill. <https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/eventing/kentucky-three-day-event-tickets-767193>

**Kentucky Derby Museum opens new exhibit dedicated to Derby fashion** - The Kentucky Derby Museum has unveiled a new, permanent "Derby Fashion" exhibit. Opened in July 2025, display showcases the bold and unique fashion of the Kentucky Derby, from its origins in the 1870s to modern times. The exhibit, which includes dozens of physical outfits and over 150 items accessible via interactive touchscreens, is designed to give visitors a year-round taste of the iconic race's atmosphere and style. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/events/kentucky-derby/fashion/2025/08/01/derby-fashion-exhibit-opens-at-kentucky-derby-museum/85440047007/>

**Kentucky Derby Museum opens new Winner's Circle exhibits** - The Kentucky Derby Museum unveiled its updated Winner's Circle exhibit in early June, honoring Sovereignty, the 151st Kentucky Derby champion. Artist Mike Prather meticulously crafted a life-sized replica of Sovereignty, capturing its unique dark coppery color and distinct blaze using a multi-layered painting technique. This exhibit, alongside an updated lobby banner and a \$2 million refreshed "The Greatest Race" film, aims to showcase Sovereignty's historic win to hundreds of thousands of visitors. <https://sports.yahoo.com/article/stakes-winner-camp-hope-ensconced-220911201.html>

## **Hotels & Lodging**

**Everhome Suites opens in Bowling Green** - Choice Hotels has expanded its midscale extended-stay footprint with a new Everhome Suites in Bowling Green, Kentucky. This property features apartment-style suites equipped with full kitchens and customizable "Me Spaces." The location caters to long-term travelers by offering modern amenities like a 24-hour fitness center and onsite laundry.

<https://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/news/choice-hotels-everhome-suites-additions/?cf-view>

**Louisville to convert Humana tower to 1,000 room hotel, conference center** - Louisville is transforming its skyline with a \$600–\$700 million project to convert the iconic Humana Tower into a 1,000-room convention headquarters hotel. Slated to open by 2030, the dual-tower complex will feature over 100,000 square feet of meeting space and a 40,000-square-foot ballroom. This landmark development aims to attract major national conventions, positioning Louisville as a top-tier destination for large-scale events while boosting tourism and downtown economic growth.

<https://meetings.skift.com/2026/02/05/louisville-to-get-1000-room-convention-hotel-to-attract-bigger-meetings/>

**JW Marriott to occupy Firth Third tower in Louisville** - A new JW Marriott is coming to downtown Louisville, occupying the former Fifth Third building at 4th and Liberty Streets. The luxury hotel will feature approximately 250 rooms, a rooftop bar, and high-end dining options. This project is part of a larger revitalization of the historic tower, which has been a skyline staple since 1982. Construction is expected to begin later this year, further expanding the city's upscale hospitality offerings near Fourth Street Live.

The hotel is slated to be complete in 2027. <https://www.wlky.com/article/new-hotel-louisville-downtown-marriott-jw-fifth-third-building/70193166>

**Renovations underway at Barren River Lake State Resort Park** - Barren River Lake State Resort Park is receiving \$9.5 million in upgrades. The project includes \$6 million for renovating lodge rooms with new finishes, flooring, and bathrooms, alongside updates to the restaurant and lobby. An additional \$3.5 million will fund critical HVAC and mechanical improvements. To accommodate construction, the lodge closed in February 2026 and is expected to reopen with modernized amenities in the fall.

<https://www.wnky.com/barren-river-lake-state-resort-park-to-receive-9-5-in-upgrades-to-promote-tourism/>

**Renovations underway at Lake Barkley State Resort Park** - Lake Barkley State Resort Park has entered the final phase of a \$24 million renovation. Expected to conclude by early 2027, the project includes lodge repairs, pool renovations, and interior updates like new flooring and decor. Upcoming improvements will target the fitness center, guest accommodations, and the golf course irrigation system. The modern upgrades will preserve the site's beloved authentic atmosphere.

[https://www.timesleader.net/news/lake-barkley-state-resort-park-enters-final-phase-of-renovations/article\\_af2c0c88-b55c-55c4-9b42-bbc152139652.html](https://www.timesleader.net/news/lake-barkley-state-resort-park-enters-final-phase-of-renovations/article_af2c0c88-b55c-55c4-9b42-bbc152139652.html)

**Hilton Lexington Downtown to undergo renovations** - The Hilton Lexington Downtown is planning a \$20.9 million renovation starting in 2027. Located at Vine and Broadway near Rupp Arena, the 360-room hotel recently received preliminary state approval for up to \$5.2 million in tourism tax incentives. The project involves remodeling guest rooms and meeting spaces to modernize the 1982 property.

<https://www.kentucky.com/news/state/kentucky/article313754225.html>

**Hotel Thoroughbred to open in Paris** – The Hotel Thoroughbred is slated to open April 2026, just in time for the Spring Meet at near-by Keeneland Racetrack, April 3-24. The hotel is located in a 135-year-old refurbished building complete with 19-rooms and an equestrian theme. Located in downtown Paris, this intimate retreat house is located in the heart of Kentucky Horse country.

<https://gardenandgun.com/articles/hot-southern-hotel-openings-to-watch-for-in-2026/#:~:text=Co.%20kitchen%20goods.,Hotel%20Thoroughbred,-Paris%2C%20Kentucky>

**Aldenberg Hotel and steakhouse open in downtown Versailles** - The \$10.7 million Aldenberg Hotel is now open in the historic 1852 Woodford Bank and Trust building in downtown Versailles, Kentucky. Named after a local architect, the luxury boutique features 29 rooms and operates as Kentucky's first hotel/distillery. It houses the upscale Silk's Steakhouse, which offers white-tablecloth service, prime dry-aged steaks, fresh seafood, and classic cocktails. The hotel also features Aldenberg Distillery, which produces Keyholder's Reserve bourbon, with a new rooftop bar expected to open in Spring 2026.

<https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article312599936.html>

**Retreat Center in Red River Gorge opens new event space** - Dappled Light Adventures, a family-owned business in Red River Gorge, has unveiled a new community space called "the Rookery." The 1,500-square-foot cliffside building will officially open in September 2025 and it offers a dedicated space for retreats and large groups. While the company still offers its "glampsites" for individual travelers, the new facility is designed to enhance its focus on providing transformational experiences for business, youth, and other organized groups. <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/articles/dappled-light-adventures-red-river-090251415.html>

**Carter Caves State Park renovating campground** - Carter Caves State Resort Park is undergoing a \$3.8 million renovation to its campground. The project, funded by a \$40 million allocation for state parks, will enhance the visitor experience by adding a new store, bathhouse, and upgraded utilities. The campground will be closed during the 2025 season and is expected to reopen in early 2026. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/carter-caves-campground-undergoing-3-221800985.html?guccounter=1>

**Letcher County to open a mountaintop resort** - Letcher County tourism leaders are planning the Raven Rock Resort, a new mountaintop destination in Jenkins. The resort, set atop Pine Mountain, will feature a lodge, cabins, and biking trails. It is designed to attract tourists traveling along Route 23, who might otherwise miss the town. According to the EKY Heritage Foundation, the project is in the design phase and is scheduled to open by 2027. <https://www.weku.org/the-commonwealth/2025-08-10/letcher-county-tourism-leaders-work-to-open-mountaintop-resort>

**Jenny Wiley State Park undergoing renovations** - Jenny Wiley State Resort Park's lodge is undergoing renovations. Work started in September with a \$5.5 million state investment for improvements to dining and meeting rooms. Expected reopening is summer 2026. Additionally, a new \$1.45 million archery center broke ground in fall 2025. While the lodge, cottages, and campground are temporarily closed, the park will continue to offer outdoor activities like hiking, biking, and fishing. <https://nkytribune.com/2025/06/jenny-wiley-state-resort-parks-lodge-to-undergo-renovations-add-archery-center/>

**Hyatt Regency in downtown Lexington to undergo renovations** – The Kentucky Tourism Development Finance Agency approved tax incentives for the Hyatt Regency Lexington. Built in 1975, the full-service hotel is adjacent to Rupp Arena and the convention center. The bulk of the \$58.5 million renovation project is set to begin Summer 2026 and will be completed in September. This major investment is deemed crucial to modernize the property and enhance the experience for the city's large conventions and major events. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/lexington-hyatt-58-5-million-100000654.html>

**Hotel Bourré Bonne opens in downtown Louisville** - The Hotel Bourré Bonne opened in April 2025, time for the Kentucky Derby. The hotel is part of Hilton's Curio Collection and is located in the heart of downtown, a block from the KFC Yum Center. The \$60 million hotel offers 168 rooms across five stories, as well as an outdoor pool, rooftop ballroom and restaurant. <https://www.hospitality-interiors.net/uncategorized/hotel-bourre-bonne-opens-in-louisville/>

## **Music**

**Louder Than Life hard rock festival announces 2026 lineup** - America's Loudest Rock & Metal Festival returns to Kentucky, September 17-20, with its largest lineup ever! Joining headliners My Chemical Romance and Iron Maiden are Pantera, Megadeth, Tool, and Limp Bizkit. The 2026 festival features nearly 200 acts, including Alice Cooper and Sublime, across seven stages. Organizer Danny Wimmer promises a four-day playground of legendary music, bourbon, and roller coasters. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/music/2026/02/23/louder-than-life-2026-lineup-dates-tickets/88831244007/>

**Lineup for Bourbon and Beyond music and culture festival released** - Bourbon & Beyond returns to the Kentucky Exposition Center September 24–27, 2026, featuring over 100 artists across five stages. Headliners include Chris Stapleton, Foo Fighters, and Kacey Musgraves. This eighth edition shifts to the weekend after Louder Than Life, blending rock, Americana, and bluegrass with elite culinary experiences.

Highlighting the "Fork & Flask" village, organizer Danny Wimmer promises an immersive "vacation inside a vacation" complete with bourbon tastings, local food, and Kentucky Kingdom coasters.

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/music/2026/02/18/bourbon-and-beyond-2026-lineup-bands-tickets-prices-dates/88529636007/>

**New music venue to open in Louisville** - A new music venue is set to open in Louisville's Paristown Pointe neighborhood, Spring 2026. Gig Louisville, in the former Amp Louisville building, will have a 250-capacity music venue and bar. Located at 1017 E. Broadway, the 2,200-square-foot space that will be both accessible and versatile versatility and accessibility. After weather and hiring delays, the venue will showcase diverse genres from local and touring acts. Operating Tuesday through Sunday, the club features an adaptable layout, snacks, and a jukebox-equipped bar area.

<https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2026/02/03/new-music-venue-gig-louisville-to-open-by-march.html?>

**Beaver Dam announces new music festival set for October 2026** - The inaugural Stomp and Holler Roots Music Festival debuts October 2–3, 2026, at Beaver Dam Amphitheater. This destination-style weekend features Americana, folk, and country rock alongside Kentucky bourbon, local food, and on-site camping. Proceeds support regional youth programs and community projects through the Cliff Hagan Boys & Girls Clubs and the Beaver Dam Foundation. The event aims to blend high-quality musical performances with local culture to create a lasting community impact.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/stomp-holler-festival-coming-beaver-101800986.html>

**Eddie Montgomery to play free show in Danville for American250** - Danville native Eddie Montgomery kicks off Boyle County's America250 celebration with a free Montgomery Gentry concert on July 3, 2026, at Millennium Park. Honoring a promise to late partner Troy Gentry, Montgomery will perform hits and tracks from his album Home Run. The patriotic weekend continues July 4 with a downtown parade, rifle competition, and fireworks. This milestone event blends country music legacy with local pride to celebrate the nation's semiquincentennial. <https://amnews.com/2026/01/09/eddie-montgomery-to-headline-danvilles-america-250-kickoff-concert/>

**Romp Bluegrass Festival Announces 2026 lineup** - The 2026 ROMP Bluegrass Festival, hosted by the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum, returns to Yellow Creek Park in Owensboro, Kentucky, from June 24–27. This year's star-studded lineup features headliners I'm With Her, Punch Brothers, and Marty Stuart & His Fabulous Superlatives. <https://wbkr.com/romp-2026-lineup/>

**Lexington's Railbird Festival releases 2026 lineup** - The lineup for the 2026 Railbird Music Festival, held at The Infield at Red Mile in Lexington on June 6 - 7, has been announced. Headlining the two-day event will be The Lumineers and Kentucky-native Tyler Childers. Over 30 artists will perform across three stages, including Caamp, Zach Top, Mt. Joy, Ella Langley, and Houndmouth. The festival will also continue to feature curated bourbon experiences. Tickets are currently on sale.

<https://www.wkyt.com/2025/10/20/lineup-railbird-music-festival-2026-announced/>

**Healing Appalachia music fest returns to Ashland** - Healing Appalachia, the world's largest recovery-based music festival, is returning to Ashland, September 18-20, 2026. Founded by Tyler Childers, the festival has raised over millions for Appalachian communities impacted by the opioid crisis. After five years in West Virginia, the festival moved to the Boyd County Fairgrounds in 2025. In years past lineups included Tyler Childers, Chris Stapleton, Molly Tuttle, Lukas Nelson and many more.

<https://holler.country/festivals/healing-appalachia>

## **Outdoors**

**Kentucky Parks launches new mobile app** - Governor Andy Beshear announced the launch of OuterSpatial, the Kentucky Department of Parks' new mobile app, designed to make exploring the state's 44 parks easier and safer. The app offers key features like up-to-date information on closings, event schedules, and detailed offline trail maps. To celebrate the launch, the department introduced the

Kentucky Passport Challenge, which encourages users to visit all 44 state parks and earn a unique check-in badge for each one. The app is freely available on both iOS and Android.

<https://www.wlky.com/article/kentucky-parks-mobile-app-outdoors-explore-louisville/68998572>

**First Frontier Appalachian Trail System grows** - The First Frontier Appalachian Trails (FFAT) is a successful and growing multi-county ATV/UTV trail system in Eastern Kentucky. Operating under the Kentucky Mountain Regional Recreation Authority, the network aims to redefine the region's post-coal economy by driving tourism and supporting small businesses. The system is rapidly expanding, seeking to connect up to 36 counties. Officials note its success is demonstrated by the sale of permits and the recent groundbreaking for a new headquarters, positioning FFAT as a major regional economic engine.

[https://www.paintsvilleherald.com/news/officials-first-frontier-atv-trail-system-successful-growing/article\\_beeef6b1-d1cc-4bca-9c18-4dfc5c2c0615.html](https://www.paintsvilleherald.com/news/officials-first-frontier-atv-trail-system-successful-growing/article_beeef6b1-d1cc-4bca-9c18-4dfc5c2c0615.html)

**Hodgenville earns Kentucky Trail Town designation** - Hodgenville recently achieved the Kentucky Trail Town designation, a result of years of collaborative effort by local officials, volunteers, and sponsors. This tourism and economic development program provides the community with a strategic plan to capitalize on its recreational assets. By sharing their outdoor opportunities, culture, and history, Hodgenville aims to attract adventure seekers and boost its downtown area by establishing new destinations like shops, restaurants, and event venues.

[https://www.pmg-ky2.com/larue/news/hodgenville-certified-as-ky-trail-town/article\\_48438bb1-3e0e-5950-a3b9-24d96406700e.html](https://www.pmg-ky2.com/larue/news/hodgenville-certified-as-ky-trail-town/article_48438bb1-3e0e-5950-a3b9-24d96406700e.html)

**AJ Jolly Park undergoing \$10 million restoration** - The camping and lake access at AJ Jolly Park will be closed through the 2026 season for a major \$10 million restoration project to ensure the long-term safety of the park's main assets. The project will address the aging 1960 dam by performing necessary repairs and improvements to its concrete and foundation. Crucially, the plan involves significantly lowering the lake to safely dredge accumulated sediment and replace an old culvert with a new bridge, aiming to restore the lake's depth and water quality for future enjoyment. Campers will be able to make site reservations in February 2027.

<https://linknky.com/news/2025/09/23/aj-jolly-lake-camping-to-close-through-2026-for-10-million-project/>

**New climbing area developed in Red River Gorge** - The Venue is a new crag at the Red River Gorge, developed following a 2025 land acquisition by the Red River Gorge Climbers Coalition. Located in the Cave Fork Recreational Preserve, this roughly 120-foot, steep, amphitheater-like cave is hailed as America's biggest and steepest new sport climbing area. It offers a wide range of routes, though it is primarily celebrated for its dynamic and challenging 5.13 and 5.14 lines, providing a new premier destination for high-end climbers.

<https://gripped.com/news/the-venue-is-an-amazing-new-crag-at-red-river-gorge/>

**Lake Cumberland to begin multi-million renovation project** - Lake Cumberland State Resort Park is slated to receive \$7.4 million in upgrades to enhance the visitor experience. The project, which begins in January and is expected to finish by late 2026, includes modernizing finishes and furniture in the lodge and guest rooms, as well as upgrading the conference center's systems. During renovations, the lodge, indoor pool, bar, and main dining room will close, but cabins, campgrounds, and trails will remain open to guests.

<https://lakercountry.com/2025/10/lake-cumberland-state-resort-park-to-receive-7-4m-in-upgrades/>

**Kentucky Fish and Wildlife remove low-head dam at Great Crossing Park** - Georgetown has reopened Great Crossing Park after work crews removed the low-head dam from that section of North Elkhorn Creek. Officials cited safety concerns as the reason for the dam's removal. The project was completed in August 2025, a week ahead of schedule.

[https://www.news-graphic.com/news/great-crossing-park-reopened-dam-removal-complete/article\\_32efc576-145b-40f6-b41a-e0c0d78f5929.html](https://www.news-graphic.com/news/great-crossing-park-reopened-dam-removal-complete/article_32efc576-145b-40f6-b41a-e0c0d78f5929.html)

**Major League Fishing to help bolster fish habitats in Kentucky Lake** - Major League Fishing's (MLF) Fisheries Management Division and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources partnered to deploy new fish habitats in Kentucky Lake. As part of the Minn Kota Habitat Restoration Program, officials construct and deploy specially made materials near the Kentucky Lake Dam State Park. These structures, made of recycled PVC, are designed to create long-term habitats for panfish and improve fishing conditions.

<https://www.radionwtn.com/2025/06/12/fish-habitat-installed-in-kentucky-lake/>

**Shark fossils discovered in Mammoth Cave** - Paleontologists have discovered the remains of a 340-million-year-old shark within Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky. The newly identified species, *Macadens olsoni*, was a small shark less than a foot long that used its curved teeth to crush prey like mollusks. According to the National Park Service, this finding adds to the more than 70 ancient fish species found inside the cave, which was once a shallow saltwater sea. This discovery helps researchers better understand ancient marine life. <https://www.livescience.com/animals/extinct-species/ancient-shark-discovered-deep-inside-worlds-longest-cave-system>

**Leg of Major League Fishing series scheduled for Kentucky in 2026** - Major League Fishing announced its 2026 Toyota Series schedule, which includes a stop at Kentucky Lake. The event, part of the Plains Division, will take place from April 9-11 and will be hosted by the Kentucky Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau in Gilbertsville. This tournament series offers anglers high payouts and the opportunity to advance to the nationally televised Toyota Series Championship. The full schedule features competitions on diverse fisheries across the country, showcasing professional bass fishing at its highest level. <https://thebasscast.com/2025/08/12/major-league-fishing-reveals-2026-toyota-series-schedule/>

**Former golf course in Northern Kentucky to be converted into multi-use park** - Kenton County leaders are investing \$20 million to transform a former golf course in Independence into a new 200-acre park. Located at the old Fox Run Golf Club, the park will feature multi-use trails, a playground, and pickleball courts. The project also includes restoring existing creeks to their natural flow. Leaders believe the park will enhance the region's outdoor offerings and attract more visitors, improving the quality of life for residents. Construction is expected to begin in Spring 2026. <https://local12.com/news/local/former-kenton-county-northern-kentucky-golf-course-become-one-areas-biggest-parks-park-acres-nature-outdoors-vitality-independence-multi-use-trails-playground-courts-creeks-funding-funds-cost-money-construction-cincinnati>

**Fish habitats installed in eastern Kentucky lake to improve fishing conditions** - New fish habitats were installed at Buckhorn Lake, located in Perry County, to improve fishing conditions. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources partnered to complete the project, which used concrete and brush to create the structures. The new habitats will highlight the quality of fishing in Perry County and boost tourism. <https://www.wyvt.com/2025/07/11/new-fish-habitat-structures-buckhorn-lake/>

**Yew Dell Botanical Gardens completes construction on Castle Gardens project** - Yew Dell Botanical Gardens in Crestwood, Kentucky, finished construction on its \$5 million Castle Gardens project. This transformation creates accessible gardens, water features, and educational opportunities around the historic Yew Dell castle. Yew Dell, a nationally registered historic site and garden center, welcomed approximately 30,000 visitors last year. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/life/home-garden/2025/06/12/yew-dell-botanical-gardens-castle-undergoes-5-million-renovation/83874548007/>

## **Other**

**Kentucky Exposition Center renovation to be complete by late 2026** - The first phase of the Kentucky Exposition Center expansion reached a milestone as of February 2026. The new 350,000-square-foot facility, featuring the venue's largest Class A exhibit hall, is set for completion by year-end. Part of a \$470 million modernization, this project will elevate the center to the nation's fifth-largest convention space. While events begin in 2027, a \$213 million second phase will soon follow to upgrade the West Wing and food operations. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2026/02/20/kentucky-expo-center-180m-expansion-on-track-for-2026-completion/88767414007/>

**American Airlines commits more routes to Louisville's airport** - American Airlines is boosting its Louisville service for 2026 race week with a record 20 nonstop routes. Between April 30 and May 3, the carrier will operate special "pop-up" flights from 13 additional cities, including Austin, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles, while doubling capacity from major hubs. West Coast travelers can even enjoy luxury Airbus A321T aircraft with lie-flat seats, ensuring a premium, direct journey to Kentucky's premier sporting event. <https://www.thetraveler.org/american-airlines-adds-record-20-nonstops-to-louisville-for-2026-race-week/>

**Viking river cruise to make stops in Henderson, Louisville and Owensboro** - Starting in 2027, Viking River Cruises will expand its Ohio River itineraries to include Henderson, Owensboro, and Louisville. Featured on voyages like the "Mississippi & Ohio River Explorer," travelers will experience Henderson's downtown area, Owensboro's Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame, and Louisville's historic waterfront. This expansion follows successful unscheduled stops in 2025. Local officials anticipate a significant boost to regional tourism and cultural preservation efforts.

<https://spectrumnews1.com/ky/louisville/news/2026/02/20/viking-cruises-coming-to-owensboro>

**Cave City to build \$20 million expo center** - Agricultural Exposition Center is coming to Cave City, transforming the region's tourism and economy. Located near Mammoth Cave National Park, the state-of-the-art facility will host livestock shows, rodeos, and community events year-round. Officials expect the project to draw thousands of new visitors, boosting local hotels and restaurants. Currently in the design phase, officials expect to have plans finalized by late Spring 2026.

<https://spectrumnews1.com/ky/louisville/news/2026/02/12/20-million-ag-expo-cave->

**Northern Kentucky's airport to expand non-stop flights** - Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport is significantly expanding its nonstop reach in 2026. British Airways increases London service to six times weekly starting March 29, while Southwest debuts twice-daily flights to Nashville. This summer, Allegiant will launch a new route to Orange County and restart Portland service in May. The expanded flight schedule is a result of the airport heavily incentivizing both domestic and international routes to boost the airport's competitiveness within the market.

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/travel/2026/02/09/cincinnati-airport-allegiant-american-airlines-british-airways-new-flights-cvg/88548559007/?qnt-cfr=1&qca-cat=p&qca-uir=true&qca-epi=z1189xxp000350c000350e1189xxv003597d--56--&qca-ft=199&qca-ds=sophi>

**Breeze Airlines announces non-stop flights from Connecticut to Louisville** – Beginning May 29, Breeze Airways will launch summer seasonal nonstop flights between Windsor Locks, Conn. and Louisville. Operating Monday through Friday on an Airbus A220-300 aircraft, the route aims to provide easy access to attractions like the Louisville Slugger and Kentucky Derby Museums.

<https://www.fox61.com/article/travel/breeze-to-launch-nonstop-flights-bdl-louisville-in-may/520-7eebaadb-42fa-420b-9323-040cac4cd8ed>

**Tourism Projects across Kentucky bring \$118 million in investments** - Kentucky officials have announced five tourism projects totaling \$118 million in 2025 investment. Key developments include renovations at the Hyatt Regency Lexington and Crowne Plaza, plus expansions at Kentucky Kingdom and Malibu Jack's. These projects, along with four preliminary approvals like Boone's Ridge, are expected to create nearly 500 jobs. The Tourism Development Act allows these developers to recover costs via onsite sales tax. <https://www.lanereport.com/185621/2026/01/5-new-tourism-development-projects-118-million-invested-in-2025/>

**Iconic and Historic Meeting House completes accessibility upgrades** - The Red River Meeting House in Adairville, birthplace of the Second Great Awakening, has installed a handicap-accessibility ramp. Funded by the Kentucky Heritage Council and America250 Commission, the project ensures the frontier landmark remains inclusive for its 2026 semiquincentennial. Designed to match the site's rustic aesthetic, the ramp allows all visitors to experience the historic 1800 revival site. This upgrade preserves Kentucky's religious heritage while meeting modern standards for community worship and reenactments.

[https://www.franklinfavorite.com/russellville/news/article\\_4b4d0990-eafa-536f-905c-c126103df405.html](https://www.franklinfavorite.com/russellville/news/article_4b4d0990-eafa-536f-905c-c126103df405.html)

**Louisville based hemp production facility debuts tourism experience** - Cornbread Hemp has launched a new production facility and hemp tourism experience in Louisville, honoring Kentucky's long history in the hemp industry. This state-of-the-art facility offers visitors guided, educational tours that provide an immersive, behind-the-scenes look at how premium CBD and THC products are grown, processed, and tested from Kentucky-grown hemp flowers. The new destination provides a tranquil, wellness-focused stop, blending tradition with modern innovation, and includes a retail shop with a wide selection of their organic products. Tours are available Monday through Saturday.

<https://www.lanereport.com/184806/2025/11/cornbread-hemp-launches-hemp-tourism-experience-in-louisville/>

**LPGA selects Valhalla Golf Club as site for 2028 Solheim Cup** - The LPGA announced that the 2028 Solheim Cup will take place from September 8-10 at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville. The Solheim is a biennial tournament between teams of the best golfers from the United States and Europe. Valhalla will become one of the few venues to host both a Solheim Cup and a Ryder Cup, marking the LPGA Tour's return to Kentucky after more than 50 years. Fans can anticipate ticket and volunteer information after the 2026 Solheim Cup. <https://www.golfdaily.com/official-dates-unveiled-for-2028-solheim-cup/>

**Delta Airlines announces more flights to and from Louisville for Derby** - Delta is rolling out its largest-ever flight schedule to Louisville for the 2026 Kentucky Derby, adding over 3,000 seats and 60 flights. This major expansion includes the introduction of new non-stop services from Austin and Raleigh-Durham, increasing access from these cities. The airline is also adding frequencies from its Atlanta hub and upgrading aircraft on other key routes to accommodate the large number of fans attending "the most exciting two minutes in sports." <https://www.traveldailymedia.com/delta-adds-more-flights-to-louisville-kentucky/>

**Red River Gorge Visitor Center installs solar panels and EV charger station** - Red River Gorge Visitor Center unveiled its brand-new solar initiative in September 2025. The center, which is located in Slade, installed new solar panels and two EV chargers. The event marked the 100th solar project for the Mountain Association and recognized the Powell County Tourism Commission for becoming the state's first tourism commission to achieve net-zero energy consumption. This monumental achievement showcases a significant commitment to sustainability and eco-friendly tourism in the Red River Gorge region. <https://www.wkyt.com/2025/09/10/special-ribbon-cutting-ceremony-held-newly-named-red-river-gorge-visitors-center/>

**Elizabethtown Airport plans 200-acre expansion** - Elizabethtown is embarking on a multi-million-dollar expansion of Addington Field to accommodate surging corporate and military demand. The project involves constructing a new, longer runway shifted 1,000 feet west to improve safety and support larger aircraft. Officials have already acquired 220 acres for the expansion, which will also include new hangars and terminal upgrades. This infrastructure boost aims to strengthen the regional economy and better serve nearby Fort Knox operations. Renovations are expected to be completed by 2027. <https://www.wave3.com/2025/10/20/elizabethtown-plans-build-new-airport-runway-meet-growing-demand/>

**Allegiant Air announces non-stop flights from California to Northern Kentucky** - Allegiant Air has announced a new non-stop route connecting Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport to Orange County, California's John Wayne Airport. Starting in May 2026, the budget carrier will offer flights twice weekly, operating on Thursdays and Sundays. This new service provides Southern California-area travelers with a convenient and affordable link to Northern Kentucky's popular leisure destinations, including world-class bourbon distilleries and attractions like the Ark Encounter, with introductory one-way fares starting from \$79. <https://local12.com/news/local/airline-unveils-new-west-coast-route-cvg-cincinnati-airport-allegiant-air-flight-orange-county-california>

**SkyWest Airlines begins daily flights from Paducah to Chicago and Houston** - As of February 2026, Paducah's Barkley Regional Airport (PAH) now offers one daily roundtrip flight to both Chicago O'Hare (ORD) and Houston Intercontinental (IAH). SkyWest Airlines, operating as United Express, is providing the new service on 50-seat CRJ-550 aircraft, replacing the current flights to Charlotte. This move was finalized after SkyWest agreed to maintain the dual-destination schedule at the original subsidy rate approved by the DOT for a Chicago-only route. <https://www.wkms.org/business-economy/2025-10-28/flights-from-paducah-to-chicago-houston-to-start-in-february>

**First phase of road improvement project in west Kentucky almost completed** - The I-69 Ohio River Crossing (ORX) Section 1 in Henderson, Kentucky, is nearing substantial completion, with a nearly 2.5-mile new roadway (KY 3690) opening to traffic. This \$158 million phase, which broke ground in 2022, includes a six-plus-mile extension of I-69, nine new bridges, and reconstructed interchanges at U.S. 41

and U.S. 60. This new connection greatly improves travel times and safety, marking a key step toward the future I-69 bridge connecting Kentucky and Indiana, which is currently projected for completion in 2031. <https://fox56news.com/news/kentucky/new-kentucky-roadway-to-open-as-part-of-i-69-projects-first-phase-nears-completion/>

**Murray Tourism celebrates 40 years** - The Murray Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is celebrating 40 years of promoting tourism, starting as the Murray Tourism Commission in January 1985. Initially a part-time role, the CVB grew into a dedicated office with full-time staff and eventually settled in a renovated visitors center in downtown Murray in 2017. Over four decades, the organization has worked to share Murray's charm, history, and community events, playing a key role in the growth of tourism for the city. [https://www.murrayledger.com/news/murray-convention-and-visitors-bureau-celebrates-40-years/article\\_398c5279-a7b3-4f64-8190-6ee810e1b3a7.html](https://www.murrayledger.com/news/murray-convention-and-visitors-bureau-celebrates-40-years/article_398c5279-a7b3-4f64-8190-6ee810e1b3a7.html)

**Millions in Economic Revitalization funding earmarked for Eastern Ky tourism projects** - Nearly \$26 million in AMLER funds were awarded for 15 Eastern Kentucky revitalization projects, expected to attract nearly 110,000 new visitors annually through tourism. Key tourism projects include \$2 million for the City of Ashland Conference Center, a 30,000 sq. ft. facility designed to boost tourism revenue and create jobs. Additionally, \$260,000 supports the Lynch Motorsports Welcome Center in Harlan County, and funding was granted for a hilltop park pavilion at Hyden's Biggerstaff Trails. <https://www.lanereport.com/183420/2025/08/15-eastern-ky-projects-getting-26m-for-economic-revitalization/>

**Lexington's airport to streamline traveler experience** - Blue Grass Airport in Lexington is implementing new changes to streamline the travel process. Travelers can now leave their shoes on at TSA security checkpoints, a move already in effect. Additionally, the airport is addressing parking issues with a new lot currently under construction that will add over 800 spaces. This expansion, part of a 20-year master plan, aims to accommodate the growing number of passengers. The airport recently also introduced license plate scanning for garage parking. <https://www.wtvq.com/blue-grass-airport-undergoing-major-upgrades/>

**Kentucky Tourism launches new webpage centered on accessible travel** - Kentucky is emerging as a top destination for accessible travel, offering a wide range of inclusive experiences. The state has launched a new Accessible Kentucky webpage to help visitors find barrier-free bourbon tours, wheelchair-accessible trails, and inclusive museums. The site features tips from accessibility advocate Cory Lee. With thoughtful design and welcoming programs, locations like the Kentucky Derby Museum and Mammoth Cave National Park are ensuring every traveler, regardless of their needs, can enjoy the state's culture and attractions. [https://takingthekids.com/kentucky-offers-more-accessible-travel-destinations/#google\\_vignette](https://takingthekids.com/kentucky-offers-more-accessible-travel-destinations/#google_vignette)

**Kentucky Tourism sets economic impact records for third year in a row** - Kentucky's tourism industry had a record-breaking year in 2024, generating an economic impact of \$14.3 billion and supporting over 97,000 jobs. This marks the third consecutive year of record growth for tourism in the state. According to a study, 80 million travelers visited Kentucky, spending over \$10 billion on food, lodging, transportation, retail, and recreation. <https://www.lanereport.com/181772/2025/06/ky-tourism-generated-a-record-year-14-3-billion-in-economic-impact-more-than-97000-jobs-in-2024/>

**Louisville to host Connect Spring Marketplace** - Informa, North America's largest event producer, has chosen Louisville, Kentucky, to host its 2026 Connect Spring Marketplace. The three-day event, scheduled for April 14-16, will bring thousands of meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry professionals to the city. Louisville was selected for its central location, convention facilities, and hospitality, making it an ideal setting for the networking-focused event. This marks Informa's fourth event in Louisville, highlighting a strong partnership. <https://www.tsn.com/event-planning/informa-selects-louisville-to-host-connect-spring-marketplace-in-2026>

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