

IDEA GUIDE



VISITLEX

Lexington Visitors Center
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HORSE FARM TOURS

Some Odds-On Favorite Ways to Visit the Homes of Lexington's Four-Legged Stars

Beautiful horse farms have been part of the Bluegrass since the region was first settled. So have horse farm visitors.

Early 19th-century travelers remarked on the beautiful country estates of the Bluegrass noting, as one put it, “a handsome horse is the highest pride of a Kentuckian.”

When great 20th-century Thoroughbred Man o' War retired to stud in the Bluegrass, visitors from around the world flocked to see him. Man o' War's groom, Will Harbut, kept ledgers for visitors to sign. When Man o' War died in 1947, there were 63 ledgers containing over 1.3 million names.

Ready to do your part to uphold this great Bluegrass tradition? Visiting a horse farm while you're in town is a uniquely Bluegrass kind of experience you'll long remember. And it's easier than you might think.

There are about 450 horse farms in the region (about 150 in Lexington/Fayette County alone). They're all working farms— which means you should never just “drop by” —but more than a few allow visitors by appointment or through arrangements with professional tour companies.

Here's how you can revisit racing history, see the world's most fabulous farms and barns, get up-close-and-personal with Kentucky Derby winners, or discover an exciting variety of horse breeds.

Three Ways to Giddyup and Go

There are three ways to visit a horse farm. You can:

- ◆ Reserve a seat on a regular guided group tour;
- ◆ Hire a private guide to conduct a custom tour; or,
- ◆ Hoof-it-yourself by making appointments at specific farms.

Guided Tours: A Quick and Easy Overview

If your interest is general and your time limited— or if you don't know which farm you'd like to see— consider taking a regular guided group tour. The itinerary is planned by the tour company to offer an overview of Lexington and its horse farms.

On the other hand, three hours on and off a bus is probably not the best option for those with restless youngsters. And since horse farms may be just a part of the itinerary, ask in advance what the tour will include to see if it has enough horse stops to satisfy your interest.

Although offered daily most of the year, reservations are still needed for the tours.

Make them as far in advance as possible since tours sell out, especially during peak visitor times, including April and October.

◆ **Blue Grass Tours (859-252-5744)** Two tours daily at 9:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, spring through fall, with a minimum of four guests. Tours last about three hours and include a stop at a local horse farm, Keeneland Race Course and other points of interest. Pick-ups available at several hotels. \$40; \$25 for ages 12 and under. They also offer longer tours like “Horses, Hooch and History” which includes a boxed lunch and a stop at a distillery. See your options and book online at www.bluegrasstours.com.

◆ **Horse Farm Tours, Inc. (859-268-2906 or 800-976-1034)** Tours are given daily at 8:15 a.m. and 12:45 p.m. seven days a week year-round. Every tour includes a drive by Calumet, two or three farms to see mares, foals and stallions,

Bluegrass Note: Horse breeding has been an important Bluegrass industry since the area was first settled. Daniel Boone himself introduced a bill for “improving the breed of horses” at Kentucky's first legislative assembly.

plus Keeneland, and lasts about three and a half hours. Tours depart from several area hotels. \$40 (\$50 during Derby week). Children under 12 are \$30.

◆ **Thoroughbred Heritage Horse Farm Tours.** (859-260-8687) Tours are offered daily at 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. year-round and depart primarily from the Embassy Suites. This three hour tour includes a drive by Calumet, a tour of Keeneland race track, an up close personal encounter with Thoroughbreds, and points of interest from the movies Seabiscuit, Dreamer, and Secretariat. \$40 (higher in winter). Children 12 and under are \$28.

◆ **Unique Horse Farm Tours.** (859-213-6653) Departing from several hotels near the Kentucky Horse Park, usually at 8:30 a.m. and at noon, this tour gives you the behind-the-scenes stories about the people and horses that make Lexington “Horse Capital of the World.” Tour historic estates and new multi-million dollar farms on this two and a half to three hour van tour. Adults are \$40. Children 12 years old and under are \$20.

Customized Tours

If you like to travel at your own pace, have specific farms, horses and attractions you want to see or want the added allure of “insider” knowledge and access, hire a private guide for a custom tour.

This is the luxurious way to go. Most private tour companies have access to a variety of farms (some not open to groups or do-it-yourself tours). You can make pit stops or photo stops as often as you like. And your guide should entertain you with all kinds of fascinating facts, legends and lore.

As you might expect, private, custom tours cost more than guided group tours but may turn out to be a comparably priced alternative if you have more than a few people in your family or group.

In most cases, custom tours are offered as a “step-on service” — the guide joins you in your vehicle. Some companies will provide transportation, especially for groups.

What you’ll pay for a custom tour can vary widely depending upon the tour company, the length and content of the tour, the number in your party, and whether you use their transportation or yours. Minimum prices recently quoted ranged from \$150 to \$200 for a two or three hour tour for a few people.

Here are companies that offer private guides for custom tours. All are friendly and knowledgeable. A good way to choose one is to call in advance of your visit to discuss possible itineraries and rates and to get a sense of which guide’s personality and tour style might best complement your own.

Bluegrass Note: An expansive listing of farms, along with histories of some leading farms, can be found in the book *Horse Farms and Horse Tales of the Bluegrass* by Wilma Beale, available at local bookstores and on amazon.com.

- ◆ Blue Grass Tours. (859) 252-5744
- ◆ Destination Bluegrass. (859) 264-7822
- ◆ Central Kentucky Tours. (859) 492-3413
- ◆ Horses of Kentucky. Lois Hill (859) 277-4625
- ◆ Kentucky Horse Tours. Mary Ann Squires (859) 312-1124
- ◆ Lexington in Touch, Inc. (859) 224-4226
- ◆ Lexington Private Tours. John Midbo (859) 278-9488
- ◆ Mint Julep Tours. (502) 396-5682
- ◆ Scott Goodlett Events. (859) 361-3539
- ◆ Prime Horse Tours. (401) 699-4596
- ◆ Thoroughbred Heritage Tours. Larry and Linda Miano, (859) 260-8687
- ◆ UnBridled Tours. Nancy Hapgood (859) 806-9688 or Martha Martin (859) 333-8940

Booking Your Own Visits

If you’re the independent type, hoofing it on your own is a perfectly acceptable and enjoyable option. A number of farms — from Thoroughbred showplaces to smaller farms specializing in a range of other horse breeds — welcome individual tourists. Policies vary from farm to farm, but usually there’s no great trick to getting in. Just follow the first commandment of horse farm sightseeing:

Thou shalt make advance arrangements.

While it can be said with absolute surety that no farm in the Bluegrass welcomes unexpected guests, other visitor policies will vary from time to time and from season to season. Some allow visitors only on specific days or limit tours at certain times of year such as breeding season (February through mid-July), Kentucky Derby time, during horse sales, or during race meets. Most likely, you’ll need to check in at the farm office first.

Some horses may not be on view to visitors, so if you’re hoping to see a particular horse, inquire about its status ahead of time.

Don’t feel intimidated if your knowledge or interest isn’t that specialized. Most visitors aren’t quite that savvy; they just want to see the world’s most beautiful horses and horse farms.

Need we say that you’ve come to the right place?

Horse Country, Inc.

Many of the farms in this article can be booked through Horse Country. Over thirty prestigious farms and equine facilities, including the famed Hagyard Equine Medical Institute and Rood and Riddle Equine

Hospital, have banded together to offer a variety of opportunities for visitors to the Bluegrass Region. If you have your own transportation, you can go online and choose a tour from their ever expanding offerings. Choose from stud farms, nurseries, aftercare facilities, clinics and more. Tickets for adults start at \$20 per person. Most tours last about one hour. Gratuity is always included when you book and purchase a tour at www.visithorsecountry.com. Sign up for their e-newsletters and you'll be the first to know about special opportunities to connect with our most famous celebrity horses. Ask them about planning a unique experience for your small group.

Thoroughbred Farms

Not sure which farm to visit? The Horse Capital of the World is most famous for its Thoroughbreds. It is common for Kentucky Derby winners to "retire" to Bluegrass farms to begin their second career in the breeding shed. The following farms are excellent choices if you'd like to see just one or several of these living legends, and all of them use visithorsecountry.com as their online booking portal.

◆ **Coolmore America's Ashford Stud**, near Versailles, is home to 2018 Trip Crown winner Justify, 2015 Triple Crown Winner American Pharoah, 2000 Derby winner Fusaichi Pegasus, as well as 1995 Derby winner Thunder Gulch. Many of Ashford Stud's magnificent stallions travel to the Southern hemisphere after the Kentucky breeding season ends, so they may not be at home July through January.

◆ **WinStar Farm** encompasses about 2,700 acres of majestic Bluegrass landscape, with divisions for stallions, broodmares, foals and yearlings as well as a racing stable. A top force in the Thoroughbred industry, WinStar bred the 2010 Kentucky Derby winner Super Saver, who stands at stud here. Tours meet at the state-of-the-art stallion barn and include the breeding shed. Book your tour at www.visithorsecountry.com.

◆ **Godolphin at Jonabell Farm**, home of the Darley stallions in America, is where you will find 2016 Derby winner Nyquist, 2011 Derby winner Animal Kingdom and 2007 Derby winner Street Sense. Learn about the global scope of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's international breeding and racing operations. The ninety minute tour begins inside the farm office. You'll head outside

for a stallion viewing, visit the breeding shed, and hop on a shuttle for a drive through the rest of the farm and a chance to get up close to broodmares, foals, and weanlings.

◆ Taylor Made Farm.

Taylor Made Farm was created in 1976 to provide care for mares shipped to central Kentucky to be bred to stallions standing here. The farm, which began as 120 acres, has expanded its scope and its acreage. Now over 1,000 acres, it is one of the leading sales agencies in the world. In 1999, three Taylor Made graduates won races at the Breeders' Cup—a feat unparalleled in racing history.

Northern Afleet is among the top stallions in residence, and 2014 Derby winner California Chrome makes this farm his home. They offer a variety of tour experiences.

◆ **Claiborne Farm**, north of Lexington near Paris, has a strong and unbroken influence on the Thoroughbred industry. Owned by the Hancock family, Claiborne has been a leading Thoroughbred farm for generations. 2013 Derby winner Orb resides here. Hop on an electric shuttle for a behind-the-scenes tour that includes the simple tombstone that marks the grave of the great Secretariat, 1973 Triple Crown winner (and considered by many to be the greatest race horse of all time). Tours are offered seven days a week.

While the following Thoroughbred farms may not have a living Kentucky Derby winner, they have their own unique history as well as lavish barns and landscaping. Call Normandy and Sun Valley direct; tours of the others must be purchased at www.visithorsecountry.com.

◆ **Three Chimneys Farm**, located on Old Frankfort Pike in Woodford County, west of Lexington, has everything you'd expect to see on one of the world's finest horse farms, and many of the super stars of the Thoroughbred world! Three Chimneys offers tours of their stallion complex year round. This behind-the-scenes experience includes the history and evolution of the farm and its influence.

◆ **Lane's End Farm**. This beautiful farm has been compared to a national park. Guests can tour the stallion division of the farm and learn the ins and outs of an elite Thoroughbred breeding operation. Tours are usually on Fridays. Elizabeth II, Queen of England, is fond of this farm; she's been an overnight guest on more than one occasion!

◆ **Normandy Farm** on Paris Pike is famous for its unusual L-shaped barn commissioned in 1933 by then-owner Joseph

Bluegrass Note: Here are some horse farm visit basics, no matter how or when you visit.

◆ You can take pictures.

◆ You can take your children, but you should, for their own safety, keep a close rein on them. (And only you can decide if they are ready to hear an often-detailed description of how horses breed; those adult tourists ask the darnedest questions!)

◆ Wear comfortable clothes and sturdy shoes.

◆ No feeding or petting the horses. Horse personalities, like human temperaments, vary widely. They may bite or kick.

◆ The farms just look like parks; no picnics.

◆ You won't be able to sit on or ride the horses.

Widener. The barn features a clock tower and its roof, gables, cupolas and dormers are adorned with ceramic cats and other animals. The farm also includes an interesting cemetery, in which a life-size bronze statue of Thoroughbred champion Fair Play overlooks the graves of Fair Play and Mahubah, sire and dam of Man o' War. Tours by appointment April through October, Monday through Friday. Call this farm directly at (859) 294-9595.

◆ **Sun Valley Farm** is a family owned and operated thoroughbred nursery on 200 acres. An intimate and hands on tour allows visitors to get close to many mares and foals. The farm residence, built in 1831, has connections with the famous Pepper family who began the Bourbon distillery across the road, which is now Woodford Reserve. Two tours are given daily. 566 New Cut Road in Versailles. Book direct: (859) 533-5377.

Megson Farms specialize in the unique breeding of Jockey Club registered white Thoroughbreds. Reserve your spot in any of their unique experiences held on their farm from getting up close and personal with their mares, foals and yearlings to workshops of all kinds. Tours are given by appointment only, to schedule visit their website www.megsonfarms.com.

Horses of All Types

You may think that a horse farm is a horse farm, but it just isn't so. Most farms specialize in a specific breed of horse. Most Bluegrass farms are Thoroughbred operations, breeding and training horses primarily for racing. Kentucky produces more Thoroughbreds than any other state. But you can also see many other kinds of horses in the "Horse Capital of the World."

◆ American Saddlebreds, used for show and pleasure riding, are Kentucky's only native breed of horse. Saddlebred farms that allow visitors by appointment include **Wingswept Farm**, 1529 Keene-Troy Road near Nicholasville (859-219-9857) and **Blue Willow Farm**, 4400 Delaney Ferry Road in Versailles (859-873-2339).

◆ For a friendly visit with Morgan horses, America's first breed of horse, visit Bonnie and Fred Neville's **Burr Oak Farm** in Scott County. The Morgan horse sprang from a single stallion raised in Vermont in the late 1700s (502-863-0887). **Angel's Acres**, also in Scott County, has Morgans, too (502-863-0399).

◆ **Spy Coast Farm** is the place to visit to see Sport horses, the type of horse used in dressage, jumping and driving. The farms activities include breeding, training, competitions and sales. Book at visithorsecountry.com.

◆ **The Kentucky Horse Park** is not just a State Park, it's a working horse farm, too -- and much more! The 1,200 acres

that comprise the Park have served as an active horse farm since the 18th century. Featuring up to 50 breeds of horses at work and play, including 2003 Derby winner Funny Cide and 1994 Derby winner Go for Gin. The Park offers a variety of equine presentations to educate and entertain, along with horseback riding, horse drawn tours and carriage rides.

The grounds are home to the National Horse Center where many of the top equine management associations and breed organizations have their national or state offices. Filling six office buildings in the Park, the Center is home to The United States Equestrian Federation, The Pyramid Society, the American Hackney Horse Association, the American Hanoverian Society, U.S. Pony Clubs, Inc., and many more.

The Park is open seven days a week from around March 15 to October 31, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. During the winter the Park is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. (800-678-8813 or 859-233-4303)

Champions in Retirement

What happens to our Thoroughbred stars when they begin to fade on the race track or in the breeding shed? "Old Friends" is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing a dignified and comfortable retirement home for racing's elite.

Based at **Dream Chase Farm** near the Kentucky Horse Park, "Old Friends" offers an up-close encounter with great champions. Meet 1997 Derby winner Silver Charm and 2002 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner War Emblem. Celebrity horse Popcorn Deelites, who was cast in the movie *Seabiscuit*, also resides at Old Friends.

Tours are offered seven days a week year round. Tours are at 10 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. mid-March through October. Tours in the winter are once a day only (November 1 through mid-March). Adults \$15; kids 4-1 are \$10; kids 3 and under are free. Call ahead for an appointment. (502-863-1775)

While Old Friends focuses primarily on stallions, **Our Mims Retirement Haven**, just north of Lexington in Paris, Kentucky, takes care of retired Thoroughbred broodmares. Calumet's champion three year old filly Our Mims resided on this farm in her later years. Meet many great ladies of the industry: the ex-racers and the mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers of current Thoroughbred stars. Watch the whole herd interacting in the Haven's pastures. Visitors are encouraged, by appointment. (859) 227-6304. 🐎

Bluegrass Note: Looking for the ultimate Bluegrass souvenir? Contact the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (859-276-2291) for a free booklet called "Buying Your First Racehorse."

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

By Teresa Day, a freelance travel writer
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