

FOCUS ON THE REGION



The Bourbon Trail

Secrets of the Land

The Bluegrass Region of Kentucky has long been described a place of uncommon beauty. Since the time the first settlers arrived, the area has captivated inhabitants and visitors alike. While pleasing to gaze upon, the land holds a secret the eye cannot see, a secret that lies at the heart of Bourbon, one of Kentucky's oldest industries.

Bourbon was born in the Bluegrass. Almost 200 years later, Kentucky produces 99% of the world's Bourbon. America's only native spirit, Bourbon is a completely natural product consisting of three ingredients: water, grains and yeast.

All three are equally important to the taste of the final product, but master distillers will tell you an excellent source of water is critical. Used to cook the grains and to cut the final product to bottling proof, it must be free of impurities or it will negatively affect the taste. People around the world appreciate the complex flavors of fine Kentucky Bourbon. The water used at our distilleries enhances the subtle characteristics of this legendary libation. So...what makes the water of this region so special?

The answer is hidden from the eye just below the surface of this unique geological region. Millions of years ago central Kentucky was a shallow tropical ocean. Over time the water dried up leaving the shrimp, lobster and other hard-shelled crustaceans inhabiting the area to fossilize and eventually become limestone. This porous limestone bedrock left behind operates today as a natural filter, eliminating iron and other minerals that would negatively affect taste.

Although much of this massive filtration system is hidden just beneath the surface, there are a few areas where you can sneak a peek of these majestic rock formations. If you would like to see the oldest rock formations in the state, take a drive along U.S. 68 or U.S. 27 to view the cliffs bordering the Kentucky River. This same limestone, rich in phosphorous and calcium, is also credited with building the strong skeletons of Kentucky's other famous product, Thoroughbreds.

Prior to prohibition, over 200 distilleries were operating in central Kentucky. It is no coincidence that today the remaining bourbon distilleries are all clustered in the same geographic area. Striving to make a superior product, legendary names of the industry like Bill Samuels, Oscar Pepper, E.H. Taylor and Jim Beam chose locations for their distilleries with abundant supplies of natural limestone spring water. They all knew the secret – there is something special about the water emerging from this land.

The Bluegrass Region is home to four distilleries: Buffalo Trace, Four Roses, Wild Turkey and Woodford Reserve. Each with a character as distinct as the bourbons they produce, we recommend touring all four.

See the Bourbon Distilleries of the Bluegrass map on page 43.