



What's New in Kentucky

Arts & Culture

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

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. Kentucky Department of Tourism is accepting nominations for additional sites to be added to the trail through Dec. 31, 2025.

<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>

Kentucky Center for African American Heritage commemorates Black jockeys - A new exhibit, "Reflections N Black – Kentucky Derby Jockeys," has opened at the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, features quilts by Eugene Poole Jr. These vibrant, full-scale quilts commemorate Black jockeys who were instrumental in the early Kentucky Derby. Poole meticulously researches each jockey and their racing silks, aiming to permanently stitch their overlooked contributions into history through his textile artistry. Located in Louisville, the Center is open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. <https://www.lpm.org/news/2025-04-17/quilts-show-black-kentucky-derby-jockeys-in-full-color-and-scale>

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>

Kentucky site added to National Underground Railroad Network - A historic Greenup County site, where 58 enslaved people revolted in 1829, has joined the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. The group, being forcibly marched to Mississippi, killed two traffickers before 16 attempted escape; all were recaptured, and five later executed. In addition to highlighting a forgotten chapter in history, this designation makes the site eligible for federal grants and preservation assistance.

<https://www.kentucky.com/news/state/kentucky/article305739391.html>

Attractions

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, coinciding 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/>

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/>

Louisville to be home to NFL 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. The franchise, announced alongside Columbus and Orlando, is led by billionaire co-owner Mike Repole, whose ties to the Kentucky Derby inspired the "Kings" nickname. Repole noted that Louisville's market

and the availability of the 15,304-capacity Lynn Family Stadium were key factors. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/2025/10/07/ufl-louisville-team-louisville-kings-mike-repole-lynn-family-stadium/85893769007/>

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/

Louisville museum designed to celebrate accessibility set to open October 2026 - 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>

Kentucky Kingdom announces new suspension roller coaster - Kentucky Kingdom is adding its sixth roller coaster, Flying Fox, set to open in the 2026 season. The custom, family-friendly ride will be the park's first new coaster since 2019. It celebrates Kentucky's agricultural heritage, sending riders soaring over farmland at up to 37 mph on a 1,380-foot track. Themed around an animal crop-duster pilot named Jeb Fox, the attraction aims to create immersive, repeatable memories for families.

<https://www.wlwt.com/article/new-roller-coaster-kentucky-kingdom-flying-fox-pov-ride/69166609>

Indoor theme park set to open in former Owensboro mall - 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

John James Audubon State Park launches family friendly gnome-themed scavenger hunt - The "Gnomes of Audubon Forest" Scavenger Hunt Experience has launched at John James Audubon State Park. This free, self-guided adventure invites visitors to find ten hidden gnome homes, each with a unique gnome character and QR code for a special message. Participants use clues to locate the homes, and those who find all ten can claim a prize at the Audubon Museum & Nature Center gift shop. The experience blends nature, storytelling, art, and education. <https://hendersonky.org/press-release/gnomes-of-audubon-forest-scavenger-hunt-experience-launches-at-john-james-audubon-state-park/>

Louisville opens \$15 million Riverfront Park for play and learning - A new \$15 million "PlayPort" has officially opened at Louisville Waterfront Park. This 3.5-acre interactive playground, part of the park's Phase IV expansion, offers STEM-based learning through custom-built equipment from repurposed materials. It celebrates the Ohio River's heritage with authentic artifacts converted into play structures. Developed in partnership with the Kentucky Science Center, PlayPort includes educational signage and QR codes linking to science activity videos, providing an inclusive and engaging experience for all ages. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2025/03/26/interactive-15m-playground-opens-at-louisville-waterfront-park/82237204007/>

Dinosaur World opens new indoor exhibit 'Jurassic Jungle' - The Jurassic Jungle exhibit at Dinosaur World in Cave City, Kentucky, invites visitors on an unforgettable adventure through a prehistoric habitat. This immersive experience allows guests of all ages to encounter and discover hidden wonders of a long-past world. As daring explorers, participants unearth mysteries amidst life-sized dinosaurs, making it an engaging and educational journey into the age of giants. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/events/things-to-do/2025/04/05/dinosaur-world-in-cave-city-kentucky-what-to-know-about-the-park/82600301007/>

Kentucky Kingdom debuts new park section 'Discovery Meadow' — Kentucky Kingdom unveiled Discovery Meadow, a new section featuring three new rides and eleven reimagined attractions with fresh storylines. This new addition is part of a \$25 million investment planned over the next two seasons. The area also boasts new restaurants, a playground, and retail shops, all designed with customer feedback in mind. Celebrating Kentucky's nature and animals, Discovery Meadow aims to provide an immersive experience for guests. The park is seven days a week through Labor Day weekend. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/tripideas/kentucky-kingdom-s-new-land-discovery-meadow-now-open/ar-AA1EVJCQ?apiversion=v2&noservercache=1&domshim=1&renderwebcomponents=1&wcseo=1&batchservesertelemetry=1&noservertelemetry=1>

Bourbon

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

Culinary

New casual fine dining restaurant opens in downtown 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>

Proprietors from two different Louisville restaurants to team up for new venture - 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

Louisville restaurants re-opens with brand new theme - Chef David Danielson is transforming 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/>

New neighborhood bar and restaurant opens in Lexington - Southern Cookhouse & Bar is 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

Established eatery opens new location in Park City - Esters Farm Catering and Café recently found a new home in Park City, Kentucky, celebrating its grand opening on Thursday, October 9th, 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 early 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 tavern in Berea 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

Lexington welcomes new establishments to its restaurant scene - 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>

Azur reopens restaurant in Lexington - Azur Restaurant and Patio, a long-standing Lexington establishment, reopened in May after a five-month closure due to lease negotiations. The revamped Azur will feature a new chef, Nathan Vazquez, who plans to infuse the menu with Puerto Rican influences while retaining popular staples like bourbon fried chicken. The restaurant will initially offer dinner and Sunday brunch. <https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article306476821.html>

Kentucky food and culture highlighted in new docuseries - Ouita Michel, award winning chef, restauranteur and Kentucky native, is the subject of a new docuseries that is premiered at the 2026 ATX TV Festival in Austin, Texas and the Tribeca Festival in New York City. The eight-episode show, entitled "You Belong Here," explores Kentucky's diverse food and culture. Michel travels the state, conversing with chefs and farmers, aiming to present a more nuanced view of Kentucky than typically seen in national media. A worldwide release date has not been set. <https://www.kentucky.com/entertainment/tv-movies/article306724931.html>

Kentucky chefs named James Beard Awards finalists - Two Kentucky chefs were named finalists for the 2025 James Beard Awards' "Best Chef: Southeast": Sara Bradley, with Freight House, Paducah and Noam Bilitzer of MeeshMeesh Mediterranean, Louisville. Bradley widely known for her "Top Chef" run and Bilitzer for his restaurant's acclaim.

<https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/restaurants/article307350836.html>

Louisville Brewery to move to NuLu neighborhood – After eight years on Baxter Avenue in Phoenix Hill, Gravely Brewing Co. is relocating its taproom to NuLu, marking a significant move for the popular Louisville brewery. Gravely will continue production at its original address. Also making the move with the taproom will be Eliana's Hondouran Cafe, which currently operates at the Baxter Avenue location. The move is expected to be completed by early 2026.

<https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/05/13/gravely-taproom-relocating.html?j=39852915&senddate=2025-05-13>

Horses

Churchill Downs announces upgrades to track - Churchill Downs is undertaking a major upgrade with the \$280–\$300 million Victory Run project, a four-story premium hospitality venue. Located on the first turn, it will replace 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.wtvq.com/churchill-down-planning-a-major-upgrade/>

Kentucky Horse Park unveils and dedicates new monument - 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 that highlights Latino community's impact on horse racing - 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-community-s-impact-on-horse-racing>

Keeneland unveils track's phase one construction upgrades - Keeneland's Fall Meet debuted the first phase of its multi-million-dollar construction upgrades. The renovations include a reimagined Saddling Paddock with repositioned saddling stalls for better viewing. A new Stakes Winner's Circle has been created from the former Walking Ring, and a more accessible East Entrance now serves as a new gateway to the grounds. These enhancements are designed to improve the race-day experience for fans and horsemen alike. <https://www.wkyt.com/2025/08/19/keeneland-tickets-sale-wednesday-new-construction-brings-new-experiences/>

Keeneland picked to host 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championship - The Breeders' Cup World Championships will return to Keeneland in Lexington, Kentucky, on October 30-31, 2026. This marks the fourth time Keeneland will host the prestigious event. The track is undergoing a significant \$100+ million capital construction project, including a new Paddock Building, to enhance the fan experience. The championships will coincide with major Thoroughbred auctions, solidifying central Kentucky's role as the Horse Capital of the World. <https://www.wky.com/article/breeders-cup-world-championship-kentucky-2026/64904296>

Dates are 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>

Kentucky Derby Museum unveils updated 360° film - The Kentucky Derby Museum completed the upgrade to its 360° film, "The Greatest Race," for its 40th anniversary in 2025. The \$2.3 million project, led by Donna Lawrence Productions, features new footage, advanced lighting, and a state-of-the-art playback system. The revamped film is an immersive experience with a fresh perspective on the Derby.

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/events/kentucky-derby/2025/04/11/kentucky-derby-museum-2-million-project-upgrades-360-degree-immersive-film-light-show/78191972007/>

Construction underway for quarter-horse track in Boyd County — Construction has begun on the \$10 million Sandy Ridge Racetrack in Ashland, KY. The facility will be Kentucky's only quarter horse track. It's expected to create hundreds of jobs and boost local economy. The track, set to open in 2026, will host races and other events. The track will be an addition to \$70 million gaming facility that opened in 2024. <https://www.wsaz.com/2025/04/22/construction-progress-update-sandy-ridge-racetrack/>

Churchill Downs completed massive renovation of grandstand and pavilion - Churchill Downs completed an \$80-\$90 million renovation project ahead of Derby 151, transforming the grandstand and pavilion. This massive upgrade replaces old bleachers with 8,300 new comfortable seating options, including stadium-style seats and rail boxes. The project also enhances amenities with new concessions, bars, and wagering windows, creating an upscale outdoor garden environment. These improvements aim to provide an elevated guest experience while honoring Churchill Downs' rich history.

https://www.wdrb.com/derby_events/churchill-downs-crews-finishing-80-million-courtyard-pavilion-project-ahead-of-derby-151/article_813febc2-5425-4a6f-9461-2b6b159649c0.html

Hotels & Lodging

Luxury 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 to renovate 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>

Eastern Kentucky County plans 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.wku.org/the-commonwealth/2025-08-10/letcher-county-tourism-leaders-work-to-open-mountaintop-resort>

Trail Hotel in Bardstown offers luxury to bourbon enthusiasts - Bardstown, Kentucky's new Trail Hotel is a bourbon lover's dream, featuring five unique bars including the speakeasy Bourbon Vault. This ninety-five-room property offers eight bourbon-themed suites and a dedicated Bourbon Butler service to arrange distillery tours and tastings along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail, with a daily trolley for convenience. Additional amenities include a golf simulator, IV drips, and a Southern-inspired steakhouse, all designed to immerse guests in the bourbon experience. <https://gardenandgun.com/feature/bardstowns-newest-hotel-is-a-bourbon-lovers-dream/>

New Homewood Suites opens in Newport - Homewood Suites by Hilton has opened in Newport's Ovation district, a \$1 billion, 130-acre mixed-use development. The hotel offers 126 suites with fully equipped kitchens, separate living and sleeping areas, and complimentary Wi-Fi. It also features a fitness center, indoor pool, and free hot breakfast. Located near the Newport Aquarium and various dining options, the hotel provides convenient access to attractions and businesses in the Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky area, catering to both extended-stay and leisure travelers.

<https://spectrumnews1.com/ky/louisville/news/2025/02/28/homewood-suites-opens-ovation-newport>

Jenny Wiley State Park to undergo \$5.5 million renovation - Jenny Wiley State Resort Park's lodge will undergo renovations started September 1, 2025, with a \$5.5 million state investment for improvements to dining and meeting rooms, reopening 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 gets approved for \$58.5 million renovation – 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

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/>

Dates set for “Louder Than Life” and “Bourbon and Beyond” music festivals - New 2026 dates have been announced for Louisville's major music festivals, Louder Than Life and Bourbon & Beyond, which together draw over 350,000 fans. Louder Than Life will take place first, running from September

17-20. Bourbon & Beyond will follow immediately after, from September 24-27. Both events are held at the Kentucky Exposition Center. My Chemical Romance was also announced as the first headliner for Louder Than Life in 2026. The back-to-back festivals solidify Louisville's standing as a premier destination for major music events. https://www.wdrb.com/news/new-2026-dates-announced-for-bourbon-beyond-louder-than-life-in-louisville/article_1f5d576b-e26d-4468-9442-fb0a4825e6a9.html

Healing Appalachia 2026 music fest comes to Ashland again in September - 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>

Louisville Orchestra Performances to collaborate with Morgan Freeman and others - The Louisville Orchestra has unveiled its 2025-26 season, promising a blend of classical masterpieces, innovative collaborations, and new works. Performances will feature actor Morgan Freeman, Stewart Copeland best known as the drummer for 80's rock band, The Police, and musician Ben Folds, among others. The season began in September, and performances will take place at the Whitney Hall, Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Louisville. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/entertainment/music/2025/03/03/louisville-orchestra-announces-2025-26-season-tickets-dates/78421712007/>

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

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

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/>

Climbers develop new popular climbing area in Red River Gorge - The Venue is an amazing 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

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 January 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.wymt.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/>

Contactless kayak rentals aim to make outdoor adventure more accessible - Georgetown, Kentucky, has launched new contactless kayak rentals at Cardome Park on Elkhorn Creek. This innovative system allows users to rent kayaks, paddles, and life jackets via a smartphone app and QR code, offering easy, affordable, and self-service access to the waterway. Operated by Rent Fun, this initiative aims to make outdoor adventure more accessible and convenient for both locals and tourists.

https://fox56news.com/news/local/georgetown/_trashed-58/

Other

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 - The Elizabethtown airport is undertaking a 200-acre expansion to boost safety and support regional economic growth. The plan includes extending the runway to 7,800 feet and shifting it 30 degrees for safer landings, alongside new terminal construction. This upgrade will accommodate larger aircraft, such as corporate jets from the nearby BlueOval SK plant and military planes from Fort Knox, positioning the airport as a major driver for future economic activity in the region. https://www.wdrb.com/news/business/elizabethtown-airport-plans-200-acre-expansion-to-boost-safety-growth/article_f97f48f9-6d84-4680-a14c-4a7b2dbf514e.html

Airline announces new 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>

Airline to offer daily flights from Paducah to Chicago and Houston – Starting in February 2026, Paducah's Barkley Regional Airport (PAH) will offer 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/airline-to-offer-daily-flights-from-paducah-to-chicago-and-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

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

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.lanerreport.com/181772/2025/06/ky-tourism-generated-a-record-year-14-3-billion-in-economic-impact-more-than-97000-jobs-in-2024/>

Event organizer names Louisville as host for 2026 trade summit - 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.tsnn.com/event-planning/informa-selects-louisville-to-host-connect-spring-marketplace-in-2026>

Construction underway on Kentucky Exposition Center renovation - The Kentucky Exposition Center is undergoing a \$460 million renovation, and fairgoers at the 2025 Kentucky State Fair got a sneak peek. The initial phase is a \$180 million investment in a new 350,000-square-foot exhibit hall, expected to be finished by late 2026. This project aims to boost Kentucky's economy by attracting more events and tourism. Future plans include redeveloping the West Wing and West Hall, adding even more exhibit space and amenities. <https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2025/08/25/renderings-detail-460m-expo-center-renovations.html>

Kentucky Tourism unveils brand new tourism campaign 'Find What Moves You' - Kentucky has launched "Find What Moves You," a new tourism campaign showcasing the state's diverse experiences and welcoming environment. Emphasizing inclusivity, the campaign, anchored by exploration, authenticity, connection, and inspiration, utilizes dynamic digital and social media content. It aims to attract visitors by promoting new experiences and aligns with the "New Kentucky Home" initiative, fostering economic investment, talent attraction, and increased tourism by highlighting Kentucky as a place for personal and professional growth. <https://www.lanerreport.com/180405/2025/04/exploring-kentucky-find-what-moves-you/>

Kentucky Golf Trail looks to better combine golf and tourism - The Kentucky Golf Trail, combining golf with bourbon and horses, recently launched in May 2025. The trail offers access to meticulously maintained courses between Lexington and Louisville. Visitors can also experience bourbon distillery tours, thoroughbred farm visits, and horse racing at Keeneland and Churchill Downs, along with diverse culinary and cultural attractions in both cities. <https://www.golfdaily.com/kentucky-golf-trail-launches-at-iagtos-north-american-golf-tourism-convention/>

Frontier Airlines launches non-stop flights from Northern Kentucky to Texas and Dominican Republic - Frontier Airlines now offers direct flights from Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International

(CVG) to Austin, Texas (AUS) and Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Flights to Austin are scheduled for twice a week and flights to the Dominican Republic will be once a week.

<https://www.wlwt.com/article/frontier-airlines-flight-cvg-airport-austin-texas/64088620>

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2025/02/03/frontier-airlines-route-cincinnati-cvg-punta-cana-dominican-republic/78183779007/>

Lexington Airport restarts direct flights to New York City — Blue Grass Airport and Delta Air Lines have resumed non-stop flights from Lexington to LaGuardia Airport in New York City. This is the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that Blue Grass Airport has been able to offer this route year-round. Flights to and from New York are available six days a week from Sunday through Friday.

<https://www.kentucky.com/news/local/article306070271.html>

Air Canada begins daily flights between Northern Kentucky and Montreal — Air Canada now offers daily nonstop flight between Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG) and Montreal. CVG officials note that this addition will give customers more connecting options between Kentucky and European destinations. In addition to Montreal, Air Canada also has twice daily service between Toronto and CVG. <https://www.wlwt.com/article/air-canada-new-flight-montreal-cvg-airport-route/64893022>

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Updated December 2025

