

The Pastime

By Nicholas DeRenzo

Don't Hold Your Horses

Now is the perfect time to visit these three American equestrian capitals

May 6 marks the 149th running of the Kentucky Derby, and while Louisville grabs much of the attention, it's far from America's only destination for equine entertainment. Here are three other horse towns we're racing to this season.



Lexington, Kentucky

This month, the famed **Keeneland Racecourse** debuts its Chef's Secret Dinner Series, in which pop-up meals are set up throughout the venue, including the Winner's Circle, the Trophy Room, and the track itself. Before taking your seat, stop into

the **Keeneland Library**, a renowned research facility opened in 1939, to see its current exhibit on 150 years of pioneering Black equestrians, which runs through the end of August. This spring also sees the opening of **The Manchester**, a hotel in the Distillery District that's rife with nods to the area's racing heritage: In the lobby, the contemporary Appalachian restaurant, Granddam, takes its name from the lingo for a horse's grandmother and its inspiration from the first female Derby winner, Regret, who won back in 1915, while the Art Deco Lost Palm rooftop bar evokes mid-century South Florida racetracks.



Ocala, Florida

Speaking of Florida, this community in the central part of the state, about 75 miles northwest of Orlando, rivals Lexington for the title of Horse Capital of the World. The surrounding Marion County is home to 600 thoroughbred horse farms, and two of the last three Triple Crown winners have been born or trained here. Ocala never had a tourism infrastructure worthy of its reputation, however, until the 2021 opening of the \$800 million **Equestrian Hotel**. It's all about opulence here: The 248-room Neoclassical property includes a posh steakhouse called Stirrups, a pub with a horseshoe-shaped bar, and a toy store that sells Breyer model horses and a \$15,000 rocking horse modeled after one of Queen Elizabeth II's steeds. Best of all, the hotel is part of the new 378-acre **World Equestrian Center**, which boasts more than two dozen indoor and outdoor arenas, where guests can catch weekly hunter/jumper and dressage shows—sometimes right through the window of their room.

Middleburg, Virginia

About an hour's drive from Washington, D.C., bucolic Middleburg has earned the nickname of the Nation's Horse and Hunt Capital for its steeplechase and foxhunting traditions. (Don't worry, no foxes are actually killed in these parts.) In late 2020, **Lost Barrel Brewing** opened on a 76-acre working horse farm, and the grounds often host events such as meet-and-greets with the horses and hounds before the Middleburg Hunt. The city is also home to the **National Sporting Library and Museum**; if you visit by May 14, you can catch an exhibit on the 50th anniversary of Secretariat's Triple Crown win. Upcoming exhibition highlights include a collection of portraits of female riders by photographer Charles Rumph.

Clockwise from top: show jumping at the World Equestrian Center in Ocala; the National Sporting Library and Museum in Middleburg; a room at The Manchester in Lexington; jockey statues at Lexington's Keeneland Racecourse; deviled eggs at Ocala's Equestrian Hotel



Andrew Ryback (World Equestrian Center); PC Maven (deviled eggs); courtesy of Keeneland Racecourse [jockey statues]; courtesy of The Manchester (room); courtesy of National Sporting Library and Museum (exterior)