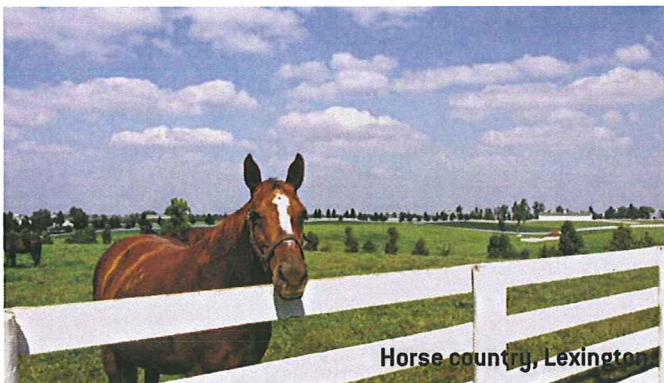


Louie Link skywalk, Louisville.

BOURBON, BLUEGRASS AND BAYS

The Commonwealth rolls out a welcoming carpet

By Buzzy Gordon and Carol Smith



Horse country, Lexington

All roads might not lead to Kentucky, but it certainly seems as if nearly all air lanes do. Louisville is the international hub for UPS, while the neighboring regional Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport is within a two-hour flight of 60% of the U.S. population. In these days of stressful air travel, Kentucky is the place to hold your meeting if you want rested attendees ready to work—and play.

The business, commerce and meetings and conventions hub of the Commonwealth of Kentucky lies within a compact triangle demarcated by Louisville, America's "northernmost southern city;" Covington (Northern Kentucky), the southern side of Cincinnati; and Lexington, the horse capital of the world. This dynamic region of the Bluegrass State also gives the world "the most exciting two minutes in sports" each May at Derby time, as well as smooth bourbon whiskey that can be enjoyed all year round—and experienced up close and personally as a mellowing adjunct to any meeting or convention.

Skywalk photo: gotolouisville.com;
Horse photo: Jeff Rodgers/Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau

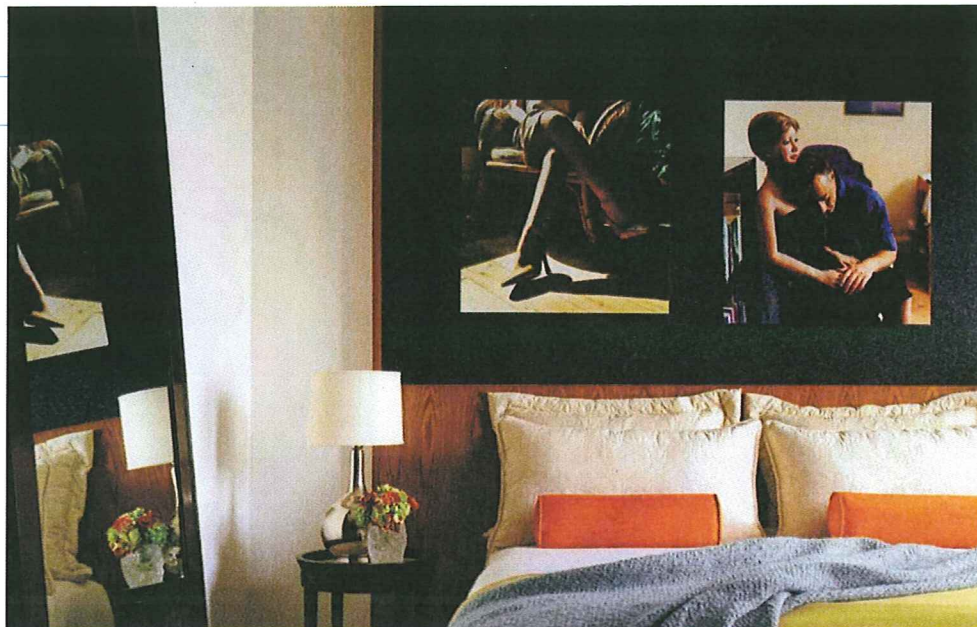
LOUISVILLE ▼

“Louisville is the meeting place of Midwest convenience with Southern hospitality,” says Nina Hudelson, senior sales manager for the **Kentucky International Convention Center** (affectionately nicknamed KICC). “Add to this the affordability that these two regions are known for, and the Louisville advantage for meetings becomes all the more compelling.”

KICC is a modern, 300,000-square-foot facility at the center of a newly revitalized downtown district along the Ohio River, which serves as the natural border between Kentucky and Indiana. A network of pedways (completely enclosed walkways above street level) connects KICC directly with three of the city’s major hotels, which together contain a total of about 2,300 hotel rooms (an additional 2,000 rooms are within easy walking distance). KICC itself spans two city blocks and houses a 30,000-square-foot ballroom, 52 meeting rooms and a convention theater equipped with plush leather seats.

Spacious as it is, KICC is practically dwarfed by its sister facility, the **Kentucky Exposition Center**; with more than a million sq. ft. of indoor space, it is the sixth-largest exposition facility in the country. The 400-acre property has become the permanent home of, among others, the National Farm Machinery Show, which alone drew more than 300,000 agricultural professionals, farmers and exhibitors to Louisville this year. KEC’s Freedom Hall is a 19,000-seat indoor arena, and yet it is still not as spacious as the downtown **KFC Yum! Center**, a 22,000-seat, 720,000-square-foot multipurpose facility with 34,000 sq. ft. of dedicated meeting space.

The Yum! Center—home arena of perennial NCAA basketball powerhouse University of Louisville—hosts some of the biggest names in show business (Elton John and Taylor Swift have rocked the house so far this year). But even if there is no headliner in town, there is always plenty of music, thanks to restaurants and entertainment venues at **Fourth Street Live**, conveniently adjacent to KICC. Also downtown is Main Street’s Museum Row, starring the **Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory**. The museum is dedicated to our nation’s pastime, and you can heft the actual bats of your favorite heroes of the diamond, as well as buy your own personalized bat from the folks who equipped the greatest legends of the game. Other museums in the Main Street lineup, all housed in remarkably preserved 19th-century edifices, include the **Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft**; the **Frazier History Museum**, which houses a world-class collection of armaments, particularly as they relate to the winning of the West; **Glassworks**, a multiuse facility dedicated to the art of glass and glassblowing; and the **21c Museum Hotel**, a museum of



contemporary art under the same roof as an award-winning, 90-room hotel.

Baseball stars are not the only stuff of legends in Louisville; so is the city’s most popular venue for off-site receptions: **Churchill Downs**, where you can stand on the infield just yards away from the winner’s circle, or your private party can survey the entire Kentucky Derby racetrack from the rarefied vantage point of Thoroughbred owners and even royalty (Britain’s Queen Elizabeth attended the Run for the Roses in 2007).

Another unforgettable place to relax—or to hold a cocktail reception for up to 650 of your attendees—is on the deck of the **Belle of Louisville**, the nation’s oldest paddle-wheel steamboat still in operation, as it meanders down the Ohio River. Those groups preferring to stay on dry land can still enjoy impressive waterfront views from riverside parks and patios, elegant meeting rooms in the Yum! Center, reception areas in the visually striking **Muhammad Ali Center** (dedicated to the Louisville-born boxing champion), or a revolving former restaurant atop one of the two towers of the **Galt House Hotel & Suites**. The hotel is the largest downtown meeting and convention hotel in the region, with 1,290 guest rooms and 124,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Other options are the **Hyatt Regency Louisville**, with 392 rooms and 20,600 sq. ft., and the **Louisville Marriott Downtown**, with 616 rooms and 50,000 sq. ft.

One organization that has decided to continue taking advantage of everything Louisville has to offer is the ABC Kids Expo, North America’s primary trade show for the juvenile products industry. President and Show Director Larry Schur says, “In 2009, we held an educational conference and trade show in KICC, and our host hotel was The Galt House. In 2010, we once again held the event at KICC and used the Hyatt and Marriott properties. All of these hotels and facilities were outstand-

ing to work with.”

With the rapidly growing ABC Kids Expo expected to draw 950 exhibitors this year, Schur reflects on the factors that are leading his group to return.

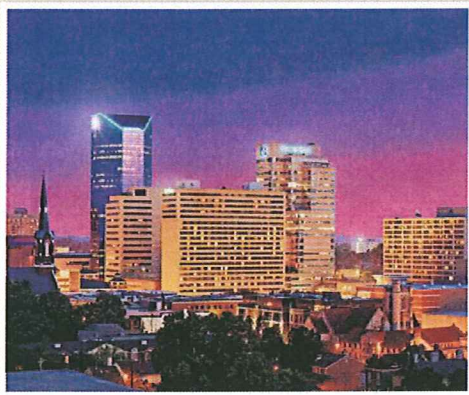
“With a show size of 1 million sq. ft., Louisville is one of only a half-dozen venues that can provide this kind of space. The city, the convention and visitors bureau, its hotels, eateries, off-site venues and its leaders know what it takes to attract and keep

GETTING THERE

- **Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport**, a hub for Delta Airlines, is consistently ranked as one of the best airports in the world. With 200 daily departures to more than 65 nonstop cities, CVG offers the same accessibility as many first-tier cities. It is 20 minutes from Northern Kentucky’s RiverCenter, 80 minutes from Lexington and just over 90 minutes from Louisville.
- **Louisville International Airport**, just 15 minutes from the downtown area, has nonstop service to 28 destinations and convenient connections to a variety of cities worldwide.
- **Lexington’s Blue Grass Airport**, located only 6 miles from downtown, is served by 7 major airlines providing 14 nonstop destinations and 85 flights daily.

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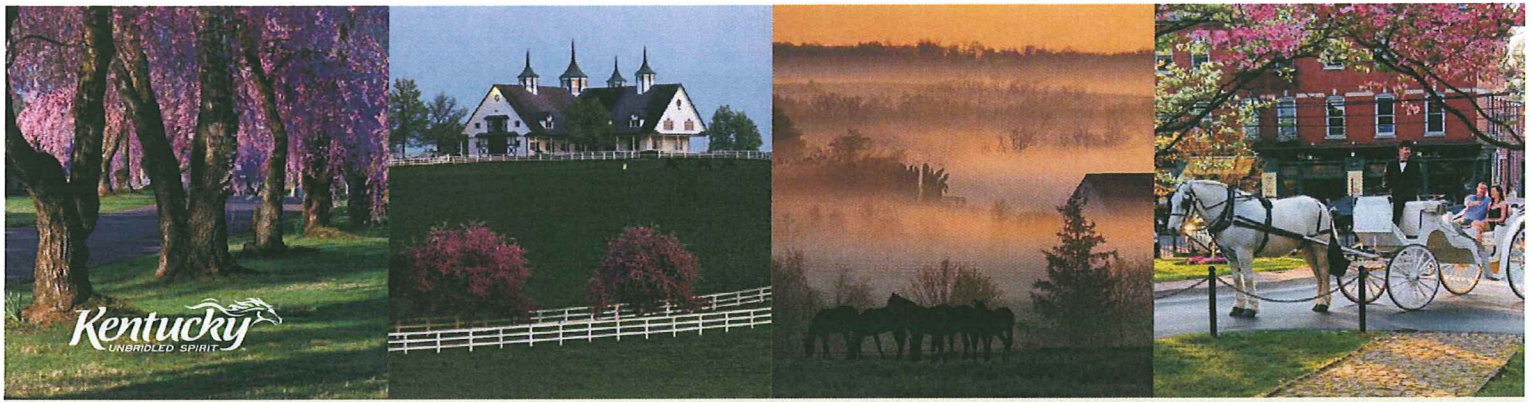
Lexington Convention Center

The Lexington Convention Center is an ideal venue for meetings, trade shows and conventions, with over 100,000 square feet of versatile, elegant space. Adjacent to two convention hotels, the Center is in the heart of an historic downtown arts district, surrounded by galleries, boutiques, charming restaurants and entertainment attractions all within walking distance in a city renowned for its charm, hospitality and natural beauty. Come experience why LCC is called "Easy to visit, Hard to leave!"

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KENTUCKY



Above, Drawbridge Hotel & Convention Center, Ft. Mitchell; below, Crowne Plaza Hotel Lexington - The Campbell House.



events by providing a level of service and hospitality that we have found to be unmatched anywhere in our travels.”

NORTHERN KENTUCKY ▼

While Louisville is Kentucky's largest city wholly within the state, farther upriver a cluster of Kentucky suburbs is actually an integral part of the greater Cincinnati, Ohio, metropolitan area. In fact, prominent city landmarks—including the home fields of the Reds and Bengals—are best seen from the Kentucky side; out-of-town fans often stay in Covington hotels and walk across the bridges to see the games. (See our Cincinnati Snapshot on pg. 148 for more information about this Ohio city.)

According to Barbara Dozier, vice president of sales and marketing for the **Northern Kentucky CVB**, the area's happening RiverCenter district combines the convenience and affordability of a mid-sized downtown area with accessibility to the attractions and amenities of a big city.

check refunding a full day's cost. And we have written a check.”

NKY 24/7 Destination Selection & Planning Assistance is yet another way the CVB makes life easier for meeting planners who work long hours:

Representatives answer the phones 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The three-level **Northern Kentucky Convention Center** offers 110,000 sq. ft. of meeting, exhibition and social function space for up to 3,000 people. Its 46,200 sq. ft. of exhibition space can accommodate 235 10-by-10-foot booths, while the 22,800-square-foot ballroom can be divided into five separate spaces.

In the event that more space is needed, the NKYCC connects directly to the 321-room Mar-

riott Cincinnati at RiverCenter: Together, the NKYCC and Marriott offer 56,000 sq. ft. of contiguous meeting space on one level, and up to 119,000 sq. ft. of meeting space under one roof.

At a completely separate campus, Northern Kentucky's **METS (Metropolitan Education and Training Services) Center** is the ideal venue for meetings focused around technology training, or wishing to incorporate remote video feeds or enhanced web conferencing capability. The METS Center, constructed from the outset as a technology-driven meeting facility, houses 43,000 sq. ft. of conference space that includes 18 distinct learning and presentation rooms, a 150-seat auditorium and three super-high-tech computer labs.

METS Center room rental fees cover the use of all equipment, plus desktop workstations and laptop computers, all at no additional cost. In other words, all technology is complimentary—including items and services for which many other facilities charge extra. The center's large inventory also means that there is no worrying about last-minute equipment availability or expert help: A range of technical professionals is always on hand.

Rounding out the roster of Northern Kentucky's meetings and conventions facilities is the new **Bank of Kentucky Center**, a bowl-shaped arena designed to host live concerts and shows, national conventions and sports tournaments. The 245,000-square-foot arena, which can seat up to 10,000, uses retractable seating to accommodate more than one configuration.

As befits a major metropolitan center, Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky has a wide variety of appealing venues for off-site activities, above and beyond the city's two storied professional sports franchises. The **Newport Aquarium** at Newport on the Levee, on the Kentucky side of the river just a few minutes' drive from the NKYCC, can host a reception in the midst of its “Surrounded by Sharks” exhibit, after a VIP tour of such popular attractions as the

Jellyfish Gallery and Penguin Palooza.

Just as the aquarium and its companion mall has revitalized Newport, the **Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal** has transformed the former railway terminus of this Midwest crossroads station into a word-class cultural complex. Currently, the museum center is celebrating a coup, hosting “Cleopatra: The Search for the Last Queen of Egypt,” a fascinating exhibit that showcases the life of this legendary historical figure. The Northern Kentucky CVB will be glad to help arrange special

The Lexington CVB promises, “Everything you expect from a big city convention site. Except the big city part.”

tours and events centered around this kind of exclusive exhibit.

LEXINGTON ▼

Just a little over an hour's drive from either Louisville or Northern Kentucky lands you in the heart of bluegrass country, with Lexington as its capital. Famed for the beauty of its rolling hills and picturesque horse farms—not to mention historic bourbon distilleries alongside clear streams—a scenic drive through the countryside connecting Lexington and the state's capital, Frankfort, is sure to be an experience to remember.

You don't have to be an equestrian to love the local attractions whose themes revolve around the distinctive relationship between man and horse. The **Kentucky Horse Park** is home to the International Museum of the Horse, a Smithsonian-affiliated institution whose exhibits vividly document the role played by horses in the shaping of the world's history and civilization.

The epicenter of equine business is Lexington's **Keeneland** race track, where annual horse auctions,

open to the public, are held each fall, and mere yearlings, or even pregnant broodmares, can fetch in excess of \$10 million. People-watching is also part of the draw every September, when the unmistakable private 747 of Dubai's Sheikh Mohammed parked at the end of the extra-long runway at Blue Grass Airport heralds the arrival of the big spenders. Keeneland is also a popular venue for off-site activities during meetings and events, whether it is breakfast with the jockeys or a private reception in the evening.

As host last year of the World Equestrian Games, the first time this event was held outside of Europe, Lexington has shown that it can accommodate even mega-events: Over the course of 2.5 weeks, more than 500,000 people converged on the town. It goes without saying, then, that Lexington can pretty much handle anything a meeting or convention planner can throw its way.

The Lexington CVB promises, "Everything you expect from a big city convention site. Except the big-city part." The centerpiece of **Lexington Center** is the recently renovated 23,000-seat **Rupp Arena**, which, as the home court of the University of Kentucky Wildcats, led the nation in college basketball

attendance. The convention center features 66,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space; 40,000 sq. ft. of meeting

CVB RESOURCES

- **Frankfort/Franklin County Tourist & Convention Commission**
visitfrankfort.com
- **Greater Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau**
gotolouisville.com
- **Kentucky Department of Travel**
kentuckytourism.com
- **Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau**
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- **Northern Kentucky Convention and Visitors Bureau**
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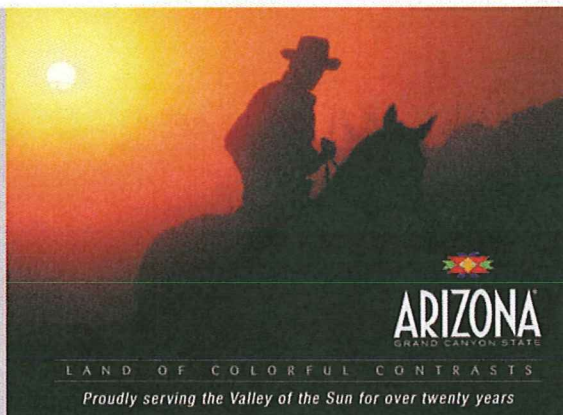
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rooms and ballrooms (including the 17,000-square-foot grand ballroom); and an additional 9,000 sq. ft. of prefunction spaces.

The facility also devotes one level to retail space containing upscale shops as well as restaurants and snack bars. All this is elegantly, seamlessly and conveniently connected to the 366-room **Hyatt Regency Lexington**, which has nearly 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space of its own.

Dennis Johnston, vice president of sales for the **Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau**, says: "Our convention center meeting space is so close to guest rooms, and in such luxurious settings that, in answers to our request for feedback about the facility, we have been told 'We didn't use it; we never left the hotel.'"

The **Hilton Lexington/Downtown** is also connected to the Hyatt/convention center complex and can contribute an additional 16,000 sq. ft. of meeting space for planners, along with its 367 guest rooms.

A popular countryside venue for meetings, yet still just a few miles from the heart of downtown, is the

THE KENTUCKY BOURBON TRAIL

Bourbon, a whiskey made from a mash containing at least 51% corn, is America's only native spirit, and Kentucky produces 95% of all bourbon. To showcase the distilleries responsible for this unique potion, the Bluegrass State has developed the Kentucky Bourbon Trail, which is comprised of eight distilleries that offer tastings for groups. Four of the distilleries are located off the Bluegrass Parkway near Louisville. Some of the most popular include:

- **Jim Beam Distillery:** Since 1795, there has been a Beam family member at the distiller's helm. Sip the liquor in the Beam home. A new distillery tour is planned for 2012.
- **Maker's Mark Distillery:** This award-winning bourbon is checked a minimum of five times while being aged. See this process on a tour and enjoy a tasting.

Also off the Bluegrass Parkway, closer to Lexington-Frankfort are:

- **Buffalo Trace Distillery:** Named 2010 Whiskey Visitor Attraction of the Year, Buffalo Trace offers three distinct tours focusing on architecture, history or the distillation process.
- **Wild Turkey:** A new building features tours of the distilling process. Make sure to taste the distillery's signature 101-proof bourbon as well as the brand's liqueur, American Honey.



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FRANKFORT

This historic city became the capital of Kentucky, the nation's 15th state, back in 1792. Just 15 minutes from Lexington, the massive state capitol building on a bluff overlooking the Kentucky River is an impressive site to behold. Not far away is the **Capital Plaza Hotel**, which offers 189 guest rooms overlooking the capitol and Kentucky River, almost 8,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and the fine dining Terrace Restaurant, where attendees can nosh on seafood and steak. On a smaller scale is the **Hampton Inn**, which features 123 rooms and 2,304 sq. ft.

Smack in the center of the **Kentucky Bourbon Trail**, Frankfort offers arguably the second-greatest treat to come from the state's favorite drink: bourbon ball chocolates. Tour the **Rebecca Ruth Candy Factory**, and try one as a sweet reminder of your sojourn in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Buzzy Gordon is an award-winning journalist, travel writer/columnist and guidebook author. Carol Smith is a senior editor with Leisure Group Travel publications.



For more information about properties, venues and attractions in Kentucky, visit smartmeetings.com/event-planning/kentucky.

LOUISVILLE	ROOMS/MEETING SPACE	WHAT'S DISTINCTIVE
21c Museum Hotel 21cotel.com	90 rms/5,000 sq. ft.	Boutique property voted No. 1 hotel in the U.S., and No. 6 in the world, in <i>Condé Nast Traveler's</i> Readers' Choice Awards.
The Brown Hotel brownhotel.com	293 rms/26,000 sq. ft.	The Hot Brown, a popular Kentucky sandwich, was invented in this historic downtown Four-Diamond hotel. Complimentary Wi-Fi and airport shuttle.
Crowne Plaza Louisville Airport cplouisville.com	588 rms/50,000 sq. ft.	The headquarters hotel of choice for the Kentucky Exposition Center; convenient to the airport. One of the five-largest Crowne Plaza hotels in the world.
Galt House Hotel & Suites galthouse.com	1,290 rms/124,000 sq. ft.	Louisville's only riverfront property. Connected by pedway to the Kentucky International Convention Center.
Holiday Inn Hurstbourne/I-64 East hihurstbourne.com	271 rms/20,000 sq. ft.	Features a conference center, perfect for seminars, conventions, banquet, receptions and parties; Winner's Circle Restaurant on-site.
Louisville Marriott Downtown marriott.com/louisville	616 rms/50,000 sq. ft.	A Four-Diamond property that has unveiled new 42-inch HD TVs. Connected via pedway to the Kentucky International Convention Center.
The Seelbach Hilton Louisville seelbachhilton.com	321 rms/32,000 sq. ft.	Listed on the National Register of Historic Places; Kentucky's only Five-Diamond restaurant, The Oakroom, is located on-site.
NORTHERN KENTUCKY		
Cincinnati Airport Marriott marriott.com	295 rms/14,905 sq. ft.	Minutes from downtown Cincinnati, Ohio; in Hebron, one-half mile from the airport; complimentary shuttle; 15 meeting rooms; 2 concierge levels.
Cincinnati Marriott at RiverCenter marriott.com	321 rms/119,000 sq. ft.	Covington hotel is the only one connected directly to the Northern Kentucky Convention Center via skywalk. A Four-Diamond, smoke-free property.
Drawbridge Hotel & Convention Center drawbridgehotel.com	300 rms/30,000 sq. ft.	Ft. Mitchell property offers old English countryside ambience combined with 21st-century convenience.
Radisson Hotel Cincinnati Riverfront radisson.com	220 rms/10,320 sq. ft.	Distinctive cylindrical architecture, walking distance to the Northern Kentucky Convention Center and the Mainstrasse dining district.
LEXINGTON		
Clarion Hotel clarionhotel.com	296 rms/13,000 sq. ft.	Affordable property features an activity center with an indoor hot tub, video arcade arena and more; the hotel's popular with groups primarily seeking affordability.
Crowne Plaza Hotel Lexington – The Campbell House crowneplaza.com/campbellhouse	287 rms/20,000 sq. ft.	Sweeping colonial entrance and green lawns located in a downtown setting. Nightly live music.
Griffin Gate Marriott Resort & Spa marriott.com	409 rms/28,000 sq. ft.	A pet-friendly property with a golf course designed by Rees Jones and a full-service spa; 9,570-square-foot ballroom is its largest meeting room.
Hilton Lexington/Downtown hilton.com	367 rms/16,000+ sq. ft.	Attached by skywalk to Lexington's best shopping, dining and entertainment; private business center on executive floors; newly refurbished guest rooms.
Hyatt Regency Lexington lexington.hyatt.com	366 rms/19,284 sq. ft.	Directly connected to the Rupp Arena, the Lexington Convention Center, upscale retail stores and a food court; mini-refrigerators in every room.
FRANKFORT		
Capital Plaza Hotel capitalplazaky.com	189 rms/8,000+ sq. ft.	Located in historic Downtown Frankfort; nearby to Frankfort Convention Center. A full-service salon is available on-site.
Hampton Inn Frankfort hamptoninn.com	123 rms/2,304 sq. ft.	Largest meeting room is 1,152 sq. ft.; located just 6 miles from Buffalo Trace Distillery, the oldest distillery in the United States.