



HORSES: THE BLUEGRASS WAY OF LIFE

by Susan Lanier-Graham

Every little girl dreams of horses. She wants a pony before she wants a bike. She reads stories about legendary stallions and loving mares. She spends lazy summer days dreaming of the wind in her hair as she goes flying across an open pasture on the back of a magnificent animal.

But horses are more than a young girl's dreams. They are a lifestyle unto themselves where a single horse might be worth millions and legends are created in moments. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Horse Capital of the World—Lexington, Kentucky.

Nearby Louisville is home to the Kentucky Derby. The "Run for the Roses" is the oldest and longest running sporting event in the US, but it still can't compete with Lexington when it comes to that horse lifestyle.

LEXINGTON'S EQUESTRIAN HERITAGE

Lexington is surrounded by more than 450 farms—and miles of trademark wooden fencing. The locals like to brag that the wealthiest residents are horses. Kentucky born and bred Thoroughbreds are such a hot commodity in the racing world that horse breeders from around the globe send mares to Lexington to ensure the proper lineage. And lineage is something Kentucky knows all about. The greatest horses of all time have spent at least part of their lives in

Kentucky—Secretariat, Citation, Seattle Slew, Affirmed, Smarty Jones, Alydar...the list continues. The offspring of those great stallions dot the rolling hills in the Bluegrass State.

KENTUCKY HORSE PARK

Located on 1200 acres in the heart of Lexington's horse country, the Kentucky Horse Park is an equestrian theme park that combines entertainment with education and a working farm. The combination creates an incredible and unique experience for horse lovers of all ages.

The Park features museums, galleries, theaters—and a chance to experience the equestrian life up close and personal.

The Breeds Barn is a highlight of the Park. More than 50 breeds from all over the world make their home for at least a few months at Kentucky Horse Park. Not only do the handlers get a chance to work with unique breeds, the public has a chance to see unusual horses and discover the differences in the magnificent animals. Twice each day from March through October the handlers present all of the horses in a spectacular Parade of Breeds.

The Park is also home to the American Saddlebred Museum, the International Museum of the Horse, The National Horse Center, and the Draft Horse Barn. Feel the excitement of stepping into the show ring with the daily presentations of champion horses that have been retired to the Park. There is a regal air about a champion Thoroughbred stallion that makes you feel like you're in the presence of greatness. No wonder little girls fall in love.

The Horse Park also has facilities for shows and competitions. From September 25 through October 10, 2010, the Park will be the first US city to host the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. The games, held every four years but never outside Europe before, are world championships for a series of eight equestrian sports.

KEENELAND RACING

The Horse Park highlights the world of the horse, but you can live it at Keeneland, where the racetrack and facilities has been the racing headquarters in Lexington for over



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN RICH

70 years. Keeneland sports both an artificial turf track and an elegant natural grass track with its legendary Kentucky bluegrass. You'll find races every April and October when the horse park hosts some of the world's best horses. In April, they host the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes, which is one of the stepping stones on the way to the Kentucky Derby. In October, the series of races at Keeneland leads up to The Breeders' Cup championship. During race times, you might even find royalty among the spectators.

The rest of the year, racing is simulcast over a massive screen set up near the race track and at screens located throughout the gorgeous facility. In addition to the racing, athletes and horses train daily at Keeneland and millions of dollars exchange hands during the popular Thoroughbred auctions.

LIVING THE LIFESTYLE

Kentucky is a celebration of the equestrian lifestyle—that perfect blend of competitiveness and friendly banter, of social event and high stakes business deal. Horses are so much a part of life in the Bluegrass State that Kentucky Derby weekend is very nearly a state holiday.

Fortunes are made and lost every day in the horse industry. Breeding mares with stallions that will hopefully produce a Derby winner is a tightly-monitored science. There's something magical about a place with lines of neatly painted fences, graceful horses frolicking in the fields and children who learn to ride before they can walk. There's no other place in the world where you'll find yourself so immersed in the horse culture.



PHOTO BY MIKHAIL KONDRASHOV



PHOTO COURTESY OF KENTUCKY

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: A horse is braided and waiting to enter the dressage ring as part of a 3-day competition. OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: Horses compete in rigorous exercises on the road to various championships. BELOW: Wranglers at work are a common scene in the Western US. A far different lifestyle than the horse culture in Kentucky.



Horses in Arizona

Here in Arizona you can enjoy horses and the equestrian lifestyle—although a different lifestyle than you will find in Kentucky. There are any number of shows and competitions in the state, from jumping and dressage to rodeo events.

One excellent example is the Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show. The 53rd Annual show will run February 15-25, 2008, at West World in Scottsdale. Since the first show at the Arizona Billmore 53 years ago, it has grown to a world-renowned event. The 2008 show will bring in nearly 2000 horses and some of the best owners, trainers and breeders in the country. Tickets are \$10 for general admission and \$15 for reserved seating. Tickets for the entire show are also available. Find out more online at www.scottsdaleshow.com.

Another option for experiencing horses locally is to attend one of the many rodeos held throughout the summer months in nearby Payson and Prescott.

If you want to get even closer, you might visit one of the stables in the area and head out on a trail ride. Try one of the following stables:

Don Donnelly Stables in Gold Canyon (www.don-donnelly.com)

Spur Cross Stables in Cave Creek (480.488.9117)

Ponderosa and South Mountain Stables in Phoenix (602.268.1261)

MacDonalds Ranch in Scottsdale (480.585.0239). 