

Country Music Highway Corridor General Overview

DESCRIPTION:

The Country Music Highway Corridor offers a symphony of delights. Great natural beauty, historic sites, cultural attractions, mountain cuisine, arts and crafts, outdoor activities and music galore can be found in corridor communities. Stretching about 150 miles along the region's Appalachian Mountains on Route 23, the corridor includes seven Southern and Eastern Kentucky counties – Boyd, Floyd, Greenup, Johnson, Lawrence, Letcher, Martin and Pike. The Country Music Highway starts south of Ashland on US 23, journeys through Paintsville, Prestonsburg and Pikeville, then joins up with US 119 to Jenkins and on to Whitesburg. The road traverses an area rich in American Indian culture, early pioneer settlement history, Civil War sites, outdoor recreation and, of course, country music roots.

For nearly 150 years, the forbidding Appalachian Mountains had kept early colonists from Kentucky. Although the Cumberland Gap – a natural passage through the mountain barrier – had been used for centuries by Indians, the first white man to travel through the gap was Gabriel Arthur in 1674. It was not until 1750, however, that Dr. Thomas Walker documented its location. That important discovery helped change the future of the nation. Coming through the Cumberland Gap in the late 1700s and early 1800s, thousands of pioneers sought a better life. Self-sufficient, hard working and proud, these new Kentuckians carved homesteads out of the wilderness, raised families and left a lasting legacy. Descendants today carry on that strong tradition and are always ready to extend a welcoming hand to visitors. That old mountain invitation to "set a spell" is not just words – it is a heart-felt willingness to share the joys of unforgettable people and places.

The early pioneers had to leave behind many of their possessions. But they brought with them a love of music and a few cherished musical instruments. That might help account for the musical talent that has sprung up along the stretch of Route 23 known as the Country Music Highway, one of Kentucky's three new National Scenic Byways. Showcases for that talent include such venues as the Jenny Wiley Theatre and Mountain Arts Center in Prestonsburg and the Paramount Arts Center in Ashland. Mountain heritage is celebrated at the Mountain HomePlace in Johnson County, the new Big Sandy Heritage Center in Pikeville, the Hatfield-McCoy Driving Tour and the Elkhorn City Railroad Museum.

Kentuckians delight in serving up delectable food – from country-style cooking to regional recipes to cosmopolitan cuisine. The distinctive regional style of mountain country cooking uses recipes shared by time and the spirit of the Appalachian people. Mark Sohn of Pikeville has written a book titled *Mountain Country Cooking*, a nominee for the James Beard Award. Mention mountain country cooking and most folks can readily name their favorite spots – Wilma's in Paintsville, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park in Prestonsburg, Billy Ray's in Prestonsburg, the Windmill in Pikeville, Top of the Inn in Pikeville, the Front Porch Steak House Family Restaurant in Louisa, Breaks Interstate Park in Pike County, and the Whistle Stop Café in Louisa. For a little more upscale dining, try the Courthouse Café and Pine Mountain Grill in Whitesburg or Lakeview Hideaway Bed & Breakfast at Yatesville Lake.

For outdoor recreation, the Country Music Highway Corridor has it in abundance – hiking, fishing, golf, camping, fishing and boating, the list goes on. One of the first 18-hole golf courses in the Kentucky Highlands is at Paintsville Country Club. Established in 1929, the course has a challenging tee shot over the Big Sandy River and the famous swinging bridge. Shoppers also will find it a challenge to visit all the wonderful shops featuring local arts and crafts. The Ashland Art Gallery, David Appalachian Crafts, Pine Mountain-Letcher County Crafts Co-op and Cozy Corner are just a start. To discover more of these gems, just stop in any county on the Country Music Highway Corridor and ask the friendly townspeople. They'll be more than happy to share their best.

COUNTIES:

Boyd

Boyd County was formed in 1860 and is located in the Eastern Kentucky Coalfield region of the state. The county seat is Catlettsburg, at the junction of the Ohio and Big Sandy rivers, where Kentucky meets Ohio and West Virginia. Ashland, the largest city in Boyd county and eastern Kentucky, is on the Ohio River north of Catlettsburg. A two-mile historical tour of Ashland goes past historical homes as well as churches, a thriving downtown business district and beautiful Central Park where several Indian burial mounds date from the Adena Period (800 B.C. to 800 A.D.). Other popular sites in the county are Armco Park, the Floodwall Murals in Catlettsburg, the Highlands Museum & Discovery Center in Ashland with a wealth of country music memorabilia and the Ashland Area Art Gallery displaying the talents of area and world renowned artisans.

Floyd

Created in 1800, Floyd County was named in honor of John Floyd, surveyor and pioneer explorer. Preston's Station, designated the county seat, was renamed Prestonsburg. Located in the coal, oil and natural gas fields of eastern Kentucky, Floyd County is part of the Cumberland Plateau of the Appalachian Mountain range. Embraced by mountain ranges, Floyd County offers scenic vistas and drives. History buffs will be interested in Middle Creek National Battlefield, eastern Kentucky's largest and most significant battle during the Civil War. For music lovers, the Mountain Arts Center and Jenny Wiley Theatre at Jenny Wiley State Resort Park offer local and national talent.

Greenup

Established in 1803, Greenup County and its county seat were named for Christopher Greenup, fourth governor of Kentucky. Greenup County lies in the Appalachian region of the state in the northeast corner by the Ohio River. The ready availability of coal and iron ore made the area a center for smelting iron in the 19th century when river transportation of the smelted iron was an important consideration. The remains of old furnaces can still be seen throughout the county. Two covered bridges also still stand in Greenup County.

Johnson

Formed in 1843, Johnson County was named for Col. Richard Johnson who served as vice president of the United States in 1837. Located along Paint Creek of the Big Sandy River, the county seat of Paintsville originally was named Paint Creek Station. The name of the creek and the town refer to Indian drawings found on trees in the area. The county features Paintsville Lake State Park, a living Civil War history park and the rustic childhood home in Butcher Hollow of country music legend Loretta Lynn and her singing sister, Crystal Gayle. The Mountain HomePlace provides a look at the past, including demonstrations of spinning, weaving and sorghum making.

Lawrence

Located in eastern Kentucky along the West Virginia border, Lawrence County was formed in 1821. The Big Sandy River and its Tug Fork form its eastern border. The county was named after Capt. James Lawrence, commander of the USS Chesapeake during the War of 1812. Louisa is the county seat. Shoppers will love the antiques at the Cypress Inn Trader and unique old hardware items at Wellman Hardware, constructed in 1879. Listed in *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, the Louisa Fort. Gay Bridge spans two rivers, Tug River and Levisa Fork, and has a right turn in the center. The bridge connects two states, Kentucky and West Virginia; two cities, Louisa, Kentucky and Fort Gay, West Virginia; and two counties, Lawrence County, Kentucky, and Wayne County, West Virginia.

Letcher

Formed in 1842, Letcher County was named for Gov. Robert E. Letcher. The county seat is Whitesburg. Three of the state's major rivers – the Cumberland, the North Fork of the Kentucky and the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy – all have headwaters in Letcher County. Located in far Southeastern Kentucky, Letcher County is a rugged mountainous county. Pine Mountain runs along the county line from the northeast to the southwest. The Pound Gap through Pine Mountain was an important passage for early settlers. Around 1898, John Fox Jr. first visited Letcher County and made it the setting of two of his best selling books – *The*

Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. To honor the contributions of Fox to the mountain people, Kingdom Come State Park was founded in 1962 in the southwestern part of the county. One of the largest tracts of protected old growth forest in the state, Lilley Cornett Woods, also is in Letcher County.

Martin

Created in 1870, Martin County was named for John P. Martin, congressman and state senator. Located on the Tug Fork of the Big Sandy River, Martin County is very mountainous with high elevations and narrow valleys cut by streams. The county seat is Inez. One of the first major mining operations was at Himlerville where in 1918 Hungarian immigrant Martin Himler began mining a seam of good coal. The historic Himler House is located at Beauty. Spanning the Tug River at Warfield, the Warfield Railroad Bridge also was built by the Himler Coal Company.

Pike

Pikeville, the seat of Pike County, was founded in 1823 on the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River and was named, like the county, for General Zebulon Pike. A diverse county with something for everyone, Pike County is credited with being the site where Daniel Boone took his first steps in Kentucky. History is celebrated in Pikeville's five historic districts and 55 structures that are on the National Register of Historic Places. Green woodlands and sky-scraping mountain scenery await at Breaks Interstate Park, known as the "Grand Canyon of the South." The park is jointly owned by Kentucky and Virginia and has 1,000-foot deep canyons.

Time Zone:

Eastern

CONSUMER CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Greenup County Extension Service
226 West Main St.
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Lawrence County Tourism Commission
PO Box 566
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888/521-6789
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Letcher County Tourism Commission

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Martin County Tourism
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Paintsville Tourism & Convention Commission
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Pikeville-Pike County Tourism Commission
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