

Cumberlands Corridor Cultural Tourism

There was a time, not that long ago, when about the only way to get something was to make it or trade for it. In the Cumberlands Corridor, that old tradition of creating beautiful and utilitarian objects has been passed down from generation to generation. The ability to craft something from almost nothing is a matter of pride. The early settlers knew how to do it and valued their time-tested talents. That trait is still seen along the Cumberlands Corridor today.

From country to contemporary, from furniture to fashions, local arts and crafts are available at area specialty shops. As an example, Chris Ramsey has developed a following for his fine arts at Knot-Head in Somerset. Beginning with a rough-hewn solid block of wood from a felled tree in Kentucky, Ramsey converts "blanks" into magnificent works of art. Most uniquely, he makes life-sized hats – Stetsons, baseball caps, fishing hats and more – as well as more traditional works such as bowls. All of his works are turned on a single, unique piece of wood with no gluing or joining of individual pieces. The turned hat sculptures he creates weigh about nine ounces and may be comfortably worn – or displayed as works of art, as they are by Kentucky governors and the President of the United States.

The works of more regional artisans are displayed and sold at Falls 4-H Mountain Crafts in Parkers Lake, Junkyard Pottery in Parker's Lake, and Landmark Gallery in Somerset. Falls 4-H Mountain Crafts features handmade quilts, wooden crafts, baskets, toys, birdhouses, candles, handmade Christmas ornaments, art work and photography, all produced by McCreary County artists.

At Junkyard Pottery, visitors get to watch potter Carol Howe work. The hand thrown, functional stoneware pottery she makes is formed, glazed with local wood ash and fired on the premises.

The Landmark Gallery offers original work by local artists, such as hooked wall hangings, hammered dulcimers, photography, paintings, handbags and fabric work. The Riverstone Gallery in downtown Somerset has interesting arts and crafts exhibits and the Center for Rural Development, also in Somerset, hosts exhibits of quality work throughout the year. In the lobby and second floor hallway of the Center, the work of one local artist is featured for two months. Watercolors, oil paintings, quilts, photography and painted silk scarves are a few of the art pieces that have been exhibited.

Houseboats built in Kentucky are almost works of art. As the houseboat capital of the world, Kentucky builds more houseboats than anywhere else in the world, with the area between Monticello and Somerset on the south side of Lake Cumberland accounting for most of that manufacturing. For a delightful shopping experience, stop by one of the region's custom houseboat builders. Turning dreams into reality are such manufacturers as Somerset Custom Houseboats and Sharpe Houseboats in Somerset; Stardust Cruisers, Fantasy Custom Yachts, Sunstar Houseboats, Lakeview, and Horizon Yachts in Monticello; and Jamestown, Fun Time Houseboats, Navigator Houseboats and Admiral Houseboats in Russell Springs on the north side of Lake Cumberland.

Of course, Kentucky is synonymous with music. In these hills, music has been a unifying chord from one generation to another. It has been a companion through happiness and sadness and has created a culture known around the world. For more than a decade, the Master Musicians Festival at Somersport Park in Somerset has drawn world-famous masters of all ages and cultures to perform along Kentucky's best and brightest musicians. Juried arts and crafts exhibits by Sheltolee Artisans, music workshops, community theater, dance, storytelling, visual arts exhibits and famed Kentucky hospitality all combine to produce an unforgettable July weekend sure to delight the entire family.

The Lake Cumberland Performing Arts Series and the Center for Rural Development in Somerset have partnered to bring the region an incredible showcase of talent. All shows are staged in the beautiful 760-seat Center Theatre. Another production of this partnership is the School Time Theatre, an entire season of student matinee performances with educational goals in mind. The Somerset Community College Fine Arts

Program combines local talent with student enthusiasm, resulting in impressive professional dramas and great comedy. The Somerset Community College Jazz Ensemble performs twice yearly. The Cumberland Outdoor Theatre in Monticello presents plays and music representing the history, culture and art of the region.

The Cumberlands Corridor also can lay claim as the birthplace, inspiration or location of some notable literary history. The novels of Harriette Simpson Arnow, of Burnside, describe the confrontations facing Kentuckians in the early 20th century. Her most famous work, *The Dollmaker*, was published in 1954 and examined the human cost of migration from Kentucky to the factories of the North. Her novels and historical works *Seedtime on the Cumberland* in 1960 and *Flowering of the Cumberland* in 1963 gave Pulaski County a place in American literature.

Mention Kentucky cooking and mouths start watering. Food is both a tradition and a passion in the Cumberlands Corridor. For a culinary delight in classic American cuisine, stop at Picasso's Bistro in Somerset. In addition to fine dining, Picasso's offers a beautiful view of Lake Cumberland, with upper and lower outer decks and two banquet rooms. Breakfasts at the Raintree Inn in Bronston are a gourmet's delight. *Gourmet Magazine* rated the donuts at Amon's Sugar Shack in Somerset among the top five nationally!

Visitors to the Big South Fork Scenic Railway can enjoy an additional treat during the train's stop at the Barthell Coal Mining Camp in McCreary County. the Coal Miner's Diner serves three meals a day with such Kentucky favorites as pinto beans and cornbread, saw mill gravy, pasties (similar to a potpie with chicken or beef and vegetables), blueberry cobbler and fried apple pies.

The common thread running through the entire cultural heritage of the Cumberlands Corridor is down-home friendliness. No one is a stranger. Visit once and hear the music, taste the food, applaud the performers, delight in the fairs and festivals, listen to the tales, enjoy the arts and crafts and the result is the same. Strangers become friends. And friends learn that the Kentucky mountains are brimming with a wide range of cultural experiences waiting to be shared.

DESTINATIONS:

Amon's Sugar Shack, Somerset 606-678-4392
Barthell Coal Mining Camp, Barthell: 888/550-5748.
Big South Fork Scenic Railway, Stearns: 800/462-5664.
Center for Rural Development, Somerset: 606/677-6000.
Cumberland Outdoor Theater, Monticello: 606/348-7809
Falls 4-H Mountain Crafts, Parkers Lake: 606/376-3463.
Junkyard Pottery, Parkers Lake: 606/376-8959.
Knot-Head, Somerset: 606/677-2466.
Landmark Gallery, Somerset: 606/676-0929.
Picasso's Bistro, Somerset 606-561-0404
Raintree Inn, Bronston 606-561-5225
Riverstone Gallery, Somerset: 606/676-9186.
Somerset Community College: 606/679-3408.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS:

* Pulaski Firefest Bluegrass Festival, August.
* Old-Fashion Days, Monticello, first weekend in September: Enjoy crafts, contests for longest hair and best dressed, corn-on-the-cob eating competition. 606/348-3064.
* Somermite's Cruise Classic Car Show, Somerset, Beginning in April fourth Saturday each month through October: Classic car owners drive from all over to participate.

- * Market Street Melodies, Somerset, first Thursday of month from May through September: Various musical artists.
- * Master Musicians Festival, Somerset: 800/642-6287.
- * Burnside Annual Catfish Festival, Burnside, September: Music, rides, crafts, food and triathlon. 606/561-4026.
- * Fall Foliage Home and History Tour, Somerset, October: See beautiful homes and leave the history behind them. 606/678-0182.
- * Annual Fine Arts and Crafts Fair, Sheltonwee Artisans Holiday Open House, Somerset, November: Get an early start on holiday shopping and see works of local artists. 606/679-6774.
- * Lakefest, Jamestown, first weekend in July: Music, dancing, games, food, arts and crafts. 270/343-4594.
- * McCreary Heritage and Homecoming at Stearns, July. 800/462-5664
- * Cumberland Heritage Days at Blue Heron, Saturdays in October. 800/462-5664
- * Foothills Festival, Albany, third week of October, a time of fun, food, entertainment, crafts and more amid beautiful fall colors. 606/387-2537