



Southern & Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association

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BLUEGRASS HAS GREAT GREENS

Kentucky is famed for its bluegrass, bourbon and thoroughbreds, country music, beautiful mountains, friendly people – and golf. Golf! Yep, the Highlands and Waterways region of Kentucky has a wealth of outstanding golf courses, and golf is a rapidly growing pastime in the bluegrass state.

The southern and eastern parts of the state, which make up the Highlands and Waterways Region, are home to the beautiful Cumberland Mountains and the Cumberland River Valley. Courses are situated in some of the most scenic areas of the state where intriguing history and spectacular views make a winning combination. In addition, the courses can be played year-round and charge surprisingly affordable rates.

Kentucky is fast becoming a premier golfing destination. Most communities have nine- and 18-hole courses open to the public. A new generation of championship courses is being built, and existing courses are being redesigned to meet the needs of a more demanding golfing public. Golfers are finding that the number of challenging and interesting courses available in Kentucky is growing each year, and that it is possible to play multiple courses within a short driving distance of each other.

What do you do with a mountain whose top has been blown off for strip mining? The tiny town of Prestonsburg came up with a creative solution and golfers have been flocking to it ever since. **StoneCrest Golf Course** is one of the most unusual and good looking in the country. At an altitude of 1,250 feet, the StoneCrest Golf Course is bordered mostly by air and mountain vistas that golfers say are unmatched. The stunning mountain view overlooks the Big Sandy Valley in eastern Kentucky. Set on Maggie Mountain between Jenny Wiley State Resort Park and downtown Prestonsburg, the \$21.3 million project took almost a dozen years, two acts of Congress and a seemingly insurmountable amount of work and money before it opened to the public on May 21, 2001. Designed by Chris Chrisman with consultation from PGA Tour player and Kentuckian Russ Cochran, the 18-hole championship project has received funding from at least 10 different state, federal and local sources.

Owned and operated by the city of Prestonsburg, the 7,011-yard, par-72 layout has about 200 members and is open to the public. More than 180,000 truckloads of topsoil were hauled to StoneCrest from the Big Sandy River to replace what was stripped off the mountaintop. The undulating course is shaped like a horseshoe with 69 sand traps, five ponds, dramatic elevation changes and an average green length of 70-by-90 feet. Most of the greens are level with the fairway and the pace of play takes about four hours and 15 minutes. On a clear day, you can view 50 miles or more from the serene mountaintop.

Less challenging than StoneCrest is the picturesque **Paintsville Country Club**, just down the road from singer Loretta Lynn's old home place in Butcher Hollow. Paintsville Country Club is the place for a relaxing round and a chance to enjoy some stunning scenery while you play golf. This is a typical mountain course, weaving in and out of the lower slopes of the Appalachian Mountains and laid out along both sides of the Big Sandy River.

For some golfers, one of the most difficult challenges at the Paintsville Country Club is getting across the old swinging bridge. In order to play holes 10 through 16, golfers must tee off for the par-five 10th hole, and then, either by foot or cart, get across the 155-foot swinging bridge. The creaky wooden bridge hangs 50 feet or so above the muddy Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River. The bridge not only sways a few inches from side to side, it also bounces up and down as well. That dizzying movement seems far more evident when walking across the one-cart-wide bridge so many golfers prefer to zoom across in a golf cart.

The Paintsville Country Club actually seems like two in one. The front nine, built in 1929, are hilly with tight rolling fairways and small old-fashioned greens, offering a variety of shots. The front nine has tees just steps from greens and fairways shared by golfers going in opposite directions. The back nine, built in 1952, are level with two lakes and the Big Sandy River weaving through. A tunnel has been constructed so players don't have to cross State Highway 40 to play the full 18 holes. Water may come into play on all 18 holes, and two holes on the back nine—No.10 and No. 17—require tee shots that carry over the Big Sandy River. At that point, golfers must cross over the famous swinging bridge.

A short ways north of Paintsville, on the I-64 corridor, is **Eagle Trace Golf Course**. Nestled in lush green splendor, Eagle Trace is a gently rolling, beautifully wooded, semi-private 18-hole golf course designed to challenge the skills of the seasoned players, yet be enjoyable and playable to all golfers. This par 72 course covers a maximum distance of 6,902 yards from the championship tees. Designed by David Pfaff, Eagle Trace has played host to a number of important statewide tournaments since opening in 1995, including the Kentucky State Amateur. The course features bent grass tees and greens, heavily wooded fairways, numerous bunkers and plenty of water hazards, along with heated and covered golf carts. The signature hole, No. 12, is a photogenic 164-yard, par 3 requiring a downhill tee shot through a chute of trees to a sloping green. Eagle Trace's trappings – hole markers, sand traps, ponds and the clubhouse – are all top notch.

South of Lexington, on the I-75 corridor, three golf courses in particular are enticing golfers to stay and play – Widow's Watch Golf Course and Connemara Golf Links in Nicholasville and Peninsula Golf Resort in Lancaster. Rated at four and a half stars by *Golf Digest* and selected as one of the best 200 places to play in North America, the **Peninsula Golf Resort** is a must stop for visiting golfers. Featuring over 6,700 yards of

lush Bermuda fairways, 60 strategically placed bunkers, Lake Herrington, and some of the best bent grass greens in the country, Peninsula is another of Pete Dye's gems.

Opened in 1997, the Peninsula course has putting surfaces surrounded by approaches that include Dye's trademark collection areas for misguided iron efforts. The par-72 gem, laid out on family farmland once tilled for tobacco, corn and hay, still has a family cemetery just above the 18th hole. Sharp-eyed golfers will notice a headstone with the unusual name of "Bogie." The course offers the designer's typical challenge to the low-handicapper yet is still playable and forgiving to the weekend golfer visiting with the family. Less than two hours from the Cincinnati bridge, Peninsula is a favorite for out-of-towners with some very affordable golf packages.

Molded from 300 acres of inspiring rolling hills, mature trees and a profusion of spring flowers, **Widow's Watch Golf Course** gives the essence of a private club while still catering to the public. The par 72 layout of this Keith Foster and Barry Sarrafina-designed course plays to over 7,000 yards and features three to four tee boxes per hole creating a variety of lengths to accommodate all levels of golfers. The combination of bent grass from tee to green, generous fairways, large subtle greens and the highest standards of maintenance provide for a challenging and enjoyable round.

The Widow's Watch clubhouse is a gift from the past. Built in the mid-1800s by John Steele in an Eclectic Italianate style topped off by a watchtower, the house is on the highest elevation between Lexington and the Kentucky River. From here, Steele could see his workers on the Woodlawn Farm tending to wheat and hemp, mules and sheep. The bottom floor of the house was renovated in 1998 for \$400,000. Future plans call for the top floors also to be renovated for perhaps a bed and breakfast.

Reminiscent of an old Scottish landscape, **Connemara Golf Links** is a par 72 links style course. Connemara offers a challenging layout for the low-handicapper, rated at 71.5 and 115 slope, while also being friendly to the weekend golfer. Situated on a 160-acre tract of gently rolling bluegrass hills, Connemara measures approximately 6,600 yards from the back tees. Connemara offers a state-of-the-art practice facility, a bent grass and Bermuda practice tee of 360 feet by 105 feet and a 15,000-square-foot practice green which gives golfers an opportunity to work on and improve their games.

Farther south on I-75 in the London and Somerset area, is another cluster of courses in the eastern end of the Lake Cumberland basin. Just two miles from London's city limits, on 360 acres of rolling farm and forest lowland, a residential golf community is providing country club living with a very playable golf course. Opened in 1993, **Crooked Creek Golf Club** and the Oaks of London residential golf community offers an 18-hole course amid 200 home sites. For folks who want a golf hole in their back yard, it's a Kentucky paradise. Semi-private with 325 members, the course welcomes out-of-town visitors to play.

Crooked Creek has three distinctly different looks to its golf course – the valley links type holes, the mountain holes and the low country holes. The valley holes have an open links type look with few trees, tall fescue and gently contoured fairways. The mountain holes offer splendid vistas from high elevation tees and dramatic playing effects because of the elevation change from tee to green. The low country holes meander along the creek and through the trees, offering a challenge to players.

A short drive to the west, on the north edge of Somerset, is the **Eagle's Nest County Club**, a residential country club course that is open to the general public. Opened in

1978, the Eagle's Nest has 218 members and 175 homes and was the first of its kind in southeastern Kentucky. Designers tried to use as much of the natural lay of the land as possible in developing the Eagle's Nest. One of the toughest holes at the 18-hole Eagle's Nest is the starting one. With an eye-catching ravine, the hole requires two good shots right away.

Instead of trying to tell golfers how to improve their games, the Eagle's Nest uses an interesting computer program that shows golfers what is right and wrong. Called the Swing View Pro, the program tapes a golfer and can be viewed frame by frame for a visual lesson.

On the south edge of Somerset, in the small community of Bronston, is the **Woodson Bend Golf Resort**. The resort got its name because it is situated on a 455-acre peninsula overlooking a large bend in the Cumberland River, which surrounds the property on three sides. For golfers who like to stay where they play, Woodson Bend Resort is a popular choice. Opened in 1972, the 18-hole championship course was designed by Lee Trevino and Dave Bennett. Tucked in among the trees are condos that are privately owned with many available for rent. Featuring an abundance of privacy, woods and wildlife, Woodson Bend is just 75 miles from Lexington but seems far removed from the hustle and bustle of big cities.

Near Woodson Bend is the **General Burnside Island Golf Course** at General Burnside Island State Park, the only island park in Kentucky's state park system. Golfers can tee off on the challenging 18-hole golf course, complemented by beautiful scenery and lake views. A fully equipped pro shop with rental clubs, pull carts and riding carts caters to a golfer's every need.

Visitors to Woodson Bend and Burnside Island also have a wonderful opportunity to combine golfing with enjoyment of Lake Cumberland. The Burnside Island Marina, which is near both courses, offers houseboat rentals. The houseboats are large and comfortable with fully equipped kitchens and baths, as well as many other amenities. They provide a unique opportunity for an unforgettable family golfing and outdoor recreation vacation.

South of London on US 25E are two other very interesting golf courses. **Wasioto Winds** is perhaps the most beautiful course in Kentucky, situated on the lower edge of Pine Mountain near Cumberland Gap, where Daniel Boone led early settlers across the Appalachian Mountains. The course is part of Pine Mountain State Resort Park, Kentucky's oldest state park, near Pineville. The course, however, is brand new, designed by Michael Hurdzan and opened for play in 2002. The \$10 million championship course got its name from the Shawnee word "wasioto," which means "valley of the deer." The Indians used that word to describe the mountainous land where the golf course now sits.

Golf Digest has rated Wasioto Winds in its top 100 courses for 2003, ranking it number 4 in the list of affordable new public courses nationwide.

Wasioto Winds, which includes five par-five holes and five par-threes, is gently rolling with three lakes and several streams, along with six scenic bridges that crisscross the stream and lakes. The 12th hole gives golfers a challenging test. Guarded by a meandering stream, the fairway is surrounded by native hemlocks and rhododendrons. The course offers a length of 7,037 yards from the tips to 4,000 yards from the front tees.

Unlike many other golf courses that use species of grasses that turn brown in the winter, Wasioto Winds stays green virtually year round. The secret is a special cool-

weather turf. The course also features eight-foot-wide cart paths, a practice range and two practice putting greens. A \$1.3 million pro shop offers a commanding view of the course from a wooded ridge. Wasioto Winds also offers the free First Tee program for local youngsters who might not have a chance otherwise to play golf. Created in 1997 by the World Golf Foundation and other golf associations, the First Tee is a national program with a goal of providing affordable golf to those with limited means. With almost 140 First Tee facilities in 38 states, the program is based on golf's strong ability to instill and nurture essential values, such as honesty, integrity, sportsmanship and a solid work ethic.

In the nearby community of Middlesboro is the **Middlesboro Country Club**, America's oldest continuously played golfing facility. The English who settled in the area and were homesick for their national pastime established Middlesboro Country Club in 1889. They found the Yellow Creek Valley a suitable place for building a nine-hole golf course. The Middlesboro Country Club still sits on its original layout. An abundance of trees is what makes Middlesboro so difficult, golfers say. In fact, a pin oak behind hole No. 5 is reported to be one of the biggest trees in the state with its 6-foot-diameter.

With a season that runs year round, the Highlands and Waterways Region of Kentucky is a great golfing destination for families as well as for serious golfers looking for new challenges. From its majestic highlands to its pristine waterways, the area is one of the most scenic in the United States, offering one of the best vacation bargains found anywhere. To enjoy a true taste of Americana, head for the Highlands and Waterways Region of Kentucky for a memorable experience that will suit you to a tee.

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