

PR Sync

“Q&A with a Kentucky Derby Insider”

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Have you ever dreamed of donning a big hat and heading to the Kentucky Derby? Do you want the inside scoop about getting there and going on? Well, I turned to the best source I know—a guy who knows a lot about the Derby and horse racing. And, most importantly, how to get tickets; where to stay; where to eat; and some really cool things the locals like to do before and after the Run for the Roses!

When it comes to the Kentucky Derby, horse racing, and the Bluegrass State, there's one person I can count on for good advice—Fred Taylor, Southwest's Senior Manager Proactive Customer Service Communication. Fred's a native of Louisville, KY; and he has lots of good tips to share with the folks who are planning (or would like to) travel to Kentucky for the Derby (this year held on May2)!

I sat down with Fred to learn more about the fastest two minutes in sports, and the best ways to enjoy it!

Q: I've heard that getting a ticket to the Kentucky Derby is one of the most difficult sporting events to attend. Is that true?

A: It is. Not only is getting a seat tough; but getting to Louisville and finding a place to stay is also challenging. But, if there's a will, there's a way!

Q: So, what do you recommend to our readers about going to the big race?

A: Well, in the past, getting in was difficult; but Churchill Downs has since created several options for every person's pocket book, and there are a couple of other approaches to take:

Purchase tickets via the Official Kentucky Derby website

<http://www.kentuckyderby.com/2009/tickets/buy>

Buy a seat license (this is what my wife and I do)

<http://www.kentuckyderby.com/2009/tickets/personal-seat-license>

You can go through a reputable ticket broker like Derby Box (I've done this in

the past, and was satisfied with my options and their service)

<http://derbybox.com/>

You can buy a general admission ticket (that grants you access to the paddock area and infield only—this is good for party goers who like to mix and mingle with friends and the rest of the crowd)

<http://www.kentuckyderby.com/2009/tickets/general-admission>

You can take advantage of a new option that Churchill Downs started offering this year—the Infield Club

<http://www.kentuckyderby.com/2009/tickets/infield-club>

You can try to buy a ticket from someone selling them outside of the gate—though not guaranteed, this is a last minute option (you just need to make sure the tickets being sold are legit).

Q: Why is getting there and finding a place to stay difficult?

A: The Kentucky Derby is a very popular one-day event every year the first Saturday in May. Which means, many of the folks who attend try to fly to Louisville (SDF) on Friday and depart on Sunday? As such, finding flight with available seats and a hotel room in downtown Louisville isn't easy.

Q: So, what do you recommend to a first time visitor or someone making last-minute travel plans?

A: If you don't make advance reservations, then you have to be flexible and creative. And, do what I do for flight options. My wife works and I have four kids. Because our schedules are all over the place, we end up making last-minute travel plans for the Derby. This year, we purchased tickets on Southwest from Dallas Love Field to St. Louis. We'll rent a car and drive from St. Louis to Louisville. Last year, we flew to Nashville and drove up from there. It just depends on the fares and the city that you're flying from. (Flying to Indianapolis and driving down is also a convenient option.) Also, if your schedule allows, there are usually seats available to SDF the Wednesday and Thursday before the Derby; and out of SDF the following Monday. The

good news is, Churchill Downs is only five minutes away from the airport (as the crow flies) if you decide to arrive on Derby Day.

Q: What about a hotel room?

A: I have to admit, I stay with relatives. That said, if you're not a hometown boy (like me), then there are still reliable options.

For the early birds who want to “do it up right,” to me, the best places to stay are the Seelbach <http://www.seelbachhilton.com/>, which is featured in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; the Brown Hotel <http://brownhotel-px.trvlclick.com/index.html> a historic four-diamond hotel built in English Renaissance style; and, relatively new on the Louisville scene, 21C <http://www.21cmuseumhotel.com/overview/default.aspx> a modern art museum and hip place to stay all rolled up into one sweet package.

For folks with less discriminating tastes, there are lots of Marriot, Courtyard, SpringHill Suites, Holiday Inn Express, Hampton Inn type places to stay scattered around town—when calling to make a reservation, I recommend requesting the eastside of the city. You have to keep in mind, these national chain hotels fill up fast (many times a year in advance), so you might have to go with “Plan B” if you roll into town late.

In this regard, for the last minute traveler, you should consider staying in a national chain hotel in the Louisville suburbs; in Southern Indiana (Jeffersonville and New Albany are right across the river from downtown Louisville); or a Kentucky town outside of Louisville like LaGrange, Bardstown, Shelbyville, Frankfort, Lexington, or Elizabethtown. All of these places are within an hour's drive time to Churchill Downs.

Q: Let's say I have my Derby ticket, my flight, my hotel, and my Derby hat all lined up. What do you recommend in Louisville for places to eat?

A: The great thing about Louisville is that there are lots of bistros in the city. The best flair can be found on Main Street, Baxter Avenue, Barrett Avenue, Bardstown Road, and Frankfort Avenue. These locations might sound like they're scattered all over the place; but they're really not. In no particular order, I recommend:

Baxter Station <http://www.baxterstation.com/>

The Bristol Bar & Grille <http://www.bristolbarandgrille.com/>

Jack Fry's <http://www.jackfrys.com/>

Lynn's Paradise Café <http://www.lynnsparisecafe.com/>

Porcini <http://www.porcinilouisville.com/info.html>

When I'm in town for the races, I always try to go to Lynn's for breakfast and Baxter Station for dinner. The Bristol is great for lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch.

Q: Where would you take visitors for a drink or some nightlife unique to Louisville?

A: Just like the cuisine, there are plenty of trendy bars and cool neighborhood pubs to wet your whistle, as well as several hip clubs. In my opinion, the best bars are:

Proof on Main <http://www.proofonmain.com/proof/default.aspx>

Molly Malones <http://www.mollymalonesirishpub.com/highlands/>

O'sheas <http://www.osheaslouisville.com/>

The Outlook Inn http://louisville.metromix.com/bars-and-clubs/neighborhood_bar/outlook-inn-germantown/498052/content

Flanagan's Ale House <http://louisville.metromix.com/bars-and-clubs/alepub/flanagans-ale-house-germantown/497717/content>

Check's Café http://louisville.metromix.com/bars-and-clubs/bar_review/review-checks-cafe/637312/content

Wick's Pizza <http://www.wickspizza.com/flash.htm>

I like to hang out at Proof and Wick's.

Q: What about clubs and other entertainment that you would recommend?

A: One good thing about Louisville is its eclectic nightlife. Whether you like more mainstream entertainment or, perhaps, you prefer an alternative mix, there's something in the Derby City for you. In this regard, I would suggest these:

4th Street Live <http://www.4thstlive.com/>

Stevie Ray's Blues Bar <http://www.stevieraysbluesbar.com/>

Magnolia Bar <http://www.myspace.com/magbar>

The Connection <http://www.theconnection.net/>

I dig the Blues, so Stevie Ray's is fantastic. And, the Mag Bar has been voted (by the locals) to have the best juke box in town. It's close to the campus of the University of Louisville. And, as a UofL grad, I can say that I've spent a few nights there. Time permitting, I always try to swing by when I'm back in town.

Q: You got us in town, and you've told us about your favorite haunts. If we had more time to spend in the Bluegrass State, what would you suggest?

A: Easy. A distillery tour. And, there's none better than the Woodford Reserve Bourbon Distillery Tour <http://www.woodfordreserve.com/Default.aspx> I'll admit it—I love bourbon, and Woodford Reserve is my favorite. (I also like Wild Turkey, Maker's Mark, and Blanton's.) The Woodford Reserve Distillery is nestled in a little valley right in the heart of thoroughbred country (45 minutes east of Louisville)—the place is literally surrounded by horse farms. And, for \$5 a person, on Tuesday thru Saturday (year round) and Sundays (April thru October) you can get a guided tour of one of the oldest working distilleries in the nation. When the tour ends, enjoy lunch on the veranda of the visitor's center. It is a very relaxing and pleasant way to spend the afternoon.

Q: When you're not being proactive with Southwest, you spend time with your race horses. Do you have any horses running on Derby Day?

A: I wish! On average, there are 36,000 Thoroughbreds born every year (this is called a crop). Each year, only 20 three-year olds from the crop earn the opportunity to run for the roses the first Saturday in May. And, only one in 36,000 will win the Kentucky Derby. So, just for fun, I started a racing partnership called Mojo Racing Partners <http://www.mojoracingpartners.com/> with a couple of folks from Southwest and other associates; but our Runners haven't struck lightning in a bottle (so to speak), yet.

Q: In that case, do you have a few picks for this year's Derby that you're willing to share with the rest of us?

A: Of course. Let's start with the Fillies and the 135th running of the Kentucky Oaks (the day before the Derby). At this point, I like: Rachel Alexandra, Justwhistledixie, and Just Jenda. The 135th Kentucky Derby seems to be open this year; but I think I'm going with: Musket Man, Friesan Fire, and General Quarters.

Q: Any particular reason you like these horses?

A: Sure, the fillies and colts that I've selected seem to do well over the traditional dirt surface; they have posted the best race times for the distances run leading up to the Oaks and Derby; and all seem to be improving each time they race.

Q: How reliable are your picks?

A: Well, I picked the Oaks and Derby winners for the last two years. So, take that for whatever it's worth.