

Field Trip!

Six ideas for unforgettable excursions to advance your whisky education.

BY SALLY KRAL

Whiskey lovers test their endurance by bicycling the Kentucky Bourbon Trail.



Gathering with friends to taste and discuss a flight of drams from around the world may be the best kind of classroom there is. But to truly deepen your appreciation for a whisky, going to the source—taking a field trip to the place where the liquid originated—is unmatched.

A whisky bar crawl is a great way to meet knowledgeable bartenders and potential club members. Visiting distilleries along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail—or the Irish Whiskey Trail—allows you to connect with the people who make your favorite whiskies and answer your questions about them. Some distilleries allow you to purchase a barrel, or concoct your own whisky. So rally your club, pack a lunch, and get out there! Just remember to bring a signed permission slip.



North Shore Whisky Club's New York City pub crawl included stops at Brandy Library (this photo) and The Flatiron Room (below).

Organize a Pub Crawl

A pub crawl may bring to mind stumbling bar-goers donning shamrock gear, but for a group of discriminating whisky fans, a well-organized bar tour can be a great outing.

“Bar crawls are a way for our members to explore venues in a neighborhood they might not otherwise visit, especially considering how big Los Angeles is,” says Kim Ohannesson, president of the Los Angeles chapter of Women Who Whiskey. She adds that these events can offer a more casual and relaxed setting for members to get to know one another. “People tend to mingle and interact more freely if they’re walking and regrouping at different venues.” Ohannesson focuses on bars that allow her to reserve a space for the group ahead of time, and finds they’re generally accommodating if the crawl takes place before the evening rush.

Organizing a crawl of your town’s best whisky-focused establishments is a simple and fun way to shake up your club’s routine. “We like to experience a variety of environments where we can enjoy whisky, and the lively, boisterous atmosphere of a pub is a nice change of pace from our regular tasting meetings,” says Darren McInnis, co-founder of the Boston-area North Shore Whisky Club. “A few years back our club was selected through a *Whisky Advocate* drawing to a rare tasting of single malt whiskies at a nice restaurant in New York City, and from there we organized our own little crawl of the excellent whisky bars Brandy Library, The Flatiron Room, and Highlands.”

There are plenty of tools available to help

organize your crawl. “Google Maps is great for general advance planning, including public transit options,” Ohannesson says. There’s also a free smartphone app, PubRally, designed specifically for organizing your own private or public pub crawl. It allows you to map out your route, or join a public crawl already underway. It also features a location tracker to prevent crawlers from getting lost, and a messaging feature to send updates to your group. But the easiest tactic may be to participate in an established event from a company like Crawl With Us, which hosts different themed crawls, such as Whiskey & Wings, in 63 cities. Even a crawl of just a few venues can be a great way to get to know your neighborhood and local bar staff, and add a fun social element to your club’s gatherings.



Pub Crawl Tips

Keep these tips in mind when organizing your own whisky club’s pub crawl so everyone has a safe and enjoyable experience.

Plan a route

Map out the venues you want to visit to determine a logical order, planning for one drink at each location, while aiming to keep the hike in between under ten minutes. Ohannesson recommends walking the route ahead of time to get a sense of how accessible it is.

Do your research

Contact bars in advance, as they might not welcome a large group, or may need extra staff to accommodate one. You may be able to request a specific whisky, cocktail, or even reserve a space. Check local laws and regulations—in Baltimore, for instance, a pub crawl of 75 or more people requires a special permit.

Pick a leader—or two

You’ll need a group leader to make sure everyone is staying on track, and it’s great to have a sidekick to round up stragglers or latecomers. Make sure all crawlers have the leaders’ contact info.

Stay connected

If your group is large, consider hats, pins, or something similar so fellow crawlers can be identified. You can also use an app with location tracking and messaging, like PubRally, to stay connected.

Pace yourself

With each round of drinks, order water and plenty of snacks for everyone. If there are more than just a few venues on your itinerary, consider ordering tasting-size drinks.

Travel safely

Plan ahead so that no one is drinking and driving—either designate a driver, use a car service or rideshare, or take public transportation. In which case, aim to start and end the crawl somewhere convenient, like at a metro stop.

Buy a Barrel

Your whisky club has likely purchased many bottles, but have you considered buying a whole barrel of whisky? It's easier than you may think and often includes benefits like selecting the barrel with the distillers, personalized labels, and the barrel itself for display.

"Selecting a private barrel of whisky is one of the most exciting experiences that a person can have," says Skip Young, who co-founded the Northern Kentucky-based Toasted Cooper Society with John Weigold and Greaahm Niemer. The club has purchased three Buffalo Trace barrels to split among members over the past three years. Like most distillers, Buffalo Trace includes a full tour of their facilities and tastings from several different barrels when purchasing by the barrel. "We make a day of it. We charter a small bus to drive us down to the distillery, and then visit additional nearby distilleries on the way home," Niemer says. "This makes it a safe, fun way for us to enjoy a day out as a group."



After you've chosen your barrel, the distillery will bottle the whiskey and work according to U.S. laws to get it to a retailer, who sells it to you. Toasted Cooper Society works mainly with Stadium Liquor in Covington, Kentucky. "Talk to your local liquor stores and build up a relationship with them," Weigold suggests. "Depending on your state, the laws and regulations could be different and they'll be able to help you along the journey."

Where to Buy a Barrel

Availability and program offers are subject to change. Check with the distillery for current details.

Barrell Craft Spirits
barrellbourbon.com/singlebarrels
CONTACT Nic Christiansen,
nic@barrellbourbon.com

Catoctin Creek
catoctincreekdistilling.com/casks
CONTACT info@catoctincreek.com or call 540-751-8404

Corsair
corsairdistillery.com/barrel-sales
CONTACT Visit the website

FEW Spirits
fewspirits.com
CONTACT Paul Hletko,
info@fewspirits.com

Four Roses
fourrosesbourbon.com
CONTACT Mandy Vance,
mvance@fourrosesbourbon.com

Freeland Spirits
freelandspirits.com/private-barrel
CONTACT Brooke McKinnon,
brooke@freelandspirits.com

Garrison Brothers
garrisonbros.com/our-babies/single-barrel
CONTACT email sitandsip@garrisonbros.com, visit the website, or call 830-392-0246

George Dickel
georgedickel.com
CONTACT DickelBarrel@diageo.com

Heaven Hill
Available for Elijah Craig and Larceny
heavenhilldistillery.com
For details on the program, ask your retailer to contact the local Heaven Hill representative or distributor.

High West
highwest.com/products/barrel-select-program
CONTACT Mark Erickson,
mark.erickson@cbrands.com

Jack Daniel
jackdaniels.com/en-us/whiskey/single-barrel/personal-collection
CONTACT Visit the website or call 1-888-551-5225

James B. Beam Distilling
Available for Jim Beam single barrel bourbon, Knob Creek single barrel bourbon, Knob Creek single barrel rye
jimbeam.com
For more information, ask your retailer to contact the local Beam Suntory representative or distributor.

Maker's Mark
Available for Private Select
makersmark.com/makers-mark-private-select
For more information, ask your retailer to contact the local Beam Suntory representative or distributor.

Mississippi River Distilling
mrdistilling.com/whiskey-custom-whiskey-program
CONTACT info@mrdistilling.com or call 563-484-4342

New Riff Distilling
newriffdistilling.com/single-barrel-program
CONTACT Visit the website

Virginia's Catoctin Creek offers individual barrels for sale.

Old Forester
oldforester.com/single-barrel-program
CONTACT Visit the website

Sazerac
Available for Barton 1792, Buffalo Trace, Caribou Crossing, and Speyburn Companion Cask, as well as Corazón tequila
sazerac.com
CONTACT Visit app.single-barrelselect.com

Still 630
still630.com/private-single-barrel
CONTACT Visit the website or call 314-513-2275

Tarnished Truth Distilling
tarnishedtruth.com
CONTACT Call 757-965-9652

Vapor Distillery
vapordistillery.com/products/buy-barrel
CONTACT Alastair Brogan,
alastair@vapordistillery.com

Virginia Distillery
vadistillery.com/casksociety
CONTACT casksociety@vadistillery.com or call 434-285-2900

WhistlePig
whistlepigwhiskey.com/reserve-barrels
CONTACT reserve@whistlepigrye.com

Wild Turkey
Available for Kentucky Spirit and Russell's Reserve single barrel
wildturkeybourbon.com
For more information, ask your retailer to contact the local Campari America representative or distributor.

Woodford Reserve
woodfordreserve.com/whiskey/by-the-barrel
CONTACT Chris Poynter,
chris_poynter@b-f.com

Wyoming Whiskey
wyomingwhiskey.com
CONTACT David DeFazio,
david@wyomingwhiskey.com



Keeping a watchful eye at J. Rieger, Kansas City (top); California's Blinking Owl offers a hands-on "MBA" in whiskey making (bottom and right).

Distill Your Own

Making your own whisky—safely and legally—is possible. Several craft distilleries allow consumers to create and distill their own whisky, from designing a mashbill to barreling and bottling.

At Claremont Distilled Spirits in Fairfield, New Jersey, the Monmouth Whisky Club did just that. "We didn't just choose a barrel that was already aged or pick from a predetermined mashbill—we were heavily involved during the whole process," club founder Peter Grasso says. "For an educational social club like ours, that was fantastic!"

Each distillery's program is slightly different: some let you choose from a few recipes, while

others allow you to make decisions on key variables like yeast variety and barrel toast levels. At Blinking Owl Distillery in Santa Ana, California, it's called the "Whiskey MBA Program," where MBA stands for "making, barreling, and aging." Meanwhile, each group participating in the private barrel program at Foundry Distilling Co. in West Des Moines, Iowa attends a staff-led whiskey seminar, including a thorough whiskey-making lesson and cocktail hour.

"Anyone can buy a barrel, but if you're looking to build unique, different, and fun experiences for your members, making your own whiskey from scratch is it," Grasso says.

DIY Whisky Programs

Designing a whiskey as a club is a perfect group project.

Blinking Owl Distillery

Santa Ana, Calif.

blinkingowldistillery.com

COST \$8,000 to \$15,000

Claremont Distilled Spirits

Fairfield, N.J.

claremontdistillery.com

COST \$1,800 for a 15-gallon barrel

Copper Run Distillery

Walnut Shade, Mo.

copperrundistillery.com

COST \$1,180 to \$9,000, depending on barrel size

Foundry Distilling Co.

West Des Moines, Iowa

foundrydistillingcompany.com

COST \$8,000 for a 30-gallon barrel, plus a 5-gallon "pilot" barrel; \$2,500 for just the 5-gallon barrel

J. Rieger & Co.

Kansas City, Mo.

jriegerco.com

COST \$12,500 for a 53-gallon barrel

Mississippi River Distilling Company

LeClaire, Iowa

mrdistilling.com

COST \$6,000 for a 30-gallon barrel

Stay at a Distillery

What could be more convenient when visiting a distillery with your whisky club than spending the night right on the premises? Not only does it relieve you from having to get everyone home after a day of touring and tasting, it also provides a completely immersive distillery experience.

“We’ve hosted a few whisky and bourbon clubs, and we take care to provide unique experiences for each,” says Andrew Yancey, co-owner and operator of Tarnished Truth Distilling, housed in Virginia Beach, Virginia’s Historic Cavalier Hotel and Beach Club. “We did a private tour and tasting with one club, followed by dinner with our distillers and myself in the Cavalier’s Hunt Room.”

In fact, some distilleries are willing to go out of their way to make your group’s stay memorable and comfortable. “There are many benefits to staying overnight at Bowmore,” says Vicky McLean, general manager of Bowmore Cottages and Harbour Inn. “We offer bespoke tutored whisky tastings that can be arranged to suit each group, private dining, plus a restaurant serving Islay specialties including the Bowmore oyster luge for groups.”

The Cavalier Hotel



The Cavalier Hotel



Tarnished Truth Distillery at The Cavalier Hotel



Lodging at The Loft at Journeyman Distillery

Where to Call It a Night

From high-end flats to cozy inns to historic cottages, these distilleries are great places for your group to spend the night after a day of whisky adventures.

Arbeg Distillery

Islay, Scotland

arbeg.com

Seaview Cottage at Arbeg Distillery is ideal for small groups of whisky enthusiasts, with three bedrooms, a self-catering kitchen, and stunning sea views.

Bowmore Distillery

Islay, Scotland

bowmore.com

Five cottages in the heart of the distillery property dating to the 1840s vary in size from one- to four-bedroom.

Glenora Distillery

Nova Scotia, Canada

glenoradistillery.com

The Glenora resort compound offers group-friendly lodging like six stand-alone chalets and a lodge with five guest rooms, located on a hillside with a panoramic view of the glen and distillery.

Journeyman Distillery

Three Oaks, Michigan

journeymandistillery.com

This distillery offers three unique rental properties including the Flat, a modern 7,000-square-foot industrial loft apartment located directly upstairs from the distillery, that sleeps fourteen.

Marble Distilling

Carbondale, Colorado

marbledistilling.com

The Distillery Inn has earned the esteemed Green Hotelier Award for its five luxurious modern suites, each with a king-sized bed, fireplace, oversized spa bath, and views of Mount Sopris.

Tarnished Truth Distilling

Virginia Beach, Virginia

tarnishedtruth.com

Tarnished Truth is fully integrated into the Cavalier Hotel, an iconic 1927 neoclassic property with 85 guest rooms, three dining venues, and the full-service SeaHill Spa.



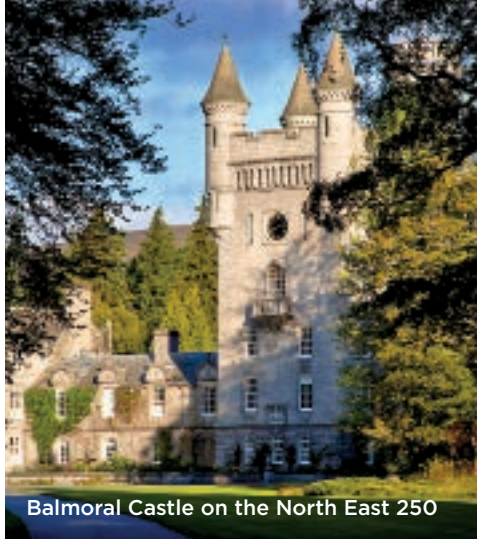
Dining at Glenora Distillery



Glenora Distillery



Staymaker Restaurant at the Journeyman Distillery



Balmoral Castle on the North East 250

Top Trails

These distillery trails are ever evolving. Check websites for latest details.

UNITED STATES

Kentucky Bourbon Trail kybourbontrail.com

Features key bourbon producers along with must-try culinary and cocktail destinations. Consider also exploring the Kentucky Bourbon Trail Craft Tour.

Tennessee Whiskey Trail tnwhiskeytrail.com

A sprawling statewide tour spanning Nashville to Memphis and everywhere in between, this trail is best tackled in three parts.

SCOTLAND—SPEYSIDE

The Malt Whisky Trail maltwhiskytrail.com

Discover the most iconic names in single malt in this beautiful driving tour of just over 40 miles.

SCOTLAND—ABERDEEN

North East 250 northeast250.com

An ambitious 250-mile scenic loop that is a favorite of drivers and well-trained cyclists.

IRELAND

The Irish Whiskey Trail whiskeytrail.ie

Spanning all of Ireland, you'll find stunning natural landscapes, waterfalls, pubs, and, of course, distilleries.

AUSTRALIA

Tasmanian Whisky Trail taswhiskytrail.com

Tasmania's recent return to whisky making (resumed in 1992) now boasts more than a dozen distilleries.



Above: Mint Julep Tours visits Heaven Hill in Kentucky. Below: The Tasmanian Whisky Trail includes Lark Distillery.

Tackle a Whisky Trail

Touring a whisky trail at home or abroad is a rite of passage for any whisky enthusiast—and like most things, more fun with friends. If planning a whisky trail tour yourself seems too daunting, seek out help from one of many touring companies eager to plan and tailor an excursion to meet your club's specific goals. "Our tours are all-inclusive—meaning we book everything from guaranteed tour times to lunch outings, tasting sessions, and more—and feature informative tour leaders and drivers who provide a wealth of whiskey knowledge along the way," says Sara Havens, director of marketing for Mint Julep Tours, which has offices in Kentucky and Tennessee. They can even add liquor store stops to your route.

Similar trails and tours exist in Scotland, Ireland, and even Australia. "We work with many whisky clubs from around the world, and we ensure that every tour is

individual," says Paul McLean, co-owner of Whisky Tours Scotland. "Touring distilleries opens your club up to new whiskies, new experiences, and new tastings, plus they get to see where their favorite whiskies are produced."

For an enthusiast, no whisky is as memorable as one tasted where it was produced. "Reading about it, talking about it, or just sipping samples of it don't hold a candle to actually stepping on the hallowed grounds of a legendary distillery," Havens says.





With an abundance of amazing whiskies, WhiskyFest New York 2019 rewarded those who planned ahead.

Make the Most of WhiskyFest

WhiskyFest is a whisky lover's paradise, offering hundreds of whiskies from distilleries across every major whisky-producing country—and the perfect event for a whisky club outing. With tastings and seminars led by master distillers, master blenders, and other industry insiders, it's become an annual excursion for many

whisky clubs, large and small, across the nation.

The bountiful whiskies—some rare and limited—educational opportunities, and meet and greet with distilling icons all await. With so much to experience, you'll want to keep these tips in mind to ensure that you and your club members maximize the night to its fullest potential. ■

WhiskyFest 2020 Calendar

Chicago March 27

Hollywood, FL *Big Smoke Meets WhiskyFest* April 3-4

New York October 29

San Francisco December 4

7 Rules for a Great WhiskyFest

Map It Out

Joseph Gaffoglio of Ridgewood Whisky Club—who has attended WhiskyFest New York with the club's six other members every year since 2015—notes, "It's vital to spend some time planning ahead of the event, especially for the VIP hour. It definitely helps to identify the four or five whiskies that you most want to try before the event begins."

The WhiskyFest app and printed program both feature a map and the full pour list, including both VIP and general admission offerings. VIP pours, which include many of the rarest and oldest whiskies, are limited. If your club members have their hearts set on a particular VIP dram, make that table your first stop to ensure everyone gets a taste.

Sit in on a Seminar

WhiskyFest seminars are one of the best ways to discover new whiskies, learn about favorites, and possibly even try drams that aren't being poured in the main venue. They're free and led by industry experts. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis, so you'll want to line up well in advance.

Divide and Conquer

With so many seminars and myriad whiskies, a key advantage of attending as a group is that you can cover more ground. "Most of the time we all attend the same seminar, but if there are two really good ones going on simultaneously, we'll split up and then compare notes," Gaffoglio notes. This can also apply to tasting whiskies.

Keep Track

Keep in touch with your fellow club members through text, social media, or, better yet, converge at a meeting point each hour. It's a great way to quickly swap notes and share your finds. Keep track of what you've tasted using the WhiskyFest app or printed program, or simply snap a photo of the label of your favorites.

Make a Connection

This is your chance to chat with distillers and brand ambassadors; you might just persuade them to offer your club a tasting. When Ridgewood Whisky Club member Joe Staunton told Glenmorangie and Ardbeg global master brand ambassador David Blackmore that Signet is his favorite scotch, he received an unexpected gift.

"David responded by affixing his Signet pin to the lapel of my Ridgewood Whisky Club blazer!" exults Staunton.

Drink Responsibly

While you will sample many wonderful whiskies, preserve your palate by refraining from finishing every pour. Also, stay hydrated—drink plenty of water throughout the evening, and make sure everyone in your group takes time to eat. A spectacular gourmet buffet is included.

Get Home Safely

Before the night arrives, determine how your group is going to get home, whether it's public transportation, ride share, cab, or a designated driver. Of course, staying the night at the event hotel is ideal.