

Kentucky: Exploring the Unexpected With Kathy Cary

**An Adventure in Rockcastle and Laurel Counties
June 11-14, 2015**

Sometimes the great pleasures and surprises in life are nearer than we realize! Join Kathy Cary, chef/owner of Lilly's Bistro in Louisville, as she uncovers delights that are hidden just a couple of hours away in our own state of Kentucky.

Our tour will include a visit to Rockcastle River Trading Company in Livingston, Ky., owned by the celebrated landscape designer Jon Carloftis. Nestled on the banks of the picturesque Rockcastle River and surrounded by the Daniel Boone National Forest, this shop and its surrounding, 50-acre landscape are among Kentucky's best-kept secrets, described by Southern Living Magazine as "a touch of Eden." Jon's charming mother and sister, Lucille and Betsy Carloftis, will be on hand to greet us as we tour the grounds and browse through the shop's unique merchandise and gifts. (We'll catch up with Jon himself later in the tour.)

Jon's brother, Buzz Carloftis, Chief Executive of Rockcastle County for 20 years, will narrate a bus tour of his county, one of the most beautiful in the state thanks to its dramatic topography, which includes huge limestone cliffs and sweeping vistas of valleys and farmlands. Buzz, who is on a first-name basis with practically everyone in his county, is arranging stops at homes of various friends who are musicians and artisans.

Another highlight – and one of the most unusual Kentucky meals you'll ever enjoy – is a dinner of make-your-own pizza at Bentgate, a charming five-acre farm at Climax, Ky., owned by Calvin Gross and Ron Small. The pizzas, with an elaborate array of toppings, will be cooked individually in the farm's outdoor wood oven, built by Calvin and based on a 3,000-year-old Roman design. The farm itself, lovingly tended by its owners, is all but self-sustaining with its unusual gardens, exotic chickens and a collection of homemade cheeses and canned goods including jellies, jams and preserves.

Meals will also include a luncheon stop at Renfro Valley, Rockcastle County's famous entertainment center recognized as the heart of bluegrass music in the U.S., and the home of "Real Country Music by Real Country Folks."

The center's 75-year history includes providing early exposure to such performers as Hank Snow, Red Foley, Hank Williams and Homer & Jethro. Our lunch will be served country style in the lodge and, as you might guess, the food is all country – fried chicken and all the fixin's, iced tea and lots of freshly made cornbread.

One of our most captivating stops is at the Great Saltpetre Cave, a historic and beautiful limestone cave (easy access) located on Rockcastle County's Crooked Creek. Daniel Boone himself left his name on the cavern walls. The cave's exquisite acoustics will be shown off by the ethereal voices of the Johnson Sisters, who perform folk ballads, bluegrass and gospel. The cave is managed by the Rockcastle Karst Conservancy, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving this unique resource. This attraction is not open to the general public; our invitation to visit is a special privilege!

Upon our arrival in Laurel County, we'll enjoy a reception at Back of the Moon, a privately owned home on beautiful Wood Creek, with group participation, fun cocktails and live music provided by pianist Danny Phelps. Kathy will be whipping up delicious food in the kitchen and can always use extra hands (in case you're interested). The evening's special guest is Kentucky humorist Carl Hurley, known as "America's Funniest Professor." Carl, who hails from East Bernstadt, Ky. (and has a street named after him there), will regale us with stories about growing up in Laurel County.

Our visit to Wood Creek also includes pontoon rides provided by local hosts. This will allow you to enjoy the scenic beauty of the lake, a pristine body of water located in the Appalachian Mixed Mesophytic Forest, a woodland boasting a diversity of flora and fauna matched only by regions of China. The lake also extends into the Daniel Boone National Forest and includes a lovely array of flowering plants that reach their peak in the month of June. These include wild azalea, mountain laurel, rhododendron and a striking wild magnolia tree with huge white blossoms known to locals as the "cowcumber."

We'll also visit some very special neighbors. PineKrest, a scenic horse-farm owned by Josh and Toni Greer, houses a herd of beautiful American saddlebreds and hackney ponies. In addition to being a successful breeder, Josh is a highly respected judge of horse shows and will demonstrate his skill in showing off his prize equines. We'll drop by The Basket House, the home of expert weaver Judy Ridings, who has invited another neighbor, Linda Stahl Finley, to display her whimsical creations in pottery.

One of our Laurel County lunches will be at Red Dog & Company, home of hand-crafted chairs, benches, rockers, stools, tables and other exquisite pieces of furniture. This dwelling/workshop/store of personable owners Michael and

Fredi Angel is located in a beautiful setting of rolling hills and forests, and 99 per cent of the wood used in the furniture is from the area – even the hickory caning that forms the seats of many of the pieces! Michael will lead a personal tour of his operation, complete with fascinating demonstrations of his craft. Fredi is a master gardener, and the setting of our luncheon promises to be as lush as a visit to Italy.

On another day of the tour, we'll visit the home of internationally famous folk artists Lonnie and Twyla Money. The Moneys' reputation has sprung from their fanciful creation of colorful birds, chickens, turtles, dragons and other designs. Lonnie is descended from Jacob Money, a 19th-century Swiss immigrant known for his carvings in the Old Country. Twyla, whose family farmed in Laurel County for generations, grew up a mile from where she and Lonnie now live. The Moneys will conduct a tour of their gallery and workshops; you'll see Lonnie carving his designs and Twyla painting them, along with working exhibits by other local artists and entertainment by local musicians. Crafts and products will include pottery, quilts, baskets, jewelry, soaps and lotions.

An exciting and truly unexpected Laurel County treasure is the family-owned Ryser's Furniture Store, which offers an elaborate display of upscale furnishings despite a rural setting complete with cow pastures! From humble beginnings in the basement of the home of original owner Toni Ryser, the store has developed into one of the leading home furniture showcases in the Southeast. It is known for the sophisticated flair of its exquisite furniture and accessories by top designers including Henredon, Maitland-Smith, Ralph Lauren and many others.

As one might expect from a tour led by Kathy Cary, food sources will figure prominently in some of our stops. We'll visit the local farmer's market as well as Laurel County's only organic farm, the Sustainable Harvest Farm, where we will meet friendly owners Ford and Amanda Waterstrat and their family. Nearby Levi Jackson State Park has one of the nation's few operating grist mills, where you can buy wonderful fresh corn meal and see the country's largest collection of millstones.

Even our roadside stops at the beginning and end of the tour are exceptional. Our first stop is the Heirloom Restaurant in Midway, Ky., where Chef Mark Wombles will prepare a special lunch. There will be time to browse the shops in this scenic little town located "midway" between Frankfort and Lexington before we depart for our host hotel, The Hampton Inn in London, Ky. En route back to Louisville, we'll enjoy brunch at the historic Boone Tavern Inn in Berea, then make a final stop in Lexington where Jon Carloftis will conduct a private tour of "Botherum," the historic home he recently renovated with his partner, Dale Fisher. Botherum was built in 1851 for attorney Madison C.

Johnson, a confidant of Abraham Lincoln, and shows an unusual combination of Greek, Roman and Gothic architectural elements. A recent article in Gun and Garden magazine noted that both the mansion's grounds and its interiors have been restored to their "former glory."

And surprises are still being cooked up by Kathy and her crew, including an over-the-top event Saturday night hosted by London residents Judy and Johnny Phelps. (That's all we'll say for now!) In short, you're sure to enjoy a taste of Kentucky that will amaze and delight you!

The fun begins when we depart on a private charter from the parking lot of Lilly's Bistro at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, June 11. We will return to Lilly's no later than 5 p.m. on Sunday, June 14.

How to Sign Up

Kathy has asked Mike McKinney to coordinate reservations and answer your questions.

Contact Mike at (502) 649-0764 or email him at mike@carlhurley.com

The cost is \$1695 per person based on double occupancy. For a single room supplement, add \$300. This price includes transportation on a private coach, all meals and beverages, fees, taxes, gratuities and deluxe lodging at the Hampton Inn in London, Kentucky.

A deposit of \$500 is required to reserve. The deposit is refundable only within 14 days after being received. Please remit by check payable to "McKinney Associates, Inc." and mail to Mike McKinney, McKinney Associates, Inc., P. O. Box 5162, Louisville, KY 40255-0162. Sorry, we are not equipped to accept credit cards. Mike will confirm your reservation and keep you informed of the details. Final payment is due no later than May 1. Events and schedules are subject to change.

A very happy group of travelers accompanied Kathy on previous tours to Rockcastle and Laurel counties in 2013 and 2014.

Walter and Catherine Christopherson, who have traveled the world, wrote: "After all our travel far and wide, who would have thought there was so much to see and do in our own backyard in Kentucky. Truly one of the best, if not the best of our trips!"

"What a great trip...we would even think of going again." Sandy and Bill Schreiber

"For me," wrote Gray Henry, "it was more of a delight than going to Paris! Forget the proximity, ease of travel, the company – and the sheer economy of this journey! What struck me most was the absolute beauty of the land and the soul of all the precious people who received and entertained us! Going into homes is

what one always remembers from any trip to another country, far more a joy than the famous tour sites. Well, this trip was nothing BUT! And the food was off-the-charts...and that included the picnics! Seeing with our own eyes that here in our OWN state, small farms were actually self-sufficient...right down to the bee honey and soap! How can I not mention the crafts? My home is now graced by the most fabulous hand-made pieces you have ever seen! I took care of Christmas (shopping) in a flash and with what elegance and superb charm! Of this expedition to another world, another country, one could not have done better than meet our dear neighbors who are way ahead of us in so many ways. Go Appalachia...your lakes and mountains and caves and music – and all those beautiful souls who hosted us and treated us like royalty!”

“I had always wanted to see more of Kentucky, and this tour gave me such a personal insight into our state and the great people who make it so special. It was probably the best venue I have ever experienced. It was such an intimate experience we had with the people we met. And to top off the experience was the superb food.” – Valerie Reeves

“Unexpectedly, our tour of Rockcastle and Laurel Counties in 2014 turned out to be the most informative and enjoyable four days of the year! This is a part of Kentucky never before on my radar. Without this inviting tour I completely would have missed getting to know some fantastic food, amazing art and truly wonderful people. So inviting that I now consider it my second home.” – Mimi Zinniel (P.S.: Mimi loved the area so much that she did indeed buy a home there to enjoy on weekends!)

This tour is limited to 18 persons. Last year, it sold out by word-of-mouth before it could be advertised. We suggest you contact Mike by phone (502 649 0764) to get your name on the list for this memorable adventure. As Kathy says, “The unexpected will surprise you.”