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## 10 Best Vacation Cities for Beer Lovers

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NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) -- Beer drinkers shouldn't limit craft beer to *part of* their vacation. With enough planning, those IPAs, Hefeweizens and Russian Imperial Stouts can *be* their vacation.

There are 2,000 craft breweries in the United States, according to the Brewers Association craft beer interest group. That means there's a great craft brewery waiting in just about every corner of the country. Think Montana's a desolate, dry place? You haven't tried a [Big Sky IPA](#). Concerned about finding quality beer in Alaska? Taste an [Alaskan Amber](#), [Glacier BrewHouse Blonde](#) or a [Midnight Sun Sockeye Red IPA](#) and fear no more.

There's a whole lot out there to start tasting, but not nearly enough space to fit it all. The following 10 destinations are by no means a definitive list, but they're some great spots for getting started. Let your palate guide you and let someone else do the

driving:



### Burlington, Vt.

Think this state's too small for a big craft beer presence? By the end of 2010, Vermont had 21 breweries for more than 625,000 residents -- the most breweries per capita of any state in the country.

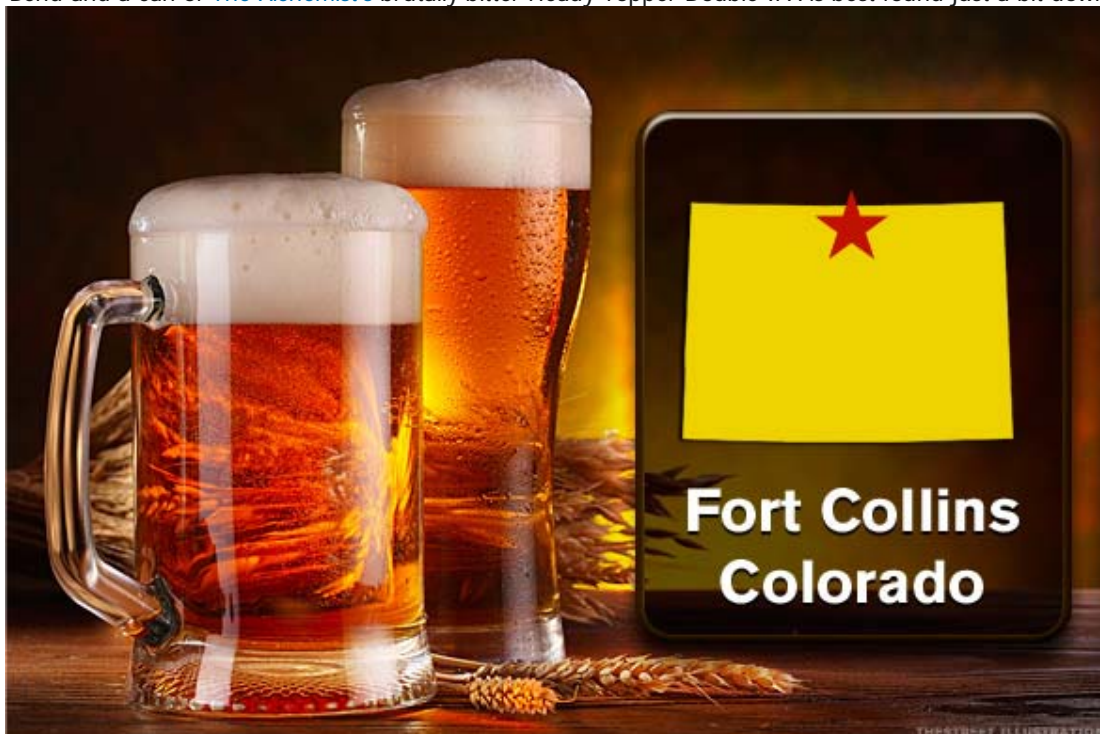
Perhaps the most idyllic and unquestionably vermonty of the bunch is the Bridgewater Corners home of [Long Trail Brewing](#). It sits along the junction of Vermont's routes 4 and 100A between Rutland and Woodstock amid rolling hills and rustic homes, town squares and farmhouses and lets guests sip its Blackberry Wheat, Double Bag strong ale and Belgian White witbier on a deck

outside the brewery and brewpub overlooking the Ottauquechee River just behind the brewery.

From there, it's quick right turn onto Interstate 91 South and stop into [Harpoon Brewery's Windsor facility](#) for guided tours, a beer garden with outdoor views and live music and tall glasses of Raspberry or White UFO hefeweizen. Darker fare can be found just north on Route 7 in Middlebury during a minimalist tour and tasting at [Otter Creek Brewery](#), where the Copper Ale, Solstice Ale, Stovepipe Porter and Wolaver's IPA and Witbiers steal the show.

If you're looking to limit your stops a bit, Burlington keeps things easy by clustering [Magic Hat](#), [Switchback Brewing](#), Three Needs Taproom and the [Vermont Pub and Brewery](#) within a short distance. That collection only gets broader in late July, when some of the state's more far-flung brewers, including Morrisville's [Rock Art Brewery](#), Lyndonville's [Trout River Brewing](#) and Bennington's Madison and [Northshire](#) breweries descend on Burlington for the annual Vermont Brewers Festival. The real gems require some digging, though, as [Hill Farmstead's](#) fantastic Double Citra IPA requires a trek out to a sprawling farm in Greensboro Bend and a can of [The Alchemist's](#) brutally bitter Heady Topper Double IPA is best found just a bit down I-89 in

Waterbury.



### Fort Collins, Colo.

Colorado has fourth-largest collection of craft breweries in America behind Oregon, Washington and California and the fourth-most breweries per capita in the U.S., which makes finding a great one relatively easy.

Fort Collins makes a great base of operations thanks to breweries as bold as the Belgian-inspired [Funkwerks](#) and its Saison or the prolific [Odell Brewing](#) and its Woodcut oak-aged ales and sublime 90 Shilling Scottish ale. We'd be remiss if we didn't mention [New Belgium Brewing](#), which has been cranking out tasty brews such as its Fat Tire Amber Ale and Ranger IPA for 20 years, but also hosts the Tour de Fat bike festival, Bike-In Cinema summer film series for cyclists and its Urban Assault Ride bicycle scavenger hunts.

It's all south from there, as [Left Hand Brewery](#) in Longmont has a tasting room teeming with taps of its signature Milk Stout, BlackJack Porter and Wake Up Dead Stout, while nearby [Oskar Blues](#) facilities crank out cans of Dale's Pale Ale and Old Chub Scottish on sites that include include a 50-acre farm, a brewpub and music venue called Oskar Blues Home Made Liquids and Solids and the Tasty Weasel Tap Room with live music, skee ball, small-batch brews and brewery tours.

From Longmont, it's decision time. Do beer lovers head south to Boulder for a one-city circuit of breweries including [Asher Brewing](#), [Boulder Beer](#), [Mountain Sun](#), [Upslope](#) and heavy hitter [Avery Brewing](#) for its cans of White Rascal Witbier or Joe's American Pilsner? Do they head even farther down Interstate 25 to Denver for a Hercules Double IPA at [Great Divide Brewing](#)? Given the gorgeous views in each direction, it's tough to lose.





### Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, Mich.

As we discovered firsthand, the Big 10 rivalry between Michigan and Wisconsin expands well beyond the football field.

The roughly 50-mile stretch between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo and its roughly eight to nine breweries (depending on the geographic leeway given by the person asked) constitute the heart of Michigan craft brewing, as do the two biggest breweries within it: Bell's and Founders.

Kalamazoo-based [Bell's](#) has become one of the Top 10 craft brewers in the country by volume, and its Oberon Pale Wheat Ale is a summer staple. Its brewery tour, Eccentric Cafe brewpub and live music venue and sponsorship of events, including the Ore to Shore mountain bike race after-party and Bayview Mackinac sailing race earlier this month, keep a visitor's attention once that first pint is gone.

Bell's has some friendly craft brewing neighbors in Battle Creek's [Arcadia Brewing](#) and Kalamazoo's [Olde Peninsula Brewpub](#), but there's a bigger payoff about an hour north on Route 131 in Grand Rapids. [Founder's Brewing](#) has become as well known for high-powered concoctions such as its 12% alcohol by volume Devil Dancer Triple IPA and 7.2% ABV Centennial IPA as it has for its hard-to-find breakfast stouts that have a sad habit of disappearing from shelves as soon as they're stocked.

For greater extremes, however, beer lovers have to head to Holland, where [New Holland Brewing](#) has been experimenting with beers such as its oak barrel-aged Dragon's Milk strong ale, its barrel-soured Blue Sunday sour beer and its chile- and coffee-concocted El Mole Ocho. A bit east in Dexter and Ann Arbor, [Jolly Pumpkin Brewing](#) concocts Belgian-style brews such as the spicy Oro de Calabaza golden ale, Calabaza Blanca witbier, La Roja sour red and Bam Biere farmhouse ale while serving guests vegetable pizzas, thick burgers and pumpkin whoopie pies in the sidewalk seats or roof deck of its Main Street Ann Arbor brew

pub.

There's no real tour to speak of and the Dexter outpost is really just a production facility, but a lakefront brewpub and restaurant in Traverse City puts guests close to [North Peak Brewing](#), [Right Brain Brewery](#) and [Traverse Brewing](#) in Traverse City and the pub, deli and hyperlocal brews such as Pontius Road Pilsner and Bellaire Brown at [Short's Brewing](#) in Bellaire.



### **Charlottesville, Va.**

The Blue Ridge Mountains are a gorgeous destination unto themselves, but the Brew Ridge trail of breweries provides just a little added incentive.

The giant, cabin-style brewery of Nelson County's [Devils Backbone Brewing](#) in the middle of a sprawling field with the Blue Ridge Mountains in the background is as fine a place as any to start. A gorgeous view of the valley and big stands of Cascade hops for tourist photos are nice and all, but its Gold Leaf Lager, Baltic Coffee brew and Danzig Porter are award-worthy.

Nearby in Crozet, former Charlottesville brewer [Starr Hill Brewery](#) found plenty of room to make its Lucy summer ale, its Festie lager and pumpkin porter among the mountains while still sponsoring shows at Charlottesville Pavillion and Jefferson Theater as well as its own [FloydFest](#). The Home of Thomas Jefferson and the Dave Matthews Band still boasts [South Street Brewery](#), and its live music and such laid-back brews as the hoppy Olde 420 Stout. Still, it's tough to compete with an outdoor patio at [Blue Mountain Brewery](#) in Afton, shaded in arbor, featuring mountain and farm views in almost every direction and sheltering drinkers enjoying its Full Nelson Pale Ale, wee heavy, imperial pumpkin and barrel-aged chocolate cherry bourbon stout.



### Seattle, Wash.

Washington has more breweries than neighboring Oregon and craft-centric Colorado and trails only California in overall numbers.

That leaves just enough room for everybody. The Craft Brewers Alliance's [Red Hook Brewery](#) used to call Seattle home, but sauntered off to Woodinville several years ago to brew more of its ESB, Copperhood and Wit while hosting host trivia nights in its brewpub, movies on its lawn and the occasional band. The other big brewer in town, North American Breweries' Seattle-based [Pyramid Breweries](#), still has an alehouse in the shadow of Safeco Field and soothes suffering Mariners fans with its hefeweizen, apricot ale and Thunderhead IPA.

Tourists down that way who like what they see can head to Seattle's [Pike Brewing](#) and swap suds for Starbucks while taking in the sights and sounds of Pike Place Market. Just across the water is [Maritime Pacific Brewing](#) -- best known simply as Maritime -- and the dry-hopped Islander Pale Ale, Flagship Red or Black Porter in its Jolly Roger Taproom. That not only puts a beer lover in the middle of Seattle's funky Ballard neighborhood, but in striking distance of the Solstice tangerine flower ale and "Summer Is A State Of Mind" cask ale in the urban beer garden of [Freemont Brewing](#). If the artists, coffee shops and Troll in Freemont leave you thirsting for more, head to the halfway point between Ballard and Freemont for a few pints of Kolsch, Troll Porter or Mongoose IPA at [Hale's Ales](#), which provides side-by-side tastings of its own brews and beers of the same variety from around the world.

That's a lot of footwork, which is why we recommend letting a group such as [Road Dogs Seattle Brewery Tour](#) handle the minutiae while you plan ferry rides, hikes up Mount Rainier or orca-watching trips.



### Portland, Ore.

There are gorgeous breweries all around Oregon, but it's tough to leave Portland once you're already there.

Yes, you could visit the [Deschutes Brewery](#) in Bend and taste its Inversion IPA there. But visiting Deschutes' Portland-based brewpub allows you to hit the [Rogue Ales Brewery](#) brewpub just a few blocks away, then head to the 100 taps of Henry's 12th Street Tavern in the old Henry Weinhard's brewery just a few blocks from that, the [BridgePort Brewing](#) facility just uptown from there and then [Widmer Brothers Brewing](#) just over the Willamette.

Honestly, if you're over the river anyway, you may as well head over to the Alameda Brewhouse and organic Laurelwood Public House and Brewery in the city's Northeast before heading down to its Southeast for a stop at Cascade Brewing's Barrel House and the extremely potent Hair Of The Dog Brewing. What we're trying to get across is that there are days' worth of breweries and brewpubs to consume in Portland alone, which makes it really difficult to justify a trip out to breweries elsewhere.

If you really want to get a taste of Oregon while sampling some of its finest brews, thought, head to [Full Sail Brewery](#) about an hour East in Hood River overlooking the Columbia River Gorge. Not only does it have a great tour and sit in the shadow of Mount Hood, but it also has a large deck looking out on sailboarders and kiteboarders on the Columbia who gave the brewery its name.

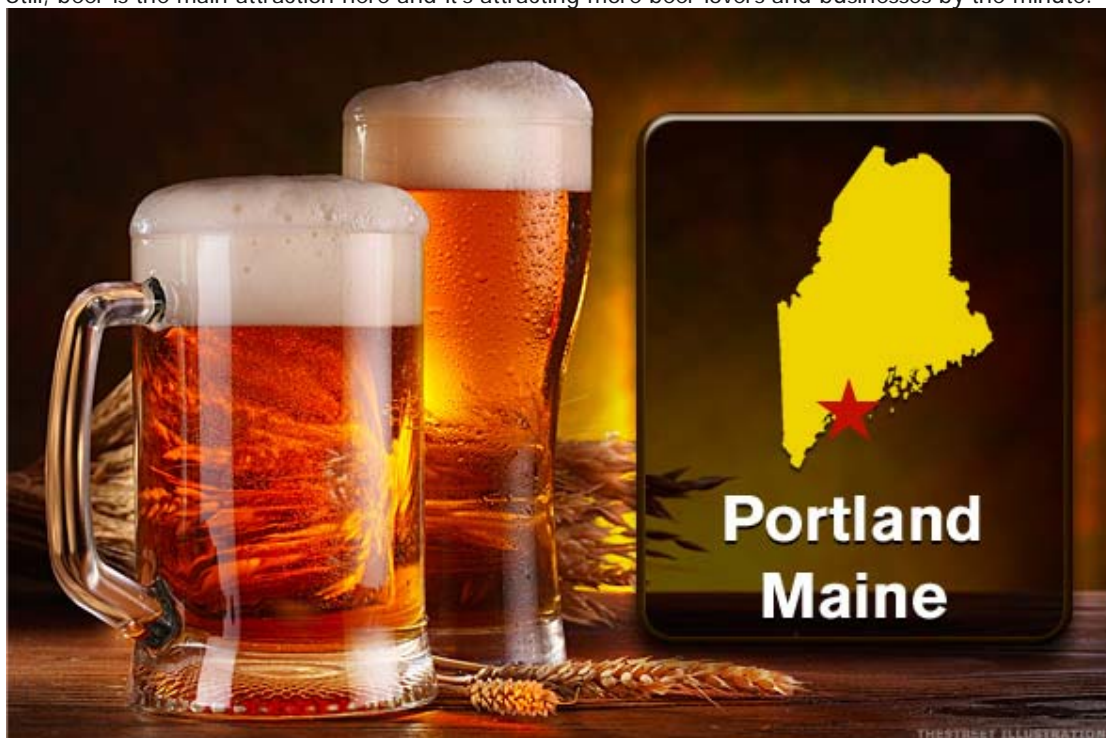


### Asheville, N.C.

When Sierra Nevada decided its first East Coast brewery would be here, any craft beer lovers who didn't know Asheville was a huge beer town learned it quickly. By the time New Belgium followed Sierra's lead and made Asheville the home of its eastward expansion, Asheville's craft beer secret was well out of the keg.

Those breweries still have a few years before they're up and running, so craft beer lovers looking to catch Asheville at its unspoiled best should do so quickly. Highland Brewery's [tasting room](#) isn't much to look at, but it's full of Oatmeal Porter, St. Terese's Pale Ale, Gallic Ale and Kashmir IPA and is perhaps the tamest place to start.

From there, [Craggie Brewing](#), [Wedge Brewing](#), [Oyster House Brewing](#), [French Broad Brewing](#), [Green Man Brewery](#), [The Lexington Avenue Brewery](#) and [Asheville Brewing](#) all await travelers who may have an understandably hard time keeping track of them all. In between, there's always the lush scenery of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the cascading falls at Sliding Rock and the history at the Grove Park Inn and the Vanderbilts' Biltmore Estate to keep folks occupied. Still, beer is the main attraction here and it's attracting more beer lovers and businesses by the minute.



## Portland, Maine

Not to be outdone by its namesake Portland to the west, Portland, Maine, packs a bunch of breweries into its small, funky waterfront confines. Much of the city's modern brewing history dates only to the microbrewing boom of the late 1990s, but D.L. Geary Brewing puts the town's brewing history back to 1983.

Founded when American microbreweries numbered little more than a dozen and most were on the West Coast, Geary's benefited from co-founder David Geary's experience working at nearly a dozen breweries in England and Scotland and still uses an English-style pale ale as its flagship beer. The brewery isn't much to see, and [brewery tours](#) are still by appointment only, but a London Porter that *The New York Times* named best in the world five years ago is a great introduction to the old portside town.

Right around the corner from Geary's is another Portland brewer, Allagash, that owes much of its existence to its distinctly European flavor. Founded in pre-Blue Moon 1995 with a mission to make Belgian-style beers accessible here in the U.S., Allagash staked its claim by combining wheat, Curacao orange peel, coriander and other spices into the Allagash White witbier that's now the brewery's flagship brand. Allagash has since been surrounded by brewers including Portland mainstay [Casco Bay Brewing](#), which has been keeping its simple with red, blonde and pale ales since 1994, and upstart [Maine Beer](#) and its hoppy Lunch IPA and potent Mean Old Tom stout.

If you'd rather skip the industrial park for the cobblestones and harbor views of the Old Port, head to [Shipyard Brewing](#) for a tour and a taste of its flagship Export Ale, Shipyard IPA, Summer Ale and Capt'n Eli's sodas. From there it's a quick walk along the harbor to [Gritty McDuff's](#) for home-brewed Black Fly Stout and Vacationland Ale to go with cover bands and pub fare.



## San Diego, Calif.

Craft beer lovers' Disneyland isn't in Anaheim. Stone still offers a [free tour](#) of its Escondido brewing facility and a look at how its Levitation low-alcohol session beer, Ruination IPA and high-octane Arrogant Bastard ales are made, but it's a sideshow compared with the offerings at its [Stone World Bistro and Gardens](#).

Roughly 12,000 square feet of dining space get a floor-to-ceiling window onto the brewery and a one-acre garden of fruit trees, pine forest, flowering plants, brooks, koi ponds and fire features as its bookends. Where there isn't running water or flickering flame, there's a ton of bar-front seating lining the patio or tucked between stone formations.

Even if this were the only brewery in town it'd be worth the trip, but San Diego and its mad beer geniuses Vince and Gina Marsaglia don't make it that easy. Their [Pizza Port brewpubs](#), [Port Brewing](#) and [Lost Abbey](#) brew project weren't content to make some of the best beers a tourist can drink; they had to make their Lost Abbey Devotion, Hop 15 and Shark Attack Double Red Ale some of the best beer in the country.

What this town does best, though, is straight hops. A visit to [Green Flash](#), [Alpine](#) or [Ballast Point](#) should send beer lovers away with enough Pure Hoppiness Double IPA, Green Flash Imperial IPA or Dorado Double IPA to leave them sufficiently bitter for the rest of the trip. Not just "my return flight's delayed" bitter, but "I just saw my ex sitting in first class with the lead of the movie I'm watching in coach" bitter.





### Milwaukee, Wis.

Do: Hit a Milwaukee Brewers game at Miller Park and sample some of the local pints. Tour the 82-acre Miller Brewery, shiver in the Miller Caves. Don't: Drink a High Life at the Miller Inn at the tour's end and eat at an Italian joint that used to be Schlitz's Brown Bottle restaurant.

If you want some idea of where modern Milwaukee beer is headed, step away from the Miller signs and head to the home of the *other* beer sold at Brewers games and Bernie Brewer's original chalet from demolished Milwaukee County Stadium: Lakefront Brewery. Founded in 1985, Lakefront offered the first certified-organic beer in America and made a name for itself with a [brewery tour](#) that gives visitors their beer first in the hopes of keeping their attention.

Is there anything wrong with Wisconsin's strong, largely teutonic brewing history? No, Sprecher Brewing on Glendale, Wis., was founded by a former Pabst brewing supervisor in 1985 and still brews Hefe Weiss, Black Bavarian, Special Amber and Light Ale in the same German and Eastern European tradition that spawned 80 breweries in Milwaukee alone in the 1880s. New Glarus Brewing, meanwhile, was founded in 1993 with copper kettles bought from a German brewery. Its new [hilltop brewing facility](#) looks like a Bavarian village, which is only just slightly odd in a town founded in 1845 by immigrants from Glarus, Switzerland, that still has Swiss flags in front of every storefront. It also has Swiss chalet-style businesses and homes lining its streets and Swiss meat and cheese shops to complement Spotted Cow ale, Fat Squirrel Nut Brown Ale or a Two Women lager.

Milwaukee's brewing culture still thrives through such breweries as [Water Street](#), [Silver Creek](#) and [Stonefly](#). A quick look back at its past, however, tells you just how far it's come.

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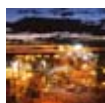
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