



# Will Travel For Beer

States and brewers are working together to draw tourists

BY BETH LAMONTAGNE HALL

It's not every day you get to share a beer with the governor, but about two dozen New Hampshire craft brewers got that chance in January at the launch of the state-run website [Nhbeer.org](http://Nhbeer.org). The site was created to tout locally made craft beers and the brewpubs that serve them. A collaboration with the New Hampshire Brewers Association (NHBA) and the Beer Distributors of New Hampshire, the website encourages people to "experience New Hampshire by the glass," complete with

beer tour itineraries, a listing of beer festivals, dinners and other events, and a map of 24 New Hampshire craft breweries and brewpubs.

Governor Maggie Hassan tipped back a few samples with the brewers, telling them that promoting craft beer makes good economic sense. It's a sector that combines New Hampshire's two largest industries—manufacturing and tourism. According to the 2012 data from the Brewers Association, New Hampshire's craft beer business employs 3,127 people and injects roughly \$248 million annually into the state's economy. Beer's overall impact is estimated to be even higher. Including the Anheuser-Busch production facility in Merrimack, the brewing industry both directly and indirectly employs 10,000 people and contributes \$1.3 billion to the New Hampshire economy, according to the state.

Marketing New Hampshire's growing craft beer industry with a dedicated website helps new and small brewers promote their product in ways they could never afford on their own, says David Currier, founder of Henniker Brewing Co. in Henniker, New Hampshire. A downloadable beer map helps people find locally made beer near tourist attractions around the state. "The map directs people who are interested in beer to visit our brewery," Currier says.

Since [Nhbeer.org](http://Nhbeer.org) launched, Currier has seen a marked boost in sales at his 15-barrel brewery. He expanded brewery hours on Saturdays and added two brewery tours to



Travel Oregon promotes beer events around the state, such as the Oregon Brewers Guild's annual Firkin Fest (above), which features local craft brewers like Rogue Ales.



Full Sail Brewing celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (above) in 2012 during Oregon Craft Beer Month, organized by the Oregon Brewers Guild.

the weekly schedule. On a normal Saturday, Currier sees about 100 people come through the tasting room during a four-hour shift. He attributes some of this traffic to New Hampshire's better-than-average ski season this year, but Currier recognizes that getting his brewery's name out there has helped too. "In terms of brand identity, the marketing campaign is very important to a start-up brewery," he says. "It develops brand loyalty and encourages people to start looking for our beers when they return home."

## Regional Attraction

New Hampshire isn't the only state trying to drive tourism dollars through its craft beer industry. Wisconsin is considering the creation of a commission focused on the marketing, research and promotion of beer produced in the state. The idea is to promote Wisconsin beer as a local agricultural specialty—similar to cheese—and to make the state's breweries a destination for visitors. Virginia Tourism Corp. promotes local breweries with a "Craft Beer & Breweries" section on the state's

visitor website, [Virginia.org](http://Virginia.org). The page posts information about beer festivals and beer and wine tours throughout different regions of the state. Grand Rapids, Michigan's official visitor website, [Experiencegr.com](http://Experiencegr.com), features a beer map, a guide to local breweries and even hotel beer packages that include brewery tour passes and souvenirs like pint glasses.

The craft beer industry also gets visitors from private tour companies, such as Beer Tours USA, which hosts about 150 people each year on regional beer tours that are open to the public and dozens more on private tours specially designed for business groups and other organizations. Owner Robin Fuchs, an avid advocate for buying American, says his tours make stops at American-owned craft breweries only. The Springfield, Illinois-based company attracts a fair number of Midwesterners, but Fuchs says people from all over the country take his tours. This fall, he'll guide a group of Germans on a New England beer tour.

The motivation behind offering the tours isn't just his love for American beer—it's also to raise the profile of smaller breweries that make great products. "Many brewers

have told me it's difficult to get the word out about their breweries," Fuchs explains. "My original goal was to give them the visibility they want."

## Off The Beaten Path

One of the country's most successful states when it comes to marketing its craft breweries toward tourists is Oregon. On the state's TravelOregon.com website, beer is treated like any other attraction or locally made product: something visitors can sample and bring home after their trip. There's plenty of great beer coming from Oregon's urban areas, such as Bend and Portland, but Travel Oregon manager of global communications Linea Gagliano wants people to know about all the great breweries in the state. "We try to focus on highlighting lesser-known places with great beer," Gagliano says. "People want to find that undiscovered thing."

The small town of Oakridge, located southeast of Eugene in the Willamette National Forest, is one example of how hosting a well-respected craft brewery has positively impacted the local economy. When the town's logging industry died, it collaborated with Travel Oregon to market Oakridge's great mountain biking trails and its Brewers Union Local 180 brewery. Gagliano says the miles of scenic trails and great beer to enjoy after a day's ride have made Oakridge a popular mountain biking destination in the region.

Brian Butenschoen, executive director of the Oregon Brewers Guild (OBG), says the members use his organization's resources to market craft breweries and beer events, including a beer



Springfield, Illinois-based Beer Tours USA promotes the nation's craft breweries, including the D.G. Yuengling & Son brewery in Pottsville, Pennsylvania (above).

tour map that's distributed at local breweries and tourism information centers. The OBG and Travel Oregon also cross-promote each other's events, such as the Zwickelmania Brewery Tour held each year over Presidents Day weekend. "We realize that coming together to promote breweries, beer culture and events in Oregon is mutually beneficial," Butenschoen says.

Although Oregon's well-known wine industry attracts more visitors, the state's craft breweries are close behind when it comes to drawing tourists. According to a 2011 study of Oregon visitor behavior, 14 percent of visitors say they visited a brewery during their trip to Oregon, more than those who attended a "cultural activity." In addition, 19 percent of study participants bought local beer to bring back home, and 26 percent purchased Oregon-made beer after returning home, usually in a local store.

## Expanded Recognition

Raising brand awareness to increase sales beyond the local market is what makes beer tourism such a good investment, Butenschoen notes. The 2011 study also showed that most of Oregon's tourists come from other regions in the state, allowing them to try Oregon breweries they wouldn't normally have access to because of restricted statewide distribution. The next largest tourism markets are neighboring states and British Columbia, Canada—places that most Oregon breweries enter when they first begin expanding their distribution.

"Beer tourism raises all boats," Butenschoen explains. "Visitors have the beer and the experience, and when these consumers return home, they can get the beer at their local grocery store." mw



In 2012, Beer Tours USA offered the Historical Mid-America Beer Tour and made a stop at the National Brewery Museum in Potosi, Wisconsin (above).

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