



# A WORLD OF BEER

## Innovations across nations

*No matter which country they hail from, beer sommeliers all speak the same language – beer! Developments within the beer scene of different countries are refreshingly varied and you can expect many surprises as you study the circumstances under which beer is brewed, marketed and consumed in each country.*

**A**s an introduction to the text that follows, here are three beer facts that are hardly known – even by many beer sommeliers:

- In Japan, home brewing is limited to beers that contain 1 % alcohol or less.
- In Seoul, more than 70 % of customers who frequent the many craft beer pubs are young women.
- The beer championship that boasts the second largest num-

ber of competing beers is not an international event, rather that staged by Brazilian breweries.

When the craft beer movement began in the 1980s, driven by the home brew movement in the USA, it disrupted the beer market to such an extent that the USA became the hub of the beer world – and this has remained unchallenged for at least 30 years. Radiating out from North America, exciting developments in the fields

of dry hopping, sour beer production, wood and barrel ageing and Wild Ales have inspired independent trends across the world. This expanded the beer world enormously and has injected general enthusiasm for fresh brew ideas. Following is an overview featuring news from some of the more active beer nations (without claiming to be exhaustive).

### South Korea

Until 2002, operating a microbrewery in South Korea was prohibited. At the same time, North Korea's (!) Taedonggang Brewery exported vast quantities of beer to its South Korean neighbor. An article published in the English weekly "The Economist" on November 24, 2012 was a key factor in the explosive development of South Korea's vibrant craft beer scene. The article stated that "brewing remains just about the only useful activity at which North Korea beats the South." The realization that North Korean beer might be in any way superior to a brew produced in the South apparently left a scar on the very soul of the nation, because from 2012 on, microbreweries sprang up one after the other.



*View inside a Seoul brew pub: you can see mostly women customers and, in the background, 16 self-service taps (a chip bracelet worn by each customer keeps a running tab).*

By mid-2018, there were 120 craft breweries, according to the Korea Craft Brewers Association.

Beers brewed in South Korea are quite competitive and feature many new and exciting innovations. But the most exciting aspect about the beer scene in South Korea is the enormous enthusiasm by consumers for the “new drink” and the many new brew-pub concepts available hardly anywhere else. As of 2015, Korean beer enthusiasts began attending Korean language beer sommelier courses in Seoul in large numbers and each of the 13 courses held so far have been fully booked. A high proportion of Korean women seem to enjoy drinking beer, by the way. A visit to any brewpub, where the proportion of female visitors is generally well over 50 %, will confirm this observation.



Brazilian beers are a colorful mix.

## Brazil

The land of Sugarloaf Mountain is familiar to many on an emotional level, with football, carnival, samba – and more recently, beer. It is in many ways a country of extremes:

the largest country in South America, the third largest producer of beer in the world and a land that has brought forth the most beer sommeliers! Why Brazil?

The emergence of a robust craft beer movement in Brazil displays many parallels with its North American neighbor: Here, too, there was previously a virtual monopoly by a

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*Birra & Cucina simply belong together in Italy.*

few brands, all of which offered a lighter beer style. This created a vacuum for consumers, especially among the many German immigrants who had settled in southern Brazil. The development of micro-breweries began in several waves from the 1990s onwards. The number of breweries grew exponentially, rising from 50 in 2000 to nearly 900 by the end of 2018. Moreover, the number of breweries increased by 23 percent in 2018 alone, in the midst of a dramatic financial crisis. A milestone and further driving force for the development of the beer scene was certainly Brazil winning its first gold medal at the World Beer Cup 2014 – by the Wals brewery in the category “Dubbel.”

The beer scene in Brazil has yielded much innovation, such as the use of regional – even indigenous – raw materials. Fruits unknown elsewhere are collected in the Amazon valley and find their way into beer, along with cassava and even coffee beans (in bright filtered lager beers!). This will to innovate has also given Brazil its first unique beer style: the Catharina Sour. This beer, similar to the Berliner Weisse, includes fresh fruit and is named after the southern Brazilian state. The second largest beer competition in the world is also held here annually: the Brazilian Beer Contest to which the nation’s breweries submitted a total of 3115 different beers in 2019.

## Italy

Imagine the following headline in a newspaper from 2000: “In September 2019, 80 beer sommeliers from 18 different nations will meet in Rimini, Italy (!) to select a World Champion.” This headline would surely have been considered utopian science fiction back then.

This shows how profound the changes in the world of beer have

been. Furthermore, Italy has shed its moniker as exclusively a “wine country” when one considers the emergence in Italy from 16 breweries in 2000 to 868 in 2017. This puts Italy in fourth place in Europe after the United Kingdom, Germany and France. In terms of per capita consumption, however, Italy weighs in at #30, with only 31 liters per year. Italy is apparently a land of beer connoisseurs where consumers may drink less, yet are willing to spend more money on beer: 24.2 percent of beer consumption is in the specialty beer sector (2018 Unionbirrai report), for which an average of 3.46 euros per liter is spent. Italy’s most innovative brewers, who typically enter the market from other branches, like to use regional and more unusual ingredients in their brewing experiments. A fusion of wine and beer, which is understandable in a wine-producing country like Italy, has led to the internationally recognized “Italian Grape Ale” beer style, which in recent years has yielded outstandingly unique beers and has placed Italy on the world beer map.

A very detailed, enthusiastic overview of Italy’s (craft) beer movement is offered by Lukas Harpf in a thesis he submitted in the Institute of Masters of Beer (IMB), available for download here: <https://www.masterofbeer.org/hall-of-members.html>.



*Head trainer of Doemens’ beer sommelier program in Japan, Sebastian Hohentanner, in his chosen element: beer/food pairing*

## Japan

Legislation has always guided and regulated Japan's beer industry. In 1994, for example, the reduction in minimum annual output of beer from 20,000 hectoliters to 600 hectoliters led to the rise of microbreweries and brew pubs. Hundreds of start-ups appeared on the scene and by 1997 there were already more than 300 breweries in operation. These earlier breweries were often installed, then abandoned by German brewmasters, who were then sent home. Without the necessary local professional competence, the brew pub boom suffocated due to poor quality brews, which meant that the sudden interest in this beverage went cold. But Japan's dedicated craft brewers have since done their homework and in recent years, new craft beer initiatives have taken off. Amidst declining beer consumption, enthusiasm for craft beers has risen as dramatically as their quality. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of the Japanese for craft beer can hardly be augmented by a homebrew movement, as brewing at home is limited to 1% alcohol and is therefore effectively prohibited. Nevertheless, the craft beer scene is clearly on the move and the "small but exquisite" Japanese craft beer association impressed many people at the 2016 World Beer Cup, winning nine medals (five of them gold!).

The beer tax in Japan is levied across three categories, depending on the proportion of malt involved: beer (at least 50 percent malt content as of 2019), Hap-poshu (less than 50 percent malt content) and a "third category" (often without malt or with the addition of spirits). At 1.9 euros per liter, the tax on beer is about 20 times higher than in Germany. This extremely high tax and the associated high shelf price force both the trade and the catering industry to manage beer very carefully, which in practice leads to a nearly unbroken cold chain in the retail trade and a very pleasing quality in the draft beer sector. Beer quality in Japan is thus consistently maintained at an exceptionally high level.

## Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal)

Between 2010 and 2016, the number of breweries in both Spain (from 65 to 483) and Portugal (from 7 to 94) increased exponentially. Parallel to these impressive figures, a vibrant beer scene has developed, anchored by popular brew pubs in downtown Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, Porto and Lisbon. The wide variety of bars encapsulates the unique atmosphere of the Spanish and Portuguese beer scene, highlighting the fact that beer is hardly ever consumed at home. Spain and Portugal, like all of the other countries mentioned above, are proud of their sustainable beer culture. In regions where beer & food pairing is a factor – in the catering industry, for example – those already involved in beer production and marketing stand poised reap the rewards. Beer is the beverage of choice with so many dishes; just think of classic beer regions such as Ireland, Bavaria or the Czech Republic. What images pop up when you hear these names? Pubs, beer gardens, regional food and the welcome sight of a freshly tapped brew! Not just supermarket shelves lined with beer bottles or kegs stacked on pallets... □



Beer sommeliers with their aprons in Barcelona: preparing the team for the food pairing module

### Dr. Michael Zepf

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