

St. Louis' Craft Beers

Microbreweries offer tasty alternatives in Budweiser's back yard.

By Katherine Rodeghier



Steve Salas lines up a selection of beers for tastings at 4 Hands Brewing Co.
Katherine Rodeghier

Anheuser-Busch probably spills more beer than 4 Hands Brewing Co. produces.

No matter. Visitors who wander into the tiny tasting room in this microbrewery with a capacity for just 22,000 barrels of beer a year aren't looking to be overwhelmed by numbers. Like most beer lovers who frequent St. Louis' craft breweries, size doesn't matter—taste does.

By the 1860s, more than 40 breweries flourished in St. Louis, many of them owned by the German immigrants who settled in the city and brought their knowledge of the brewing art with them.

Only one survives.

Founded in 1852 as the Bavarian Brewery, Anheuser-Busch was taken over by Eberhard Anheuser in 1860 and gave it his name. Adolphus Busch married the boss' daughter, joined the business and in time added his name, too. Anheuser-Busch grew to become the nation's largest brewer with a dozen breweries scattered across the U.S. With its acquisition by Belgian-Brazilian brewer InBev in 2008, it joined the largest brewing company on the planet.

With such a behemoth dominating the city, one might think no other brewer would rise to challenge it, but St. Louis has 33 microbreweries, many open for tours and tastings.

Craft Beer Movement

"St. Louis has a friendly, vibrant beer scene," said Troika Brodsky, communications director at Schlafly Beer. There's no animosity among the brewers, she said. "We kinda all love each other."

In 1991, Schlafly became the first brewery to open in St. Louis since Prohibition and is now the largest of the city's independent breweries. It makes more than 70 beers, half bottled or canned and half served on draft in its two brewpubs, the Schlafly Tap Room downtown and the Schlafly Bottleworks in suburban Maplewood. Among its classic beers is its flagship Pale Ale made with hops from the UK, the seasonal Belgian-Style Golden Ale and Barleywine aged on Missouri oak chips.

Morgan Street Brewery opened in 1995 in one of the oldest buildings in historic LaClede's Landing and uses some of the city's old steam lines in its brewing equipment. The beauty of running a craft brewery is "having control over your own product," said owner Steve Owings.

Morgan Street is unusual in its focus on lagers such as Black Bear, a classic schwarzbier, and its Golden Pilsner that took the gold in the World Beer Cup in 2010. It has expanded into ales, including its first, dubbed appropriately, Virgin Territory. Visitors who can't decide what to try order a brewski, a flight of five beers, in the brewery's restaurant.

Newcomer

4 Hands Brewing Co. is the new kid on the block, its name inspired by owner Kevin Lemp who told his wife and two children when the brewery opened five years ago that they were all in it together. With 16 full-time employees, its slogan is "Ales Without Borders" and turns out a handcrafted portfolio of beer inspired by the American craft movement as well as traditional Belgian and French-style farmhouse ales.

Core beers include the mahogany Cast Iron Oatmeal Brown with aromas of dark chocolate and coffee, and the crimson Reprise Centennial Red with the aromas of malt and citrus. Among the more whimsical beer names are No Place Like Home, aged in cabernet wine barrels, and Smoked Pigasus, a porter than contains maple syrup and pairs well with barbecue.

No visit focused on beer in St. Louis would be complete without a tour of Anheuser-Busch, if for no other reason than to compare the big guy with the little guys in town.

Brewery tours include the Clydesdale Stables, built in 1876 and a national historic landmark, brew kettles, the beechwood aging cellars and the 1891 Brewhouse, where samples are served to guests age 21 and older. Visitors can end their tour in the Biergarten where 18 beers are sold on draft along with a menu of hot and cold dishes with recommended beer pairings.

Planning Your Trip

For more information on visiting St. Louis, contact St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission (800) 916-0092 or visit www.explorestlouis.com. For more information on the breweries mentioned:

- **Schlafly Beer:** (314) 241-2337 ext. 285; www.schlafly.com;
- **Morgan Street Brewery:** (314) 231-9970; www.morganstreetbrewery.com;
- **4 Hands Brewing Co.:** (314) 436-1559; www.4handsbrewery.com;
- **Budweiser Tour Center:** (314) 577-2626, www.budweisertours.com.

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Visitors who tour the Schlafly Bottleworks see bottles racing along the bottling line.

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