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Country Hopping Takes on a Whole New Meaning

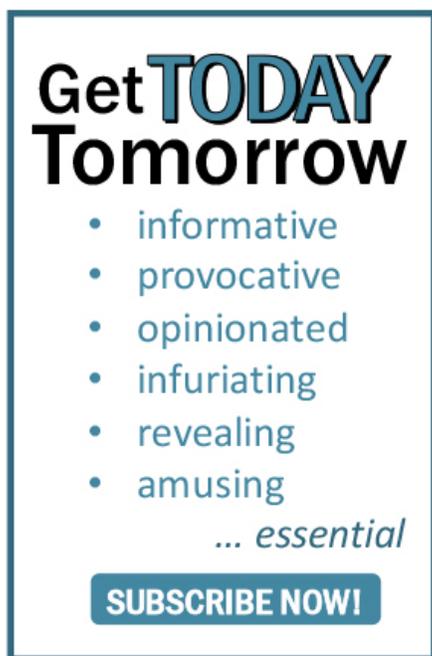
Steve Gillick

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14 DEC 2015: You can't miss Cursing Mati. He's pictured as an elderly man wearing a white T-shirt. A curmudgeon-like, open mouth expression makes it appear like Mati is ready to pronounce

judgement on everybody and everything. But the story behind this craft beer in Eli Amram's shop the Beer Market, inside Tel Aviv's trendy Sarona Market, adds some touching humanity to what would normally be regarded as just another humorous beer label.



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Mati is a Holocaust survivor and a regular at one of the brew-pubs in the city. To pay homage to their client's past, as well as his unique perspective on life, they named a beer after him, with a portion of the sales donated to assist other Holocaust survivors.

The beverages in Eli's store, with names such as Dancing Camel, Fat Cat and Vilda Chaya (Wild Child, in Yiddish) are part of a movement that is not only spreading across the globe, but is also becoming a travel niche that attracts beer aficionados, connoisseurs of wine and whiskey and the culinary-curious crowd. Welcome to the world of craft beer!

Israel's industry is relatively small with 25 breweries producing over 140 different varieties of

beer, each boasting its own unique composition and flavours. These might include Cuban tobacco, chocolate, coffee, buckwheat, chickpeas, dates, honey and spice and caramelized pumpkin. According to Eli, while Israelis tend to lean toward the more mainstream, mass-production beers such as Goldstar, with wines and cocktails following close behind, more and more are looking for new taste and flavour experiences, a sentiment heard wherever craft beers are sold.



Recently at Detroit’s Fall Beer Festival, 83 brewing companies featured 675 craft beers, 100% of which were made in Michigan. Eric Briggeman, the President of the Michigan Brewers Guild emphasized that although some of the 8000 attendees were rebelling against the winter by enjoying a good time in the outdoors, many were there to try something unique and interesting.

“They’re looking for enhanced flavour-content” and with creativity as the new standard-bearer when it comes to artisanal beer varieties, Eric asked rhetorically, “Why would you go backwards in your taste expectations”?

And with that I wandered off, past the stall selling T-shirts emblazoned with the phrase “I support Michigan one pint at a time”, and headed to one of the sampling tents to try Witch’s Hat Dragon Water, described as “a Bourbon Barrel-aged Blend of Night Fury and Well Water”. It was in fact a

smooth, almost creamy, dark coffee-flavoured stout. I guess I'm into Night Fury!



I have to admit that I mostly sampled beers with enticing names, such as Spiders from Marzen, Stumblin' Pumpkin and Cosmic Autumn Rebellion. There were fruit beers, flavoured beers (anyone for chocolate chili or ghost pepper beer?), beers aged in barrels formerly used for Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Shochu, Scotch, Tequila and more. Creativity knows no bounds!

While many were definitely at the festival with a party-hardy attitude, I met others who were there to add to their repertoire of tastes - and we are talking about serious collectors who boast lists of 500 or more beers tasted. For the record, most beer samples are delivered in 5 ounce glasses—enough to sniff, check out the colour, and then sip, quaff, gulp, taste, ruminate, get that pleasure-endorphin-zap and ultimately, the smile of approval.

The attraction of craft beer lies in both the complexity of the drink and the taste variation. Serious drinkers mirror wine lovers in deciphering the various flavours that comprise the beer, ranging from the added ingredients to the type of hops used.

Brian Steele, the CEO of Kalamazoo's Boatyard Brewing Company said that patrons feel there is always something new to learn about craft beer

“just like deciphering the region where a Bordeaux has originated”.

And just as we have wine sommeliers, there are beer cicerones who pass national certification exams and strive to attain the master level. When a cicerone encounters a patron who claims they don't like beer, the attitude is “you haven't yet found a beer that you like ... that's what I'm here for”.

And statistics show that out-of-state/country travellers journey to Michigan just for the sake of beer. The US \$6 Billion state industry includes visits to iconic breweries (such as Bon Vivant, Bells and Founders), and famous bars such as the Kalamazoo Beer Exchange where the price of beer varies from minute to minute like a stock exchange. When there is a 'crash', the patrons rush to order the rare and expensive beers (\$15.50 for a pint for 'Perrin No Rules', an Imperial Porter—reduced during the crash to \$7.25).



But of course Michigan doesn't have a monopoly on craft beer tourism. There are beer crawls and pub tours in many European, Asian and South American cities, beer festivals (such as Munich's Oktoberfest), beer tasting day trips on waterways cruise itineraries, and brewery visits. While no trip to Dublin is complete without a pilgrimage to the Guinness Storehouse, there are delicious craft alternatives in the pubs in Temple Bar and in small towns throughout the country.

There are in fact 122 countries that boast at least one [craft brewery](#) (Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda) to several hundred (France has 654), to several thousand (the USA has about 4000).

In Canada, there are roughly 480 craft brewers and just recently in Ontario, the LCBO opened a craft beer section at its Summerhill store. Mark Wilson, the category manager for Beer and Cider noted the LCBO lists 276 regular and seasonal beers and

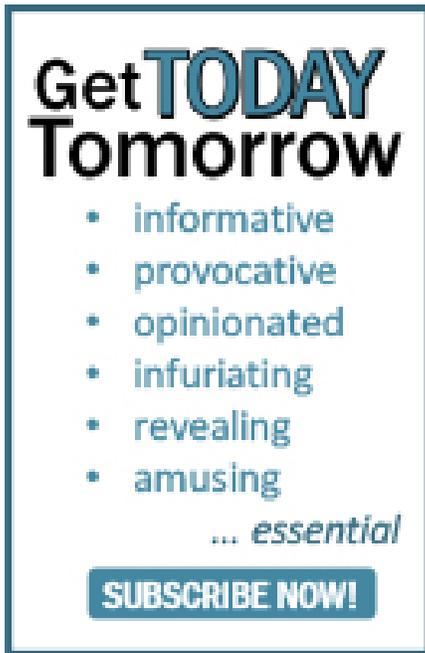
that it's not unusual to see customers visit the Vintages section of a store to buy fine wines and then head directly to the craft beer section.



The psychographics are strikingly similar to those of the travel industry. Craft beers appeal to those who are into experimentation - trying new things - asking the question “what else?”

These people have a broad range of interests and hence, enjoy the wide variety of flavours that craft beers offer. And when it's beer festival season in Ontario (and in many Canadian cities), visitors from both inside and outside Canada will travel to be part of the upbeat atmosphere and the opportunity to engage with brews, brewers and fellow brewsaders (a Grand Rapids Michigan term for beer crusaders).

Niche Markets drive travellers to check out new destinations, try on new experiences and make serendipitous discoveries along the way. Travel consultants who are aware of these drivers, do well in being able to customize, personalize and humanize a client's travels. And just as some clients will travel for the wine, whiskey or sake, some in your database will want to travel for artisanal-craft-beers.



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This holiday season when you're looking for some creative cheer, keep travel special interests in mind and consider trying a craft beer!

BEER

Cursing Mati Craft Beer at The Beer Market in Tel Aviv



Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

[Read more from Steve Gillick](#)