Brewery Crawl

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What is the most popular beverage after water and tea? What do you get when starch is saccharified and the resultant product undergoes fermentation? What do I need after a long clinic-day saturated with complex patients? The answer to all these and many other questions is beer. Once only a wide-eyed observer of its consumption as documented by numerous childhood photos, I have since adopted a different position on fermented saccharified sugar. Transcending the casual and often-time passive role of a consumer, I have now embraced the responsibility of an enthusiast. And what better way to celebrate my new function in society than to learn about the origin of these tasty brews by traveling to their respective birth sites.

Here, you will find, and hopefully enjoy, the fruits of my elective investigation: a short description of my favorite breweries in northern California listed in order from incredibly enjoyable to unpredictably pleasant.

1. Lagunitas Brewing Company

Located less than an hour north of the city in Petaluma, Lagunitas stood out among the rest owing to its high marks in many domains not limited to great quality beer, a well-designed tour, and an exciting restaurant ambience occasionally augmented by live music. Patrons usually share benches in the communal outdoor seating, which offers a suitable setting for a collection of individuals united by an enthusiasm for beer and understandably inspires a sense of solidarity. The weekday tours are special. Self-identified participants are escorted to a spacious lounge resembling a hybrid between a bachelor pad and renovated frat house. Five free sample-size pours of Lagunitas’ seasonal beers are distributed. During my visit, the dialogue began abruptly when a husky red-bearded tour guide demanded our attention from behind the bar. He initiated a unique narrative less focused on specific brewing details and production stats. Rather, he engaged the audience by describing the genesis of the brewery, which is notably emboldened by misadventures and imbued with character.

http://lagunitas.com

2. North Coast Brewery Company

Born in 1988, North Coast is located along the Mendocino coast in Fort Bragg, home of the Glass Beach. Considering the ability to visit their museum, restaurant and/or gift shop, there are many ways to absorb the North Coast experience. I decided to visit their gift shop, which was adequately stocked with their brews. Among these beers, two Belgium-style
ales caught my attention and taste buds. The farmhouse ale Le Merle, which means Blackbird, is a saison derived from brewing traditions of the Flanders region of Belgium. This straw-colored, hoppy ale carries a subtle tropical fruit aroma. The Good Food award-winning PranQster is a Belgium-style golden ale. True to its name, it displays a healthy golden color in addition to providing a robust fruity flavor. [http://www.northcoastbrewing.com](http://www.northcoastbrewing.com)

3. Redwood Curtain Brewing Company

A little south of Redwood National Park in Humboldt County, Redwood Curtain is located in Arcata. It is a unique establishment akin to your favorite cafe except that it sells beers. Instead of ordering a venti coffee-to-go, one can fill a personalized growler with their favorite brew. Grab your favorite board game or word puzzle from their wide selection and challenge your friends to a game-filled afternoon. Come on the right night and you can test your knowledge in a trivia competition, take part in a cribbage tournament, or enjoy a musical performance. Among their large array of brews, my personal favorites include the Trippel and Imperial Gold Ale. They also served a collection of sour beers such as the Citra Pale Ale and Ipa Dry Hopped with Citra. [http://www.redwoodcurtainbrewing.com](http://www.redwoodcurtainbrewing.com)

4. Russian River Brewing Company

A restaurant brewery, Russian River is located in the heart of downtown Santa Rosa. We were able to take a leisurely stroll down 4th street, passing by murals, fountains, courtyards and live performances while waiting for our number to be called. After being seated, my friends and I enjoyed a pizza lunch complemented by a flight of sample-size beers served in a unique wooden tray. Two flights were offered - hoppy California style ales and Belgian inspired ales. In addition to the popular Pliny the Elder, I particularly enjoyed the golden ale Sanctification and the darker red ale Salvation. Like Redwood Curtain, they also serve a large selection of sour brews as part of the Belgium cohort. [http://russianriverbrewing.com](http://russianriverbrewing.com)

5. Lost Coast Brewing Company

Another restaurant brewery, Lost Coast is located in Eureka along Highway 101 just before it bends around Arcata Bay. The restaurant generates a stimulating atmosphere. In addition to the great brews and American-style food selection, it stocks arcade games and a pool table in the posterior aspect of the establishment. As for the brews, my favorite is their pale ale, which took home the gold at the Humboldt county fair in 2004. Another popular choice is Downtown Brown, which, not surprisingly, is a nut-brown ale carrying a mild crystal malt flavor uniquely integrated with a strong porter taste. [http://www.lostcoast.com](http://www.lostcoast.com)

Honorable mentions:

21st Amendment Brewery

Located in SOMA near downtown SF, this brewery is great for grabbing a quick one before heading to a Giants game as it is located walking distance from AT&T Park.

Santa Cruz Brewery

Nice cozy brewery with ample outdoor seating located a short distance away from the boardwalk/beach filled with miniature golf, bowling, and every arcade game a kid (or an adult in our case) could imagine.

Bear Republic Brewery

Conveniently located in downtown Healdsburg, this brewery has a large outdoor patio upon which one can enjoy a meal and their beer served in either 3.5oz or full pours.