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Foaming at the mouth for a brewery tour? Wisconsin beckons

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Chances are if you are a beer fan, you owe a big thanks to the people of Wisconsin. Whether you are enjoying a tasty brew at home or in a bar in Lincoln Park, much of the beer we consume comes from the state to our north. Ever wonder just how it is made and where it comes from? Well, within a short drive of the Twin Cities, you can see for yourself first-hand where many of your tasty brews come from.

Miller Brewery

Located on the west side of Milwaukee, Miller Brewery is Wisconsin's largest, producing more than 8.5 million barrels of beer annually. Brewing under the brand names Miller Genuine Draft, Miller Lite, Miller High Life and Icehouse to name a few, the brewery actually produces 44 different beverages on the land that Fredrick J. Miller purchased in 1855.

The Miller tour begins with a short introductory movie, then proceeds to cover the bottling and canning facility, the warehouse, the brew house and the Miller Inn, where each guest can sample some Miller products.

Tours are given Monday-Saturday between 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., but the visitor's center is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tour times do frequently change and the visitor's center is often closed for holidays, so it is best to call the day you plan to tour. There is no cost for the indoor/outdoor walking tour and it runs approximately one hour. The Miller Brewery is located at 4251 W. State St. in Milwaukee. For more details, call the tour hotline at 800-944-5483 or visit www.millerbrewing.com.

Leinenkugel Brewery

The Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company was founded in 1867 in the beautiful Northwoods of Wisconsin. Original opened under the name Spring Brewery, Leinenkugel and his partner John Miller (no relation to the Miller Brewery) began making beer for the thirsty lumberjacks who lived in the Chippewa Falls area. Now nearly 140 years, Leinenkugel is still producing beer, just for a much wider audience.

Begin your tour at the newly build Leinie's Lodge, which serves not only as the gift shop, but also as a Northwoods cabin where guests can sit and relax with a complimentary pint of beer. The tour consists of visiting the brew house, warehouse and bottling facility, but if you wish to see the brewery in operation, take the tour during the week as the plant doesn't operate on weekends (although tours do).

Tours are free and begin at the Leinie Lodge, which is open Monday to Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tours run just about every half-hour, seven days a week, beginning a half-hour after opening and with the last one leaving an hour before closing. Times do vary however and it is best to call ahead for tour

reservations, as Leinenkugel only allows 15 people per tour maximum. The Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company is located at 124 E. Elm St. in Chippewa Falls. Reservations and tour information can be found by calling toll-free 888-534-6437 or by visiting www.leinie.com.

Stevens Point Brewery

Much like how Jacob Leinenkugel began his brewery, Frank Wahle and George Ruder saw an opportunity to sell to thirsty men, and that is how the Stevens Point Brewery began back in 1857. Brewing five beers and one root beer, the brewery is one of the oldest continually operating breweries in the United States.

Thought the tour is shorter than most, you will not find your mind wandering during the 45 minute trip. Guests visit the brew house, warehouse, packaging plant and aging facilities, as well as hear all about the storied history of Point Beer. The Tour concludes with a stop in the sampling room and a visit to the Point gift shop.

Beware though when planning a trip to the Stevens Point Brewery, as their hours and schedules are much more limited than most other breweries, due largely in part to their size and location. Tours during the off-season (September to May) are given at 11 a.m. Monday-Friday, and 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on Saturdays. During the summer months, tours run on the hour Monday-Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Also plan to pay \$2 per person (but be prepared to receive a gift at the tours conclusion).

The Stevens Point Brewery is in Stevens Point at 2617 Water Street. Reservations are recommended and more information is available by calling 800-369-4911 or visiting www.pointbeer.com.

New Glarus Brewing Company

Unlike any of the other breweries mentioned, New Glarus Brewing Company is a small, family-operated brewery that produced several microbrews. And also unlike many of the others, Dan and Deb Carey just opened in June 1993 and produced its first barrel of beer in November of that year.

While the storied history isn't there, that doesn't make it any less of an interesting tour. Visit the brew house, the packaging area (where kegs are actually hand-filled) and sample many of the unique brews that they have to offer. The only catch to taking this tour is you will have to wait until summer if you want a guide. Guided tours are only offered on Saturdays during the months of June, July and August, but self-guided tours are available Monday-Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. year around.

Tours, whether they are self-guided or not, cost \$4.50 per person, but each guest takes home a New Glarus commemorative tour glass. New Glarus Brewing Company is located in Highway 69 in New Glarus. Call the brewery at 608-527-5850 or visit www.newglarusbrewing.com for more information.

Capital Brewery

Not very far from the New Glarus Brewing Company is another small yet fun brewery. The Capital Brewery opened its doors in March 1984, although that is not the first time the building opened its doors. Located in a former egg processing plant, Capital Brewery produces 15 beers, many of which have won awards at national and international beer competitions.

Tours only run on Fridays at 3:30 p.m. and Saturdays at 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. and cost \$2.75 per person. The tour consists of a walk-through the brew house and a visit to the sampling room. All tour guests also receive a Capital Brewery glass to take home.

The Capital Brewery is in Middleton on 7734 Terrace Avenue. Visit www.capital-brewery.com or call 608-836-7100 for more information.

Huber Brewery

Finally, a brewery tour for both adults and kids (which is not to say that the others aren't kid friendly). Huber Brewery, maker of Berghoff Beers and Blumers Soda, offers visitors the opportunity to see the oldest continually operating brewery in the state of Wisconsin (and the second oldest in the nation).

Start with a short video presentation before you travel to the brew house, where you and all of the tour guests will be asked to rub the old brew kettle, a Huber tradition that guarantees a great brew. Then it is onto the aging, bottling and brew warehouse before ending the tour at the Founder's Tap Room, where you can sample some Berghoff Beer, and the kids can sample some Blumers Soda.

Catch a tour of the brewery on Thursdays, Fridays or Saturdays at 11 a.m., 1 and 3 p.m. Or if you have a group of 15 or more, call ahead and arrange a personal tour for your group. Adults will pay \$2.00 per person for the tour, but children 14 and under are free. Not traveling through Monroe when tours are scheduled? Huber Brewery encourages people to call, as they are always willing to try and accommodate all of their guests (although no guarantees are made).

Located in Monroe, the Huber Brewery is located 1208 14th Avenue and can be reached by calling 608-325-3191.

Not enough brewery tours for you? Looking to see a couple more? Wisconsin has several more breweries and brew pubs that are open for visitors. Check out www.wistravel.com for a long list of places to soak up the suds. You can also call the Wisconsin Department of Tourism at 1-800-432-8747 for more information, or visit them on-line at www.travelwisconsin.com.

And if you are a true beer connoisseur and you are looking to tour the breweries of Wisconsin favorite's Old Style, Pabst Blue Ribbon, or Old Milwaukee, you are looking in the wrong state. In 1996, Heileman Brewing Company closed its doors in Milwaukee and LaCrosse, and now the Pabst Brewing Company is located in the San Antonio, Texas, and brews all three brands down there.