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EXPLORING BELGIUM'S BEAUTIFUL, BEERY GAUME

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<http://allaboutbeer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Orval.jpg>

Anne-Françoise Pypaert pours an Orval inside the brewhouse at Brasserie d' Orval. Photo by Charles D. Cook.

In the southeastern corner of Belgium, within the province of Luxembourg, is a beautiful, historic region referred to as “The Gaume.”

This area, which borders France, is home to valleys and rivers, and is a hotbed of outdoor activities. It is a big tourist region, especially during summer.

The Gaume has a microclimate with the highest number of sunny days in Belgium and is often 2-6 degrees F warmer than the rest of the country. It is sometimes referred to as the “Provence” of Belgium. The Gaume sits at a slightly lower altitude than the Ardennes, which it borders. In Torgny, there are even vineyards, which are uncommon in Belgium.

There are five breweries within the Gaume, and it is a great place to enjoy fine meals paired with local beers. The cuisine can include wild game, such as deer and boar, which are indigenous to the area, and regional produce. Given the very rural nature of the area, there is very little available in the way of public transportation. You will need a car, bicycle or some sort of wheeled transport to get around.



<http://allaboutbeer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/orval-church.jpg>

l'Abbaye Notre Dame d' Orval is located in a serene setting in the Gaume region of Belgium. Photo by Charles D. Cook.

The gem of the region is l'Abbaye Notre Dame d' Orval, and **Brasserie d'Orval**. This Trappist abbey and brewery are located in a serene, beautiful valley, which was initially settled by monks around 1070. Orval means "Golden Valley," and this spot clearly has impressed for millennia. The ruins of a 12th century abbey and cathedral now sit in the shadow of a newer, 1930s abbey, which was designed by Henri Vaes, a celebrated architect. It is one of the most impressive sites in Belgium. You can tour the ruins of the old abbey and visit much of the grounds, as well as a beer museum. See [orval.be](http://www.orval.be/) (<http://www.orval.be/>).

At the end of your sightseeing day, you can drink the renowned Trappist beer, Orval, at **A l'Ange Gardien**, (<http://alangegardien.be/>) the café/restaurant owned by the monks. It can be enjoyed fresh, with three to four months of aging, or with a minimum of one year in a cellar, at which point the funky character of the *Brettanomyces* yeasts should be in full bloom. There is also the don't-miss Orval Green, a superb session beer with 4.5% and fine hopping. It is only available at the café and only on draft.

You *must* eat at the café, which has a wide range of delicious choices, including Orvaliflette. This house dish consists of potatoes and chopped bacon, with a cream sauce, and covered with Orval's Port Salut cheese, browned and melted. This dish is not for calorie counters.



<http://allaboutbeer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Gengoulf.jpg>

Brasserie Gengoulf brews a 6.1% ale that is fruity and medium-bodied. Photo by Charles D. Cook.

The beer tour of Villers-devant-Orval doesn't end there. The new brewery in the neighborhood is **Brasserie Gengoulf** (<http://gengoulf.be/>) located just 2 kilometers from the café and abbey. Four friends, including Vincent Habran, who works in the brewery lab at Orval, opened Gengoulf a couple of years ago. They brew just one beer at the present, simply called Gengoulf. This amber/blond, 6.1% ale is very fruity, medium-bodied and easy drinking. Only about 300 hectoliters (7,900 U.S. gallons) will be brewed at Gengoulf in 2014. "All of our production is sold before it ever leaves the brewery," Habran says.



<http://allaboutbeer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/gaume.jpg>

Brasserie La Rulles celebrates its location in the Gaume region of Belgium. Photo by Charles D. Cook.

Another jewel of the Gaume, in beer terms, is **Brasserie La Rulles** (<http://www.larulles.be/>), in Rulles-Habay, on the eastern edge of the region. La Rulles is one of Belgium's great breweries, and brewer-owner Gregory Verhelst possesses a deft hand at crafting delicious, flavorful brews that are generally in the 5-8% range. La Rulles is one of the few breweries in Belgium that still use open fermentation. A brewery expansion was just completed in early 2014. Business is good (as it usually is when you make superb beers!) and La Rulles will likely brew about 7,000 hectoliters (185,000 U.S. gallons) of *biere* in 2014.

Estivale, created as a summer brew a few years ago, is an eminently pleasing hoppy 5.2% blond. La Rulles Blonde, Brune and Triple are among the best of their respective styles. Two winter beers, Cuvée Meilleurs Voeux and La Grande 10, are fine, malty, strong tipples that will warm a wintry night. The brewery debuted an interesting new beer this summer, Saison VIII, which is on the lighter side of the style with just 5.3%. The brewery has a shop/tasting room.

The unofficial capital of the Gaume is Virton, which is the most southerly city in Belgium. Virton was an old Roman town, and there are a number of historical sites and museums worth visiting. The local brewery is **Brasserie Sainte-Hélène** (<http://sainte-helene.be/>), which was founded by Eddy Pourtois, who started homebrewing in 1995 and went pro in 1999.

Brasserie Sainte-Hélène was upgraded in 2011, and Raphaël Vanoudenhoven joined Pourtois as a partner. Their beers are all unfiltered and unpasteurized, and include a blond, an amber, a triple called Gypsy Rose and a hoppy blond, La Grognarde. The winter seasonal, La Prime, is a malty, reddish brew with 8.5% ABV. Another beer, Barley Wine, is brewed sporadically and is U.S.-inspired, but brewed with Belgian yeast. It is fairly dry, and has 10% ABV.

In the central part of the Gaume, you will find **Brasserie MilleVertus** (<http://www.millevertus.be/>), situated just yards from the Semois River, near Tintigny. Owner Daniel Lessire moved to this location in 2011 after seven years at a smaller facility in Toernich.

Lessire and MilleVertus are known for crafting beers with unusual ingredients, such as black pepper, saffron, spelt and smoked malts. In fact, their La Fumette, brewed with six malts, including smoked malts from Germany, and four hop varieties, is a must-try for smoked beer fans. Also seek out La Bella Mère, a hoppy blond with four malts and four hops; La Mac Vertus, a dry stout with less than 5% alcohol; and La Mère Vertus, a strong and complex beer. It is brewed with five different malts and five different hops, and weighs in at 9%. La Papesse, a dark quadrupel with 10%, is the strongest brew in the range.

The brewery building sits in an open field, near a wooded area that leads to the Semois. It is a great place to sit outside on the brewery patio and taste the house-brewed beers. There is also a tasting room/bar inside the brewery and even a two-room B&B on site.

Enjoy your visit to the Gaume!

Charles D. "Chuck" Cook is a writer and photographer who has traveled to Belgium 29 times since 1994 to explore, experience and enjoy its incredible beer culture. He has written for various publications, including USA Today, All About Beer Magazine and Celebrator Beer News, and his own website, drinkbelgianbeer.com (<http://drinkbelgianbeer.com/>).

3 Comments



adam / spellman

January 12, 2015 at 1:07 pm (<http://allaboutbeer.com/gaume-beer/#comment-395232>)

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