



Twenty Questions with Stu Stuart of Belgian Beer Me! Beer Tours  
By Don Scheidt 2009

1) Why Belgian beer, rather than German/British/Czech/everywhere else?

Without getting too technical--taste and massive variety. Belgium has more than 500 varieties of interesting beer brewed by about 100 breweries in an area about 1/5 the size of Washington state.

2) What (and when) was your first experience with Belgian beer?

Chimay Red Label from a girlfriend. One taste is all it took--of the beer, of course.

3) When did you first travel to Belgium?

When I turned 40 I treated myself to a beer tour of Belgium. I really couldn't afford it, but hey, life is short and that's what credit cards are for, right? Best investment I've ever made. I could have died after the tour, or during it, and have considered it a full life.

4) What lasting impressions did your first visit to Belgium leave?

That no matter how long you visit, you are just touching the tip of the ice berg of this amazing beer culture.

5) Why did you start teaching the "Belgian Beer Me!" course?

To share my passion for Belgian beers and give people a base camp in which to explore even more Belgian beers. Knowledge is power and tasty!

6) What five Belgian beers would you recommend to first-timers?

Duvel, Chimay, Saison Dupont, Poperings Hommelbier, Piraat and Kwak. OK, six, but who's counting, right?

7) What five Belgian beers are your personal favorites?

How dare you !?! Seriously, though, it depends on the week. With so many incredible Belgian beers to choose from, it keeps changing. I dread list questions because you risk coming off arrogant, ignorant, or worse, both.

8) I'm jaded. Is there anything new from Belgium that is a must-try?



Many really “new” Belgian beer are not available in the United States. Some times the batches are small and just for certain festivals, which is why you really need to go there and hit the festivals. But, new by American standards? Try Pannepot by DeStruise Brouwers, if you can get it--it will change your life!

9) Where in Belgium would you recommend visiting, for first-timers?

Bruges is a must. You cannot spend too much time in Bruges. It's historic, scenic, cool hotels, great beer at every turn and you can walk everywhere. I'm also a fan of the rural and scenic Wallonia region in the south with the Ardennes Mountains and Forest. Think Achouffe.

10) Which Belgian beer festivals have you been to?

Poperinge, Heikantse and Herentalse. Marbehan, in Wallonia, will be my next one in October and Zythos in March with my tour.

11) Which Belgian beer festivals would you recommend attending?

Zythos is the granddaddy of 'em all, but I recommend all of the above, too. There are dozens of small beer festivals in Belgium each year. I have a British friend living and working in Brussels, who tracks them religiously and emails me spreadsheets with the latest information.

12) North American brewers are also making Belgian-style beers. Any favorites?

The list grows each day, but some of my favorites are Pranzster from North Coast Brewing, Sapient from Dark Horse Brewing and Final Absolution from Dragonmeade Brewing. All very authentic tasting. Oh, also beers from Brewery Omegang and New Belgium Brewing.

13) What do you think of North American brewers making Belgian-style beers?

Absolutely, it's great! But they are hard to replicate. For a homebrewer, it's like trying to cook authentic Thai food, it rarely comes out like what you get from the source.

14) What makes the beer-drinking experience in Belgium so unique?

The entire beer culture: Ancient beer recipes, good food, dimly-lit intimate beer cafes with fireplaces and old wooden beams that are hundreds of years old, surrounded by people who share a common passion.

15) What are your five favorite beer cafes in Belgium?

Brasserie Caracole in Famignoul, De Kleine Keizer and Het Anchor Cafe in Mechelin, t'Garre in Bruges, Insurance Against the Great Thirst in Eizingen and the Trappisten in Westmalle.

16) What are your five favorite Belgian beer venues in North America?



Beveridge Place Pub and the Stumbling Monk in Seattle, La Trappe and Monk's Kettle in San Francisco, the Trappist in Oakland, the Hopmonk in Sebastopol, Cal., and Lake Superior Brewing Co. in Grand Marais, Mich. How many is that?

17) Are there any Belgian brewery tours that are particularly worthwhile?

Duvel, Bosteels, Van Steenberge, Bink, Fantome and Caracole, the last fire-brewed beer in Belgium, to name several.

18) Do you have any upcoming "Belgian Beer Me!" tours planned?

I offer five beer tours a year, roughly at the same time each year, so people can plan years ahead of time. Each has its own theme and provides a good cross-sampling of the best of Belgium. The next one is the "Essen Christmas Beer Festival Tour in December. This is going to be an awesome tour. Good deals on transatlantic flights during this time make this tour especially attractive.

19) Why should people care about Belgian beer and Belgium's beer culture?

"Should," is a strong word, but for serious craft beer fans, who are looking to expand their horizons, it is the next logical step into a fantasy world of beer, very novel in many aspects to America. It is intriguing, historical, mystical, delicious and satisfying all at the same time. Plus, you could spend a lifetime, touring Belgium and sampling beers and never try them all or get bored. Belgium is a gem and will spoil you for the rest!

20) Where (and when) will you be holding your next "Belgian Beer Me!" courses?

Click [here](#) for class dates & locations. Call (231) 215-0173 to enroll and for more information on courses and beer tours of Belgium. Or, visit [belgianbeerme.com](http://belgianbeerme.com). Look for course locations in Seattle, Portland, Ore., the SF Bay Area and Philadelphia and dare to dream about taking a beer tour to Belgium. You will never be the same!