

BREW

World's best spots for an ale of a time

Having sampled brews around the globe, **Willie Simpson** lists his top pilgrimage sites for beer lovers.

Enjoying a classic beer on tap, as close as possible to the source, is a heady indulgence and also makes a lot of sense. The Germans have a saying that you should only drink beer within sight of the brewery. In other words, drink the local brew in its freshest possible state.

Some beers embrace a strong sense of place and various styles evolve through the use of local ingredients and particular brewing techniques. Chances are the local beer is a perfect match for a local cuisine or specialty dish.

The following is a selection of ultimate beer experiences I've sampled along the way.

Little Creatures Brewery, Fremantle

Setting up a bar and wood-fired pizzeria inside a working brewery is a fairly novel concept in this country. Huge stainless steel serving tanks behind the bar emphasise the fact that the beers really are brewery fresh and the experience is complete when the smell of fresh hop flowers wafts through the open space.



A swill time ... Little Creatures Brewery (left); Munich parties.

Cascade Brewery Visitors' Centre, Hobart

For some reason, Cascade Stout tastes better here than anywhere elsewhere – especially with a snow-capped Mount Wellington in view or at night, when the vaguely gothic brewery facade is illuminated. The beer founts are mounted on thick pipes that appear to lead directly to the brewery – in fact, they're purely for show and the beer comes out of a keg.

Redoak Boutique Beer Cafe, Sydney

There is plenty of fine beer to enjoy here but Redoak Special Reserve (Australian International Beer Awards 2006 Grand Champion) is possibly Australia's rarest and most expensive beer, available in 50ml nips and served in a cognac balloon. The 12 per cent dark ale has been through three fermentations and is wood-aged for more than three years.

The Brazen Head Pub, Dublin

Guinness may not be the flavour-packed brew it once was, but a pint of the dark,



Photo: Michael Dalder/Reuters

Crisp and clear ... Tasmania's striking Cascade Brewery

creamy stuff in a Dublin pub is a must-do for the serious beer hound. There has been a watering hole on The Brazen Head site since 1198. Last time I left this pub on a cold afternoon I was greeted by the delicious smell of freshly roasted barley, drifting up the Liffey River from the Guinness brewery.

De Koninck, Antwerp

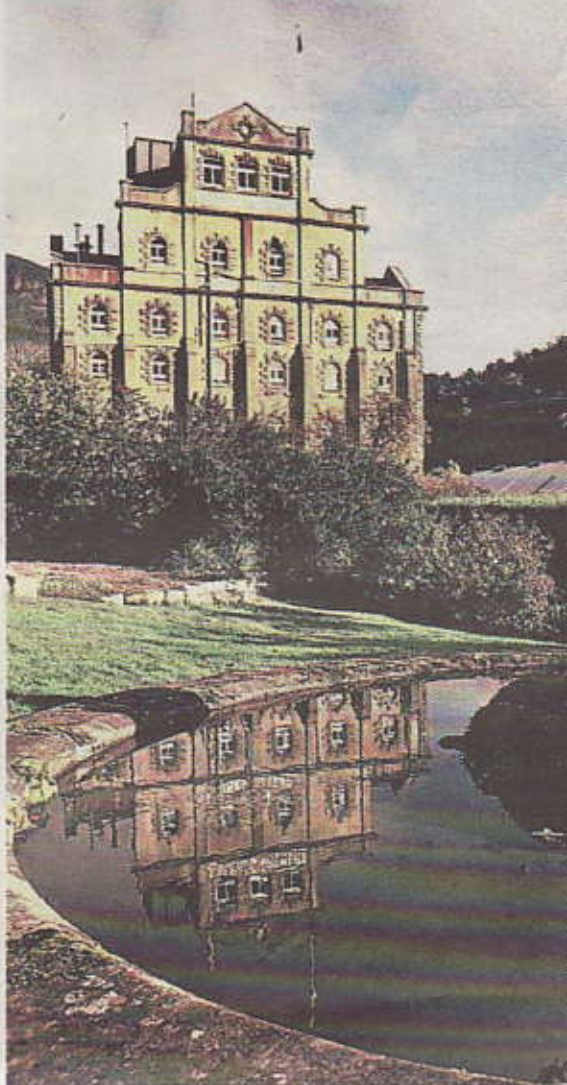
Some beers just have to be drunk from the tap in their city of origin and De Koninck is one of them. Served in a goblet known as a bolleke, this ale is gently fruity and spicy and dangerously easy to drink. The bottled version doesn't come close.

Ferme Des Quartre Saisons, Chimay, Belgium

This unpretentious restaurant in the village of Chimay, close to the famous Trappist brewery, serves a rabbit dish slow-cooked with prunes and Chimay Blue, making it a heavenly match with this formidable ale.

U Pinkasu, Prague

A renowned Prague bar that has been serving Pilsner Urquell on tap since 1843



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Munich parties.

Photo: Michael Dalder/Reuters



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Photo: George Apostolides

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and is still one of the city's best outlets to drink it (served in half-litre mugs); the restaurant's signature dish is roasted pork hock marinated in the famous Czech lager.

Beer Gardens, Munich

Summer is the best time to visit Munich, when the city's beer gardens come into their own. One of the best operates near the Viktualienmarkt, a busy, open-air produce market; grab a stein of lager or foaming glass of weissbier and join locals and tourists at one of the long communal tables.

Augustinerbrau, Salzburg

It's Oktoberfest 364 days of the year (it's closed Christmas Day) at this former monastery with a sprawling beer garden and cavernous beer hall. A cloudy, tasty lager is served from wooden casks into ceramic steins.

Fuller's ESB, London

A pint of hand-pumped real ale is wonderful in the right Pommie pub. Fuller's Extra Special Bitter (ESB) is a deliciously complex real ale, best enjoyed in one of the many Fuller's pubs around London.