

TAG DES DEUTSCHEN BIERES / GERMAN BEER DAY DEUTSCHER REINHEITSGEBOT / GERMAN PURITY LAW der 23. April 1516

Bavarian Beer Week

A "Fountain of Beer" in Commemoration of the 1516 Bavarian Beer Purity Law

There are many beer fests in Germany, especially in Bavaria, throughout the year in addition to the two weeks of Oktoberfest in the fall and the two weeks of Strong Beer Season at the beginning of Lent. However, there is one beer celebration that has a special meaning even to the fest-hardy Bavarians. This is the Bavarian Beer Week, when Bavarians pay homage to their beers. The week is marked by lectures, presentations, brewery tours, and educational events, as well as the sampling of Bavaria's many different brews.

The Bavarian Beer Week was the idea of the Bavarian Brewers Federation, who stages many of the events in cooperation with the Bavarian Hotel and Restaurant Association. The week always starts on or around April 23, a date listed in the Bavarian Beer Calendar as Bavarian Beer Day, and for good reason: It was on April 23, 1516 that the Bavarian co-rulers Duke Wilhelm IV and Duke Ludwig X proclaimed the weighty and consequential Bavarian Beer Purity Law. This law has become so famous around the world that it is now often known just by its German name of Reinheitsgebot.

The proclamation of the Reinheitsgebot marked a momentous turning point not just in Bavarian beer history, but in German and even world beer history as well. The proclamation of the Reinheitsgebot is significant because it marked the first time in history that a government succeeded in regulating the quality and safety of an essential food item. It was the beginning of modern consumer protection legislation. Just as the law could not have been simpler, its implications could not have been broader: The Reinheitsgebot stipulated that Bavarian brewers, henceforth, would be allowed to use only barley malt, hops, and water to make their beers. The existence of yeast was unknown at the time, so this beer ingredient was not mentioned in the original wording of the law. In subsequent centuries, of course, yeast was added to the list of permissible ingredients as was malted wheat for certain beer types, especially the Hefeweizen. But the basic thrust of the Bavarian Reinheitsgebot has remained unchanged to this day and, in its modern formulation, it has become part of the federal law for all of Germany.

Prior to the Reinheitsgebot, many starch-containing botanicals other than malted barley were common additions to the people's drink as were many flavorings other than hops. Wherever beer was brewed, not just in Bavaria, Brewers sometimes added legumes, tubers, tree bark, rushes, herbs, and mushrooms to their beers. Some of these could make the drinker sick, others were downright poisonous! Brewers used these obscure ingredients mostly to save money in raw materials and to mask off-flavors after their beers went bad. After 1516, however, such practices simply had to stop, first in Bavaria and eventually in all of Germany. As a result, only good beers reached the consumer, and bad beers had to be poured down the drain.

German brewers are justifiably proud that, even today, they still make all their beers from the same natural ingredients that were mentioned in the almost 500-year old Beer Purity Law. While many breweries the world over now add cheap barley substitutes such as rice and corn as well as chemical process enhancers, such as artificial enzymes and head stabilizers, to their beers, Bavarian brewers are adamantly old-fashioned. They regard their continued dedication to the best, simplest, and all-natural ingredients, combined with their insuperable craftsmanship, as an indispensable foundation of the consistently high quality of their beers.

The Bavarian Beer Week brings brewers, restaurateurs, and tourist associations together to offer the public a host of attractions and events that celebrate both the people's favorite drink and the Reinheitsgebot on which it is based. There are beer fests, beer tastings, brewing demonstration, brewery tours, beer seminars, and hikes to different beer gardens...all designed to showcase the variety of Bavarian beer and the quality of its raw materials. During Beer Week, Bavarians honor and behold the culinary and cultural importance that beer occupies in their daily lives.

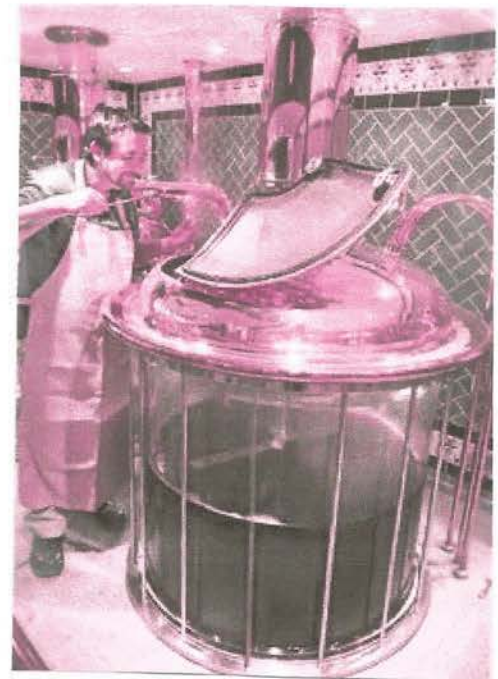
One of the highpoints of the Bavarian Beer Week is the opening day, the Bavarian Beer Day, when the Bavarian Brewers Federation dispenses free beer to the public from a specially designed open-air beer fountain in front of the Federation's "Brewers House" in downtown Munich. The people receive their beer in commemorative mugs that are produced especially for the event, and the first mug from the beer fountain is usually drawn by a celebrity, often the Bavarian Minister of Agriculture or the Mayor of Munich.

The Munich beer fountain is supplied by some 1,000 liters (almost 275 gallons) of beer each year, donated by the Munich breweries for the occasion. Snacks are always available as well, perfectly selected to harmonize with the Bavarian beers dispensed from the fountain. Particularly popular are the offerings of Bavarian cheeses selected by the Bavarian Dairy Association.

For information about the dates and events of the next Bavarian Beer Week, contact:
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Two of every three companies sell only within a 50 kilometer (35 mile) range of their business.

The *Wirtschaftswoche* article appeared shortly before Sunday, April 23. On that day, proclaimed Day of Beer in a campaign by the brewing industry, communities held festivals and breweries opened their doors for public tours. The historical significance of April 23 dates to the year 1516, when Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria issued the *Reinheitsgebot*, or purity law, for brewers. Germany still takes pride in the purity law, which says that beer may only be produced from water, barley, hops and yeast. While companies in many other countries use other substances such as sweeteners or rice, Germany has remained firm on the *Reinheitsgebot*. The result seems to satisfy Germans, who consume an average of 140 liters (37 gallons) of beer every year, and in fact lead the world in beer consumption. But when it comes to the international market, Dietzsch observed, "Image alone does not produce demand" for Germany's favorite beverage. ■



There are over 1,300 breweries
in Germany.

