

6 Famous German Beer Styles & Brands You Have To Taste For Yourself

André Klein · Monday, July 30th, 2018



German beer is inarguably one of the most famous staples of German culture, way up there with Sauerkraut, [cakes](#), automotive engineering and wearing socks and sandals. (Sorry for that.)

But have you ever asked yourself how many German beers there are? According to some sources, there are more than 7800 (!) different beers from more than 1400 breweries all over Germany.

In other words, we really love our *Gerstensaft* (literally: “barley juice”). But what is the difference between all these different German beer styles? What’s their history? And which beer brands are most popular?

Pils



The most popular beer in Germany by a long way is the *Pils*. It's a bright-golden beer with a hoppy-bitter taste that got its name from the Bohemian (today Czech) city of *Pilsen*.

In the 19th century the quality of local beer was so bad that a committee was formed to establish a new brewery which was manned by Josef Groll, a brewmaster from Bavaria, who brought with him a special recipe of “untergärig” (bottom-fermented) beer his father had invented.

On the 11th of November 1842 the first *Pilsen* beer was publicly served and the times of bad Bohemian beer were over once and for all.

Nowadays, *Pils* is usually served in a special glass known as “Pilsglas” or “gestielte Tulpe” which literally means: “pediculated tulip”

Famous German *Pils* brands are: Krombacher Pils, Bitburger Pils, Veltins Pilsener, Warsteiner Pils, Hasseröder Pilsener, Radeberger Pilsner, Beck's Pilsener, Oettinger Pils, König Pilsener and Jever.

Weizenbier



The *Weizenbier* (also known as *Weißbier*) is the most Bavarian of all German beers and its triumphal march from the south to the north and abroad is a testament to its fruity taste.

Contrary to the “untergärig” *Pils*, where the yeast sinks to the bottom, *Weizenbier* is a “obergärig” (top-fermented) beer where the yeast swims on top of the brew.

There are two sub-types of *Weizenbier*: *Kristallweizen* (“crystal wheat”) and *Hefeweizen* (“yeast wheat”). In the former, yeast and sediments are filtered out, increasing the clarity of the brew, hence the name, where the latter is exactly the opposite: a full-bodied murky concoction rich with yeast and sediments.

Weizenbier is traditionally served in special tall slender glasses known as *Weizenbiertgläser* and pouring it correctly is an artform:

Famous *Weizenbier* brands are: Erdinger Weißbier, Paulaner Hefe-Weißbier,

Rothaus Hefe-Weizen, Schöffelhofer Weizen, Licher Weizen, Franziskaner Hefe-Weißbier and Maisel's Weisse

Bockbier



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Looking for something stronger? *Bockbier* belong to the category of Starkbiere (“strong beers”) with more than 6.5% alcohol. There are brighter and darker varieties, but nowadays most *Bock* beers are bottom-fermented, dark, sweet noticeably less hopped.

This beer style was first conceived in the city of Einbeck in Lower-Saxony. When the sons of Heinrich des Löwen (“Henry the Lion”) bestowed the municipal right onto the city, its citizen also gained a license to brew beer. *Bock* was considered a luxury in Medieval times and was exported as far away as Italy. In order to ensure its storability, it was brewed with a strong Stammwürze (gravity, literally: “stem spice”) which resulted in the high amount of alcohol.

Other varieties are *Doppelbock* (even stronger), *Maibock* (brighter and less sweet), *Festbock* (Austrian variety) and *Eisbock* (beer is freezeed over and frozen water is removed).

Bock beer is usually consumed in bulbous glasses.

Popular German *Bock* beer brands are: Einbecker Ur-Bock (Hell/Dunkel), Schneider Weisse Aventinus Eisbock, Weihenstephaner Korbinian, Hofbräu Maibock and Flensburger Frühlingsbock.

Altbier



Altbier, literally “old beer” is a dark top-fermented beer most popular in the areas around Düsseldorf. It’s often just referred to as “Alt”.

Altbier is brewed at higher temperatures than bottom-fermented beer which was beneficial in times when no technical cooling existed yet. After Carl von Linde invented the Kältemaschine (refrigeration machine) in 1873, bottom-fermented beers like *Pils* became more popular because ice-cellars weren’t necessary anymore. But still most breweries continued to offer both the “new” and the “old” beer.

Altbier is usually served in the *Altbier-Becher*, a cylindrical small glass.

Famous *Altbier* brands are: Düffel Alt, Felskrone Alt, Gatz *Altbier*, Oettinger Alt, Schlüssel *Altbier*, Uerige Alt, Fückschen Alt and Bolten Alt.

Kölsch



Another local variety, *Kölsch* is a clear, bright, top-fermented beer which, at least in Germany, can only be legally produced in the region of Köln (Cologne).

At first glance, a *Pils* and a *Kölsch* look deceptively similar: the color, fizz and head (foam) are almost indistinguishable. But when it comes to the brewing process and taste, the differences become obvious.

Kölsch is brewed with top-fermenting yeast known as *Kölschhefe* (“Cologne yeast”) which makes for a fruitier taste than *Pils*. Additionally, unlike *Pils*, *Kölsch* also contains a certain portion of wheat malt.

Kölsch is served in the famous *Kölner Stange* (literally: “Cologne staff”), a cylindrical 0.2 liter glass similar to the Altbier-Becher, but taller and slimmer.

Popular *Kölsch* brands are: Früh Kölsch, Dom Kölsch, Gaffel Kölsch, Pääffgen Kölsch, Sion Kölsch and Küppers Kölsch.

Zwickelbier/Kellerbier



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This style of beer, also known as *Kellerbier* (literally: “cellar beer”) is an unfiltered, naturally cloudy beer that is often served (or bottled) immediately after secondary fermentation.

Zwickel- or *Kellerbier* contains less carbon dioxide than most other beers and is considered the nutritionally superior choice to filtered beers, because all the sediments and trub are not thrown out.

The name “Zwickelbier” dates back to the process of taking a sample directly from the fermenting vat known as “zwickeln”. The name “Kellerbier” refers to the fact that it comes “straight from the cellar”, i.e. no filtration process.

Although *Kellerbier* and *Zwickelbier* are often used synonymously, the *Kellerbier* is actually slightly more hopped. Both are usually served in the “Seidel”, the traditional German 1 liter beer mug.

Popular German *Kellerbier/Zwickelbier* brands are: Hofbräu Münchner Sommer, Oettinger Kellerbier, Lösch-Zwerg Kellerbier and Köstritzer Kellerbier.

? The Big German Beer Quiz: How Well Do You Know German Beer Culture?

What are your favorite German beer brands or styles? Prost!

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sources: biermap24.de, wikipedia