

Belle of the Beers

KENDALL JONES taps into the booming brewery scene in Bellingham

BEER AFICIONADOS from across the region are beginning to recognize Bellingham, Washington state's 12th-largest city and a two-hour drive north of Seattle, as one of the Northwest's budding beer destinations. On weekends, brewery taprooms are brimming with locals mingling with beer tourists from British Columbia, Seattle and points beyond.

Even the data analysis website Pricenomics recently dubbed Bellingham the "Top Beer Snob City" for the lack of mass-produced beers on menus at local pubs and eateries.

There are currently seven breweries in downtown Bellingham, most of which are within an easy stroll of each other. Start touring at the oldest and best-loved brewery in town, **Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro** (1107 Railroad Ave.; 360.647.5593; bbaybrewery.com), a place locals refer to simply as "the pub" or the "brewery." It features an expansive, all-ages eatery and an always lively, adults-only bar with a huge beer garden open from May through September. The rustic, comfortable and nautically themed brewpub opened in 1995, paving the way for others.

In 2008, **Chuckanut Brewery and Kitchen** (601 W Holly St.; 360.752.3377; chuckanutbreweryandkitchen.com), the second-oldest brewery in town, opened near the waterfront and immediately earned a national reputation for brewing authentic European-style lagers. In its first year of existence, Chuckanut Brewery won four medals at the Great American Beer Festival, the most prestigious beer competition in America. The kid-friendly, cozy and casual brewpub is awash in natural light from a bank of windows overlooking the mouth of Whatcom Creek. Will and Mari Kemper, the owners, are legends on the Northwest beer scene, having opened the long-since-defunct Thomas Kemper Brewery in Poulsbo back in 1984.

Kulshan Brewing Co. (kulshanbrewery.com) operates two breweries less than a mile apart, each with its own beer-only



Top: Kulshan's James Street location. Left: brewers from Chuckanut Brewery; below: burger from Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro



taproom. The first location (2238 James St.; 360.389.5348), opened in 2012, is family-friendly. It's much smaller than the second, affectionately known as K2 (1538 Kentucky St.; 360.389.5348), which opened in 2015 for grown-ups only (21 and older). Both taprooms serve the same great beers, and you're likely to see a food truck in front too.

To the delight of the city's eco-conscious beer lovers, **Aslan Brewing Company** (1330 N Forest St.; 360.778.2088; aslanbrewing.com) opened in 2014 and began brewing the city's only certified organic beers. Kids are welcome at this vibrant downtown brewpub, where the quality of the beer is equaled by the quality of the food, with a menu focused on locally sourced, organic ingredients. The beer lineup includes flagship brews, such as pale ale, porter and IPA, but don't be afraid of the constantly changing selection of one-off and more adventurous offerings, such as the Unicorn Picnic, a fruity and funky beer that defies standard style definitions.

Food trucks often park outside the all-

ages, beer-only, warehouse-style taproom at **Wander Brewing** (1807 Dean Ave.; 360.647.6152; wanderbrewing.com), where you'll enjoy your pints next to weathered oak barrels and shiny stainless steel brewing equipment. Ask if there are special, barrel-aged beers on tap.

The new kid on the block is **Structures Brewing** (1420 N State St.; structuresbrewing.com), which opened its tiny downtown brewery in November 2015. The barebones taproom (21 and older) offers precious few seats, but plenty of standing room and places to rest your beer. One of the latter is the Citra pale ale, a well-structured beer that balances sweet malt character with lots of citrus flavors.

Two more breweries are inching ever closer to opening: Gruff Brewing Co. plans to open soon in the Central Business District, and Stones Throw Brewing Co. has secured a location in historic Fairhaven. Beyond those two, buzz on the street suggests that an additional three breweries are in the early planning stages.

Kendall's Bellingham Beer Picks



SCOTCH-STYLE ALE, BOUNDARY BAY BREWERY & BISTRO Deep, dark, reddish-brown, with a rich golden-brown head, this beer seems bigger than it is, tasting much stronger than might be suggested by its 6.4 percent alcohol by volume. The rich, complex flavors are sweet, sticky and thick, with notes of coffee, chocolate, caramel and more. Available on tap at the brewery and in 22-ounce bottles at grocery stores and bottle shops. **PAIRS WITH:** Order the yam enchiladas and nobody will notice you're an outsider.



CHUCKANUT PILSNER, CHUCKANUT BREWERY AND KITCHEN Crisp, cracker-like flavors are accentuated by the pleasantly spicy hop character in this brilliant golden beer, available on tap at the brewery and in 22-ounce bottles at grocery stores and bottle shops. Clocking in at a modest 5.0 percent alcohol by volume, this refreshing, quaffable lager has earned multiple medals at the prestigious Great American Beer Festival. **PAIRS WITH:** The pub's mac and cheese makes a great match, but you should always add the optional smoked salmon.



BASTARD KAT IPA, KULSHAN BREWING IPA lovers swoon over this excellent example of the style, an exceptional beer with its strong citrus notes and assertive hop bitterness. Twinges of orange, grapefruit and resinous pine dominate this bright golden brew, which weighs in at 6.6 percent alcohol by volume. It's available at the brewery's two tasting rooms and at grocery stores and bottle shops in 12-ounce cans. **PAIRS WITH:** Four-star pad thai or any spicy dish will amplify the beer's hop character.



GINGER RYE ALE, ASLAN BREWING Inspired by a delicious cocktail called a Moscow Moose, this beer explodes on your palate with vibrant flavors: sweetness from the rye, a bit of heat from the ginger and an unexpected slap of lime on the finish. On very rare occasions, a keg makes it to one of Seattle's many beer-focused bars, but for the most part, you'll have to head to the brewery to drink this draft-only beer, which weighs in at 5.4 percent alcohol by volume. **PAIRS WITH:** Aslan's grilled rockfish tacos do it justice.



GLOBAL MUTT BALTIC PORTER, WANDER BREWING The aroma of dark roasted coffee wafts from this nearly black beer, but the coffee flavor is a bit more restrained. You'll pick up notes of chocolate along with an earthy, roasted malt flavor before the coffee bitterness returns on the finish. Get this brew, 7.0 percent alcohol by volume, on tap at Wander Brewing's taproom or look for it at bottle shops in 750-milliliter bottles. **PAIRS WITH:** Make a beef stew robust enough to stand up to this big beer.