



Charlie Bamforth's top five beer destinations (apart from UC Davis)

The Birch Hall Inn, Yorkshire, England



I have been visiting this pub since the time I could first walk! Holidays as a child were always spent in Goathland on the North Yorkshire Moors in England, and this tiny pub is in a hamlet a short stroll away. It has never changed: it isn't allowed to according to the will of the late landlady, Edith Schofield. She served me candy when I was a child from the minuscule shop that sits between the two bars. Years later she pulled me pints of ale. The current owners bought the pub from her in 1981 and maintain its wonder. This is what beer is all about. Hand-pulled pints of Beckwatter or Black Sheep bitter. A pie or a sandwich on rustic bread. No television, no music. Just two small rooms to sup ale and chat to the walkers and the farmers. And hanging outside under protective glass a painting by Algernon Newton, a member of the Royal Academy. Heaven.

Sierra Nevada Brewing Company, Chico, Calif.



Most breweries in the world would not win a prize for any aesthetic beauty. Many are hardly shining examples of cleanliness or sound upkeep. The company that leads the way in doing it right in all these things, and much more besides, is Sierra Nevada. Ken Grossman, of course, started it all in Chico. Devout beer lovers should make this pilgrimage. The building is architecturally appealing. The insides are pristine. Gleaming copper vessels, murals in the brewhouse depicting characters from the proud history of the company, hand-crafted tiles on the walls illustrating aspects of brewing raw materials and the process, floors that you could dine off. The tops in environmental consciousness. And the pub: always heaving and no wonder, for the food is delectable and the magnificent beers presented to superb advantage.

The National Brewery Centre, Burton-on-Trent, England



At age 31 I became research manager for the Bass Company in Burton. I loved to visit the Bass Museum, which these days is independent from the old company and rejoices in this new name. But you can still see the scenes of traditional brewing as performed through the years in one of the two great brewing traditions. You can still feed carrots to the horses—no wonder they are so huge. You can still admire the fleet of beer vehicles, including the car shaped like a bottle or Worthington White Shield. And you can still enjoy ales brewed to perfection.

The Brewing Network, Concord, Calif.



When I first appeared on one of Justin Crossley's shows the studio was in his home in Martinez. Upon arrival I found a Harley Davidson parked in the front room. "Not married then?" were my first words. Since then they have moved locations twice. The second of those, in downtown Martinez, saw my most recent appearance on a show. I won't forget it, as a pan handler strolled in off the street right into the studio and started eating the buffet as the show was going out live. It's always fun with those guys – including Jamil Zainasheff, who is a great brewer and in whose Heretic brewery there is a fermenter named "Charlie" and another called "Bamforth." I asked him why he was bestowing this honor on me and he replied, "because you are the biggest heretic we know."

Belgium. Pretty much anywhere in Belgium



Guido asked me the most foolish question ever uttered: "Would you like a beer?" I replied in the affirmative and he proceeded to reel off the names of twenty or so options. I selected one and he disappeared. Fifteen minutes later he had not reappeared. "Guido, my beer?" I called. He replied "I am trying to find the glass." He would not give me a beer unless it was in the specific glass for that beer. That is reverence for beer—and that is the norm in Belgium, where you can find an immense range of astonishing product styles. The steak-and-fries are good too!