



Beer Tourism: Kentucky Craft Brewery Visitor Profile and Motivations

K. Joseph Berend, M.S. * Michael J. Bradley, Ph.D. * James N. Maples, Ph.D.



Eastern Kentucky University

Introduction

Craft beer has gained popularity and evolved into an immense industry in recent years. In 2015, the total number of breweries in the United States reached an all-time high of 4,144—a number not seen since the late 1800s (“Brewers Association,” 2015). The influx of breweries has contributed to increased participation in craft beer consumption and beer tourism. Plummer, Telfer, Hashimoto, and Summers (2005) define beer tourism as “visitation to breweries, beer festivals and beer shows for which beer tasting and experiencing the attributes of a beer region are the prime motivating factors for visitors” (p. 449). While beer tourism is not limited to on-site brewery visits, brewery visitors represent an understudied segment of beer tourists. The resurgence of beer and especially craft beer in America has led to increased interest in the industry. There exists information on beer consumers, however, there is a dearth of literature on brewery visitors. A necessary first step in researching beer tourism is to obtain an initial understanding of beer tourists by examining demographic information as well as what motivates people to visit breweries.

Methods

This study aims to explore the people who visit Kentucky craft breweries in order to identify and create a profile of brewery visitors. Researchers administered an on-site questionnaire to Kentucky brewery visitors. Only surveys from visitors that live outside the city or county in which the brewery is located were used in this study. Survey participants answered common demographic questions and were asked to rate their level of agreement, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree), with Likert-style statements on motivation and experience preferences that had been utilized in beverage research (Plummer et al. (2005); Francioni (2012); and Park et al. (2008)). There were 302 surveys completed from a total of fourteen Kentucky breweries that are located in diverse geographic locales from the north and west of the state to the central Bluegrass Region. Breweries are in cities ranging from the state’s two largest cities, Lexington and Louisville, to a city with less than 10,000 people (Paris, KY).

Kentucky Brewery Locations:

- Lexington, Kentucky - Alltech Lexington, Blue Stallion, Country Boy, Ethereal, and West Sixth
- Louisville, Kentucky - Against the Grain, Goodwood, and Great Flood
- Northern Kentucky breweries - Ei8ht Ball Brewing and Braxton Brewing
- Western Kentucky breweries - Dry Ground Brewing Company and White Squirrel Brewery
- Central Kentucky breweries - Rooster Brew and Wrigley Taproom and Eatery

Brewery Visitor Profile

- Gender - 59.5% Male, 40.2% Female
- Mean Age Overall - 33.88, Male- 35.67, Female- 31.28
- Mean Income - \$86,229.95 (N=218)
- Education - Bachelor’s Degree 40.1% (N=116)
- Race - 88.7% Caucasian (N=267)
- Mean number of people in respondent’s group - 4.02 people
- Mean miles traveled one way - 249.33
- Staying overnight - 47.3% (N=139)
- Visits per year - 51.7% (N=156) visited 0 times, 27.4% (N=83) visit 1-9 times, 20.9% (N=33) visit 10 or more times a year
- Visiting a brewery is main reason for visiting the community - 24.8% (N=73)

Results

What do you plan to participate in while at this brewery?

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|------|----------------|
| -I plan to participate in a brewery tour. | 292 | 3.04 | 1.358 |
| -I plan to participate in beer sampling. | 294 | 2.31 | 1.310 |
| -I plan to purchase beer (beyond sampling). | 292 | 1.80 | 1.058 |
| -I plan to purchase food. | 291 | 2.53 | 1.368 |

Why did you visit this brewery?

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|------|----------------|
| -To buy beer. | 290 | 1.98 | 1.227 |
| -To experience Kentucky beer. | 294 | 1.89 | 1.060 |
| -To taste new beer. | 295 | 1.75 | 1.013 |
| -To get drunk. | 293 | 3.75 | 1.309 |
| -To increase my beer knowledge. | 294 | 2.67 | 1.215 |
| -To help bring the family together more. | 295 | 3.33 | 1.364 |
| -So I can be with friends/family. | 294 | 1.88 | 1.059 |
| -So I can meet people with similar interest. | 294 | 2.97 | 1.285 |
| -For food tasting. | 294 | 3.47 | 1.252 |
| -To get away for the weekend/day. | 293 | 2.58 | 1.334 |
| -To enjoy the entertainment. | 294 | 2.70 | 1.295 |
| -To relieve stress. | 295 | 2.37 | 1.273 |
| -I enjoy brewery tours. | 287 | 1.81 | .882 |
| -It important for the brewery to provide a variety of beer types. | 286 | 1.53 | .673 |
| -It is important for breweries to provide specialty beer. | 285 | 1.64 | .707 |
| -The location of the brewery is important. | 285 | 2.04 | .943 |
| -I will drive more than an hour to visit a brewery. | 287 | 2.47 | 1.281 |
| -I prefer craft beer over big name beer. | 284 | 1.84 | 1.024 |
| -I order local craft beer whenever I can. | 285 | 1.91 | 1.061 |
| -I enjoy touring beer routes/trails, if available. | 285 | 2.12 | 1.093 |
| -Merchandise is important for breweries to offer. | 286 | 2.76 | 1.152 |
| -I am at this brewery only to eat at their restaurant. | 287 | 3.98 | 1.200 |

Implications/Discussion

Kentucky brewery visitors are **not** motivated to visit breweries to get drunk or to bring the family together more. They do visit breweries to buy and taste Kentucky beer and to be with friends/family. Results suggest visitors may purchase food at a brewery, but visitors are not motivated to visit to taste food or to eat at the brewery’s restaurant.

Suggestions to increase brewery visitation:

- offer opportunities for social events/gatherings - Visitors are more likely to visit with friends and family than alone.
- offer tours – While participants’ mean score of 1.81 (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree) on “I enjoy brewery tours” suggests tours should be offered, a mean score of 3.04 (3=unsure) on “I plan to participate in a brewery tour” suggests visitors are indifferent about going on a tour.
- provide a variety of beer types and specialty beer – Both were highest ranked questions by respondents.
- offer a variety of craft and local beer – Respondents prefer craft beer and order local beers when possible.

Beer tourism could be increased by offering several avenues for social interaction and entertainment. While white males and those with higher incomes make up a majority of brewery visitors and should be a primary target market, breweries should take steps to attract other consumers to craft beer. Results indicate breweries have room to increase visitor diversity by marketing to women and minorities. To attract more women, breweries could partner with groups like the Snobby Beer Bitches or the Pink Boots Society, which could result in increased brewery visitor diversity. As the craft brewery industry considers the future, visitor profiles and motivations will help guide brewery management to target marketing efforts in ways that position the industry for growth and community impact.

