

The Best U.S. States for Beer Lovers: You'll Never Guess Who Tops the List

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Americans love their beer. At least two-thirds of the United States' adult population enjoys and occasional drink, and more of them (39%) prefer to reach for a cold one than will pop open a bottle of wine (35%) or pour out a shot or two of liquor (22%). Among developed nations, only Australians, Canadians, the Irish, and the Germans quaff more brew per person each year than Americans, and given these nations' beer-loving reputations, that shouldn't be much of a surprise.

But some Americans like beer more than others, and some American states are quite a bit fonder of their brew than the rest. With the help of data collected by Bloomberg, the Tax Foundation, and Wisconsin's *Capital Times*, I've put together a complete list of all 50 states, ranked by the sort of factors that indicate the presence of beer-lovers -- per-capita beer consumption rates, breweries and bars per 100,000 people, and the taxes each state imposes on each gallon of beer. Using a proprietary algorithm that takes each category into account, I've ranked every state (and Washington, D.C.), and you'll see the full list at the end of this article. First, let's look at which states topped each category, and why that did (or didn't) boost its final score enough to crack the top ranks.

Honorable mentions and unexpected showings

Massachusetts, where **Boston Beer** (NYSE: [SAM](#)) essentially [created the American craft-beer movement in 1984](#), placed only 29th out of all states. The state was hindered in its rank by low per-capita consumption rates (residents' 26.2 gallons per capita placed 40th), and Boston Beer's dominant presence may have hindered the development of more craft breweries, as Massachusetts' 70 breweries equate to only 1.05 breweries per 100,000 people, good enough for 26th place.



Source: J.M. Rosenfeld via Flickr.

California has more than twice as many breweries (508) as any other state, but its residents don't actually like beer all that much. Its 44th-place showing in per-capita consumption (25.5 gallons per year) and low concentration of bars (8.1 per 100,000 was only good for 37th place) dragged the home of 10 of America's 50 largest craft breweries -- a list that includes Sierra Nevada, Lagunitas,

Stone, and Anchor -- down to 35th place, below Washington, D.C., and Mississippi, neither of which is particularly known for its beer.

Missouri, home to **Anheuser-Busch InBev's** (NYSE: [BUD](#)) American operations, ranks only 16th on our beer-lovers list despite earning the title of *Time's* most beer-friendly state. The state has 12.3 bars per 100,000 people, which is good for only 30th place, and despite boasting two of America's 50 largest craft brewers (Boulevard and St. Louis Brewery), Missouri's 61 permitted breweries offer only one per 100,000, earning the state a 27th-place showing.

Colorado, home to **Molson Coors** (NYSE: [TAP](#)) , which operates the world's largest brewing facility in the town of Golden, ranks eighth on our list, a placement that's almost entirely thanks to welcoming regulations -- the state has the fourth-lowest beer taxes and the sixth-highest concentration of breweries per capita of any state in the country. However, Colorado residents might be enjoying their [legalized marijuana](#) too much to pick up a six-pack, as the home of New Belgium and Oskar Blues ranks only 24th in per-capita beer consumption and 26th in bars per capita.

Lowest beer taxes: Wyoming (\$0.02 per gallon)

Wyoming is the epitome of a tax-hating state. My fellow Fool Sean Williams has written a detailed series on state-by-state taxes, and Wyoming often comes in at or near the top of the low-tax lists -- it's [the most tax-friendly state for businesses](#) and also has [one of the lowest mean property-tax burdens in the country](#). Wyoming also has [no income taxes](#) and boasts a modest 4% general sales tax, and its gasoline taxes are second to Alaska's in the race for [the lowest rate in the country](#). If anything, the real surprise is that Wyoming taxes beer at all.



Source: Nick Taylor via Flickr.

Sparsely populated Wyoming places third on our list, primarily because it also has a high concentration of breweries per 100,000 people (4.3) and bars per 100,000 people (29.5), which ranked fifth and seventh overall, respectively. There are 20 Wyoming breweries listed on RateBeer (Bloomberg's list counts 25), of which Jackson Hole's Snake River Brewing claims to be the largest. Only a 15th-place finish on per-capita consumption held Wyoming back from taking the beer-loving crown. Drink more, Wyomingites, and you can be America's most beer-friendly state next year!

Most beer drunk per capita: North Dakota (45.8 gallons per year)

What is there to do in North Dakota? From the look of this list, a beer pairs well with just about every

popular North Dakotan pastime. North Dakota's ethnic roots (many North Dakotans have Norwegian or German ancestry) and its outdoorsy bent (hunting and fishing are popular hobbies, while farming and oil production are two of the state's largest industries) contribute to a strong cultural bias for beer. Montana and South Dakota are right on North Dakota's tail in per-capita consumption, and several other upper Midwestern states also rank highly in this category.

North Dakota's beer tax is higher than that of many other states, but only one other state has more bars per 100,000 people, which helps North Dakota claim sixth place overall on our list of beer-loving states. There aren't many breweries in the state, but Fargo Brewing is the largest.

Most breweries per capita: Vermont (6.38 per 100,000 people)

There are only 40 breweries permitted in Vermont, but with fewer residents than any state but Wyoming (even Washington D.C. has more!), the nation's leading supplier of maple syrup takes the crown for brewing density. Beer is pretty important to Vermont's economy, as 2.4% of the state's GDP came from beer sales in 2012, but Vermont brewers take their craft seriously -- several IPA innovations are credited to Vermont craft breweries, and the Vermont town of Waterbury earned the *Boston Globe's* title of "Best Beer Town in New England."



Source: Don LeVange via Flickr.

Vermont places fifth overall on the list of beer-loving states, thanks to this top score and because of its seventh-place rank in per-capita consumption. The state's beer tax and bars-per-capita ranks are in the middle of the pack. The state's largest brewery, Long Trail Brewing, was the 18th-largest craft brewery in the country by volume in 2012, according to the Brewers Association, but brew fans are probably familiar with Vermont-based Magic Hat and Otter Creek Brewing (producers of Wolaver's Organic Ales) as well. Boston-based Harpoon also operates a microbrewery in Vermont.

America's most beer-friendly state: Montana

Montana goes easy on its beer taxes (a rate of \$0.14 per gallon ties the state with New York for 11th place), earns high marks in per-capita beer consumption (it takes third place with 41 gallons per year) and breweries per capita (its 4.6 per 100,000 people also ranks third in the country), and it tops the country in bars per capita, with 59.3 bars per 100,000 people.

Montana's cultural profile is rather similar to North Dakota's, but Big Sky Country boasts more than five times as many breweries, the largest of which is nationally renowned -- Missoula's Big Sky

Brewing Co. is the country's 46th-largest craft brewery, and it's won multiple gold medals at the North American Beer Awards since 1999.



Source: Lars Plougmann via Flickr.

You don't have to move to Montana if you love beer, but it might be worth your while to make a pilgrimage there some time soon. Luckily for many Americans, it's easier than ever to find great beer nearby, whether or not you live next door to a world-class craft brewery.

Scroll down to see the full rankings for America's most beer-loving states, and don't forget to leave a comment to let me know if you agree or disagree with the way these states have been ranked.

The next step for you

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Rank	State	Annual Beer Consumption Per Capita, Gallons	Breweries per 100,000 People	Bars per 100,000 People	Beer Excise Taxes per Gallon
1	Montana	41	4.63	59.30	\$0.14
2	Wisconsin	36.2	2.56	52.99	\$0.06
3	Wyoming	33	4.29	29.52	\$0.02
4	Oregon	30.3	5.29	21.07	\$0.08
5	Vermont	35.3	6.38	15.80	\$0.27
6	North Dakota	45.8	1.24	58.34	\$0.39

Rank	State	Annual Beer Consumption Per Capita, Gallons	Breweries per 100,000 People	Bars per 100,000 People	Beer Excise Taxes per Gallon
7	South Dakota	38.9	1.30	43.20	\$0.27
8	Colorado	30	4.12	15.05	\$0.08
9	Iowa	33.6	1.62	31.78	\$0.19
10	Nebraska	35.2	1.34	31.79	\$0.31
11	New Hampshire	43.9	2.27	2.87	\$0.30
12	Idaho	27.8	2.42	20.35	\$0.15
13	Nevada	35.8	0.82	21.72	\$0.16
14	Pennsylvania	28.6	1.38	23.09	\$0.08
15	Maine	34	4.37	7.38	\$0.35
16	Missouri	31	1.01	12.34	\$0.06
17	Delaware	33.6	1.30	6.37	\$0.16
18	Texas	34.4	0.44	9.80	\$0.20
19	Ohio	30.1	0.97	19.77	\$0.18
20	Washington	24.8	3.60	12.48	\$0.26
21	Michigan	26.8	1.90	16.35	\$0.20
22	Rhode Island	26.3	0.95	25.11	\$0.11

Rank	State	Annual Beer Consumption Per Capita, Gallons	Breweries per 100,000 People	Bars per 100,000 People	Beer Excise Taxes per Gallon
23	West Virginia	30.3	0.49	24.70	\$0.18
24	Illinois	29.1	0.87	21.70	\$0.23
25	Indiana	25.9	1.25	17.11	\$0.12
26	Arizona	29.5	0.85	9.05	\$0.16
27	Kansas	28.3	0.83	15.69	\$0.18
28	Louisiana	33.9	0.28	18.27	\$0.37
29	Massachusetts	26.2	1.05	13.67	\$0.11
30	New Mexico	32.4	2.16	5.32	\$0.41
31	Alaska	28.7	3.40	22.85	\$1.07
32	District of Columbia	28.3	1.70	16.86	\$0.48
33	Minnesota	28.5	1.35	18.71	\$0.48
34	Mississippi	33.9	0.20	3.64	\$0.47
35	California	25.5	1.33	8.09	\$0.20
36	New York	22.4	0.88	17.60	\$0.14
37	Arkansas	26.7	0.61	4.63	\$0.23
38	Virginia	26.7	0.93	1.51	\$0.26

Rank	State	Annual Beer Consumption Per Capita, Gallons	Breweries per 100,000 People	Bars per 100,000 People	Beer Excise Taxes per Gallon
39	Oklahoma	28.3	0.39	9.66	\$0.40
40	South Carolina	32.7	0.57	7.62	\$0.77
41	New Jersey	22.4	0.38	12.36	\$0.12
42	Florida	27.4	0.51	9.46	\$0.48
43	Hawaii	30.4	1.21	16.17	\$0.93
44	Connecticut	22.1	1.00	8.87	\$0.24
45	North Carolina	27.1	1.16	6.24	\$0.62
46	Maryland	23.2	0.69	9.70	\$0.45
47	Alabama	30.2	0.46	5.44	\$1.05
48	Kentucky	24.4	0.59	7.46	\$0.76
49	Utah	20.2	0.76	6.17	\$0.41
50	Georgia	25.7	0.38	4.50	\$0.85
51	Tennessee	26.2	0.79	5.22	\$1.15

Sources: Bloomberg, the *Capital Times*, and the Tax Foundation.

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