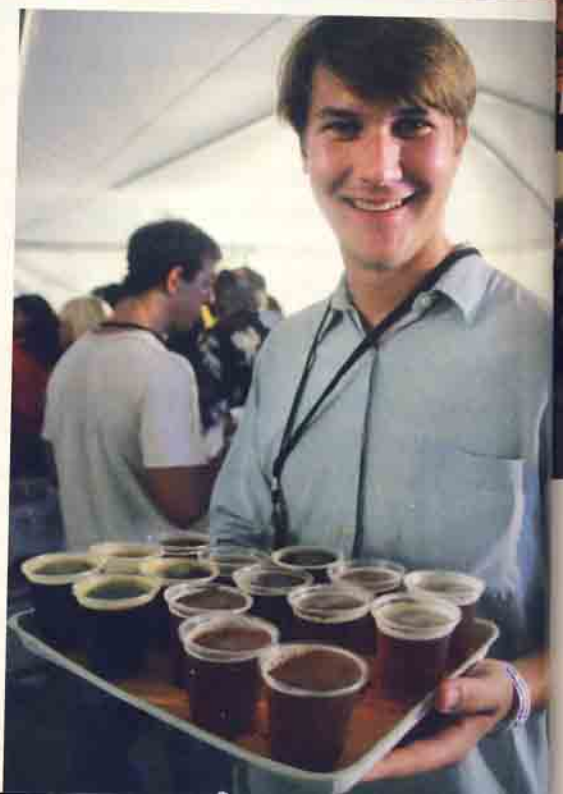
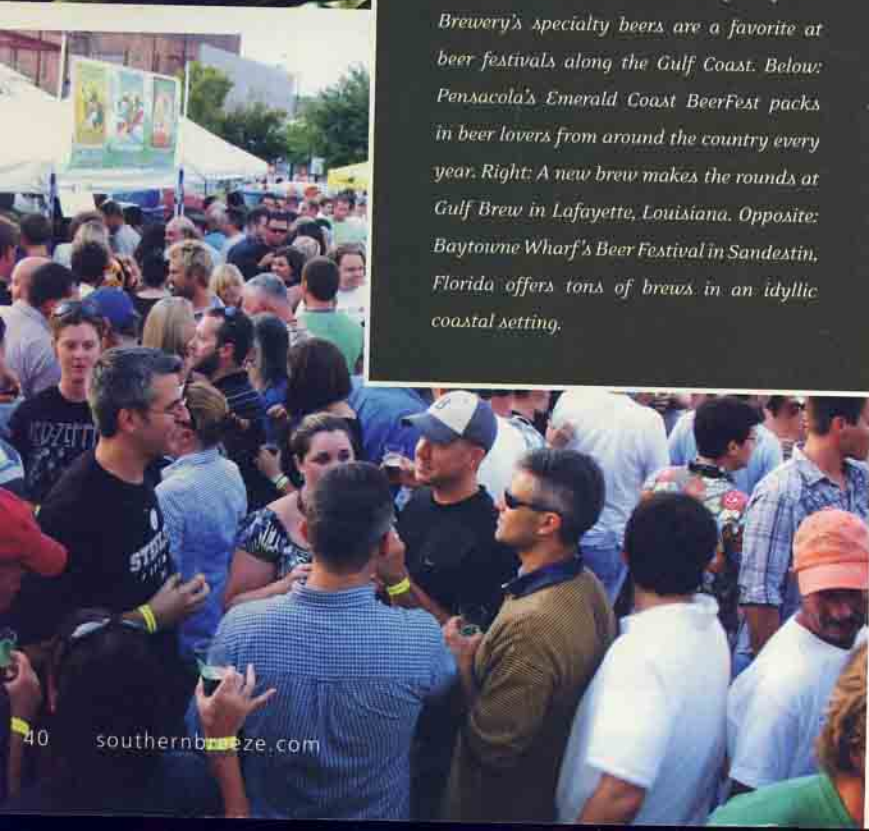




Top: Kibn, Mississippi-based Luzy Magnolia Brewery's specialty beers are a favorite at beer festivals along the Gulf Coast. Below: Pensacola's Emerald Coast BeerFest packs in beer lovers from around the country every year. Right: A new brew makes the rounds at Gulf Brew in Lafayette, Louisiana. Opposite: Baytowne Wharf's Beer Festival in Sandestin, Florida offers tons of brews in an idyllic coastal setting.



southern brews

By KATHIE FARNELL



ALL ALONG THE GULF COAST, SUDS ARE FLOWING AT BEER FESTIVALS FEATURING OLD FAVORITES AS WELL AS DELICIOUS BREWS YOU'VE GOT TO TASTE TO BELIEVE! SALUD!



the beer hunter

Beer festivals happen throughout the year. For more information, check the following websites:

Baytowne Wharf Beer Fest

Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, Florida:
www.sandestin.com/Baytowne

Destin Beer Festival

Destin, Florida: www.chanswineworld.com

Gulf Brew

Lafayette, Louisiana: www.GulfBrew.com

Dauphin Street International Beer Fest

Mobile, Alabama: www.ncsmobile.org

Emerald Coast Beer Festival

Pensacola, Florida: www.emeraldcoastbeerfest.com

Beer festivals—a somewhat less-dressy alternative to the ever-popular wine festival—have established an enthusiastic following along the Gulf Coast. From laid-back to cutting-edge, these brewfests add their own brand of yeasty charm to the beach.

The Acadiana Center for the Arts in Lafayette, Louisiana, was inspired to launch a beer festival after seeing the success other nonprofits had in putting on wine festivals. Events coordinator Rose Courville notes that Lafayette's annual Gulf Brew once nearly foundered on its own success. "The first year, we had planned for four-hundred guests and one-thousand showed up!" she says. The one-day event adjusted its supply of beer accordingly and for the past couple of years has been a sellout. Last year's Gulf Brew, held July 25 in downtown Lafayette, was sponsored in part by Tobacco Free Living and featured nearly 80 different beers. One of the highlights of the festival was the presence of the local Dead Yeast Society, crafty home brewers who enthralled the crowd with some of their more extreme beers, among them entries made using everything from watermelon to hot sauce.

The Florida Panhandle resort of Sandestin presents its Baytowne Wharf Beer Fest each October. The 2008 festival featured beers from 32 breweries, including specialty and hard-to-find brews. The fest—which takes place in Sandestin's Village of Baytowne Wharf—kicked off with a VIP beer tasting led by John Lasseter of local partner Goldring Gulf Distributors. The tasting, set in Lumpy's Wine Bar (Lumpy is a dachshund, and no, I don't know if he drinks) featured a selection of craft beers including a couple of unusual items—Orange Blossom Honey Beer from Florida and Lazy Magnolia Brewery's Southern Pecan beer.

John likes craft beer festivals as an easy way to introduce visitors to new beers. "Beer lovers can treat themselves to a new taste that they are not likely to sample anywhere else," he says. "Then, people can find places that serve the brand or stock up with cases straight from the brewer." The 2009 festival is set for October 23 and 24 and will feature more than 100 beers from all over the United States and Germany, as well as live entertainment.

Nearby Destin is the setting for the area's longest-running beer festival. Chan's Wine World in Destin celebrated its seventh annual Destin Beer Festival in March 2009 with more than 200 beers from all over. In addition to seminars and presentations led by brewmeisters from regional and national breweries including Louisiana's Abita and Atlanta's Sweetwater, the festival, which was billed as "Beer, Blues, Barbecue and Brats" featured chef Alison Porter cooking at an open-air grilling area.

The festival is a juried event and judges picked the top brews in a variety of categories. In past years, Rogue Ales from Oregon has taken top awards along with Bell's Brewery from Michigan and



Opposite: Sampling the suds at the Baytowne Wharf Beer Festival. Beers, ales, lagers...it's all good at the Emerald Coast Beer Festival in Pensacola (left) and Lafayette's GulfBrew (above).

“BEER LOVERS CAN TREAT THEMSELVES TO A NEW TASTE THAT THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO SAMPLE ANYWHERE ELSE.”

Stone Brewery from San Diego. For 2009, Bell's Brewery Amber Ale shared Best in Show honors with a Belgian pale ale, Leffe Blonde. The festival is not the only time to visit Chan's for a little education; Jim Blanchett, Chan's "beer guy," hosts beer dinners throughout the year, demonstrating how beers are selected to complement each course.

Mobile, Alabama, is the site of the annual Dauphin Street International Beer Fest, which descends on the downtown area each August. The festival, which highlights the Lower Dauphin Street district, brings crowds to an area of town which has been the focus of a gradual revitalization over the past 12 years of the festival. Festival organizer Chris Barraza of the City of Mobile's Department of Neighborhood and Community Services says that for the area, it's a chance to bring in new business by exposing crowds—2,400 attended the festival in 2008—to its bars and restaurants. "It's a night of bar-hopping. We have 23 or 24 venues, each serving some of the new beers from the distributors," Chris explains. "They feature a mix of international beers and micro-brews. We have our festival the weekend before Labor Day each year to kick off the fall season."

In addition to beers from all over, the festival gives visitors the chance to try the down-home special brews of Hurricane Brewing Company on Dauphin Street. All brewed on-site, these beers include the evocatively named Insurance Adjustor Pale Ale and Floating Car Blonde Ale, as well as Storm Surge Stout. Tickets to the event are available from any of the more than two dozen venues (which include everything from bars to restaurants to private clubs). Because the festival takes place within a manageable radius, patrons can also take advantage of a free ride on the city trolley cars which travel a loop through the downtown area.

The Emerald Coast Beer Festival, held each September in

Pensacola, Florida, is sponsored by the Escambia Bay Homebrew Club, which sees the event as a way to bring breweries and homebrew clubs together to introduce the public to new frontiers in beer. The September 2009 event will be held in the middle of historic downtown Pensacola at Seville Quarter. Club president Pat Johnson notes that the Homebrew Club uses the event as a charity fundraiser. "We raise thousands of dollars for Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the Independence Fund, a Marine charity for wounded soldiers," Pat says.

The festival, which features more than 200 different beers, is enjoyed as much by the brewers as by the beer-fancying public. "We take care of our brewers," Pat says. "We pay for their rooms on Pensacola Beach and shuttle them back and forth to downtown Pensacola. We also pay for them to stay Saturday night so they can spend a non-working day at the beach. It's like a working vacation for them so they all want to come." Breweries participating have included everything from the Yazoo Brewing Company of Nashville to Ft. Lauderdale's Holy Mackerel Brewery, along with Pensacola's own McGuire's Irish Pub.

Homebrew clubs, including the Homebrewers Underground of Fort Walton Beach and the LA Lagers of Mobile, bring their best beers to the festival. Beachgoers are catered to by the Seville Quarter shuttle bus which makes trips from Pensacola Beach Resort to and from the festival. Ticketholders are issued a 6-oz. souvenir sampling glass and invited to sample all the brews offered by breweries, homebrew clubs, and distributors. Pat Johnson sums up the offerings: "We try to serve a sampling of the best beer currently being brewed in the Southeast and we think you'll find something to your liking."

Sun, surf, and beer—the Gulf Coast just doesn't get much better than that! ●