

Ale Trail Adventure

Craft brews dominate the downtown spotlight

By Dianna Stampfler

SOME VISITORS MAY THINK THE designation “Beer City USA” is something new for Grand Rapids, but beer actually has been brewed in the state’s second-largest city since the late 1830s. Today, the surrounding Kent County region boasts about 40 amazing breweries, with a dozen in the greater downtown area.

Grand Rapids emerged as a world-class beverage destination when it was honored with Beer City USA accolades in national polls back in 2012. To complement that, *USA Today* readers later recognized the town as having the “Best Beer Scene.”

To promote these beer city titles and keep this vibrant brand booming, Experience Grand Rapids, the local visitors bureau, created two programs to guide tourists and locals on their beer explorations. The Beer City Ale Trail guide lets visitors map out a tour of local brewers around Kent County.

Once beer fans are smitten by the variety and flavors, it’s on to becoming a Beer City Brewsader after getting stamped (in the Beer City Brewsader app) at eight of 40-plus different beer destinations. That will earn them special gear and additional perks. More details are available on the bureau’s website.

Here’s a look at several local favorites:

- Established in 1997, Founders Brewing Co. has become the city’s largest operation and was named the “World’s 3rd Best Brewery” by *rate-beer.com* (2013). Its energetic venue on Grandville Avenue SW has indoor and outdoor fun spaces, live music, savory sandwiches, and a well-stocked retail shop. Popular brews are Centennial IPA, All Day



Founders Brewing Co.'s taproom attracts beer lovers from around the state (photo taken pre-COVID-19).

IPA, Breakfast Stout, Red’s Rye, and Solid Gold.

- City Built Brewing, which opened in 2017 on Monroe Avenue, brought a Puerto Rican flare to the city and expanded the neighborhood’s culinary offerings. Guests rave about the pork belly or beef cheek tacos, the distinctive and addictive “Spokes” (fried and flavored wheat duros), and Cacophony Society, a triple-barrel-aged imperial stout.

While breweries have a longstanding history in Grand Rapids, distilleries have emerged as welcome additions to the local craft beverage culture.

- Long Road Distillers on West Leonard Street was the first distillery to operate in the city when it opened in 2015. Using herbs, grains, fruits, and other ingredients sourced from around Michigan, its award-winning spirits include Aquavit (named Best in Show in 2017 by the American Craft Spirits Association). Three of its signature cocktails — The Polish Falcon, Teta’s Lemonade, and Long Road

GnT — are available for takeout in a four-pack of 12-ounce cans.

- In early 2021, Wise Men Distillery of Kentwood (named one of the Top 10 Best Up and Coming Distilleries in the U.S. by *USA Today*) opened its second tasting room in McKay Tower on Monroe Center Street. At a mere 638 square feet, this downtown location focuses on signature handcrafted cocktails in an intimate setting.
- Detroit-based Two James Spirits recently opened a Grand Rapids location attached to the 7 Monks Tap Room on Michigan Street, in the Medical Mile section of town. Belly up to the 18-foot bar and sample Grass Widow Whiskey, crafted from a resurrected pre-Prohibition recipe. They all sound amazing! Cheers. 🍷

PLAN IT!

Experience GR
experiencegr.com
 Michigan Craft Beer and Spirits
mibeer.com