

BEER TOURISM IN SCANDINAVIA, REVISITED!

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Back in May 2012, I devoted my debate column – this was before I moved these into the editorial space where they belong! – to the question of why there is no systematic, well-marketed, commercial and specific beer tourism in our countries.

I shall refrain from repeating all the excellent and still valid arguments for why beer tourism to Scandinavia should already now be a booming business to the benefit of the breweries here as well as for the hotels, restaurants, and all the other industries that cater to the tourists. In short, to the benefit of our national economies as such. What could be a nobler purpose?

But already having voiced my unequivocal opinions on the frustrating state of affairs related to beer tourism in Scandinavia back in 2012 – and, as far as I can see, nothing at all has happened since 2012 in respect to drawing tourists to Scandinavia with the brewing industry as a highly prioritized part of the experience offered to the tourists – why go back to this topic once more? Well, I hope that you will agree with me, if you read on, that this is actually relevant, as there are both new arguments for beer tourism in Scandinavia and new areas of synergy between the beer scenes and the other ‘selling points’ that already today attract very significant numbers of tourists to our region.

A few weeks ago, I read the following ‘advertorial’ on the beer website and news service ‘WeeklyPint.com’ :

‘Journey through America’s first (and probably favorite) national park all while sipping on some seriously tasty suds. Who wouldn’t want to hike, bike, horseback ride, and raft their way to five Montana breweries in the incredible greater Yellowstone ecosystem?’

...Maybe you have a taste for European beer? Belgium has seen an unparalleled reputation for specialty beers ever since

the Middle Ages. Sample some of the world’s most elusive and unique beers all while casually biking and hiking through the beautiful Belgian countryside on Zephyr’s Belgian Bike, Hike, and Beer Adventure...

Or if you would prefer to leave the physical activity for another time, try Taste Vacations, Zephyr’s sister company, that focuses on beer, wine, food, and spirits tours with unique experiences not available to the everyday traveler. Taste Vacations also offers a Belgium Beer Tour that focuses on the food and culture of this amazing country.’

This made me again think about the sad state of beer tourism in Scandinavia, but after first having satisfied myself with the argument that I already have done my bit to try to change this. And although, like so many other of my ‘crusades’ in SBR, this one did not result in the slightest reaction, not to mention bring about changes in the state of things, I could not help but reflect a bit further. And the mere fact that this ‘advertorial’ had made its way to the WeeklyPint made me conclude that beer tourism is becoming a more common thing. At least in the US, which is always a decade or so ahead of us when it comes to all things related to craft beer. And then I noticed this sentence: “Sample some of the world’s most elusive and unique beers all while casually biking and hiking through the beautiful Belgian countryside...” Well, of course! Biking and hiking makes sense when you’re sampling beer! But that’s not the interesting aspect of the sentence. In my view, the interesting thing is the implicit statement that holidays in which the participants are biking and hiking are also now a selling point in the US. Firstly, this made me think of the fact that we here in Scandinavia – possibly somewhat more in Denmark than elsewhere – consider biking an important part of daily life, and that everything, from the landscape (OK – this is really only true of Denmark!) to the way the public roads and streets are laid out and regulated, encourages biking as much as possible. So there would actually be a synergy in arranging beer tourism in Denmark/Scandinavia based on cycling and hiking. The next leap of thought was very obvious: If there’s a synergy between biking/hiking tourism and beer tourism, would it not be an obvious thought that there might be other things that could work in synergy with Scandinavian beer tourism?



So my focus in this editorial is to look at these potential synergies that would make beer tourism more varied and thus also much more appealing to a broader customer base. And, from just a 15-minute, one-man brainstorm, a number of synergies emerged:

- The **'New Nordic Cuisine'** is still, as it was back in 2012, attracting unprecedented attention worldwide. Maybe it has become a bit more 'mainstream' than it was back then. But this obviously is only positive for us, as the flow of 'foodies' – a concept that was barely recognized in 2012 – coming to Scandinavia to visit 'Noma', 'Geranium' or other of the all-time-high number of Michelin star restaurants in Scandinavia continues.
- **'Nordic Noir'** is the new 'black' in entertainment, nearly worldwide – movies and TV series being the most prominent examples. 'The Killing', 'Borgen', 'The Bridge', etc. have made tens of millions of people in the UK, the US and many Western European countries become madly fascinated by our region.
- **The Vikings**, their era, their history and their influence on Western European culture have gained incredible new interest all over the Western world, too, in recent years, and that new focus on Vikings has attracted many tourists on its own.

Possibly driven by these factors, among other things of course, the positive, global interest in our region is at an all-time high. So there has never been a more opportune time to move on Scandinavian beer tourism.

It would seem logical and reasonable for us brewers to 'hook on' to this general craze for our culture. After all, we brewers live and brew according to this culture, and it comes through in our approach to brewing and in our beers. We may not notice it ourselves, as we are not able to 'see the forest for all the trees'. But it's there!

By now, Scandinavia has become, even more than in 2012, the most vibrant and innovative brewing scene in all of Europe. This amazing phenomenon will be of great interest to a lot of holiday makers outside of our own backyard. Remember that, in all the countries – China included – from where our tourists come, the interest in craft beer has grown significantly since the turn of the century. In many of these countries, it has literally exploded. Add to this that, since my first debate article on this topic, the Nordic Beer movement has gained tremendous momentum, only making our beer scenes in Scandinavia even more unique and interesting, as both the beers we can present to the tourists and the stories behind them now, with certainty, can be marketed as something you will not be able to find anywhere else.

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The old brewery-part from Carlsberg museum in Copenhagen

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BY NOW, SCANDINAVIA HAS BECOME, EVEN MORE THAN IN 2012, THE MOST VIBRANT AND INNOVATIVE BREWING SCENE IN ALL OF EUROPE. THIS AMAZING PHENOMENON WILL BE OF GREAT INTEREST TO A LOT OF HOLIDAY MAKERS OUTSIDE OF OUR OWN BACKYARD

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And we already know that our breweries do attract the interest of tourists in general. This is clearly demonstrated by the hordes of people paying a visit to Carlsberg as part of their agenda of things to do while in Copenhagen. Beside the fact that Carlsberg, of course, is a household name almost everywhere in the world, this is most certainly due to the fact that the tours at Carlsberg are among the attractions in Copenhagen that are actually marketed.

And try to stick your head into one of the many new craft beer bars in Copenhagen – none mentioned, none forgotten – and listen to the lively conversation: you will have to listen hard to detect any Danish spoken!

It just so happens that we are publishing an article called ‘La Route de la Bière’ by Jan Lichota in this issue of the SBR – how’s that for a leap in editorial brilliance! – on a joint Belgian, German and French initiative to market a flexible series of ‘beer trail tours’ in the respective countries. Jan’s very vivid record of his experience on just a single leg of such a trip should convince everyone of the magic in participating – at least I’m convinced! And, as with so many things, it’s just about getting started and getting the message out there effectively.

In 2012, I asked the following: ‘Maybe the reason that this opportunity as yet has not been utilized is that the craft brewing businesses are quite small and generally operated by people without much general business experience. So those of us involved in the new beer scene are maybe so much concerned with just getting our businesses up and running, solving the urgent daily issues that it has not appeared to us that we have

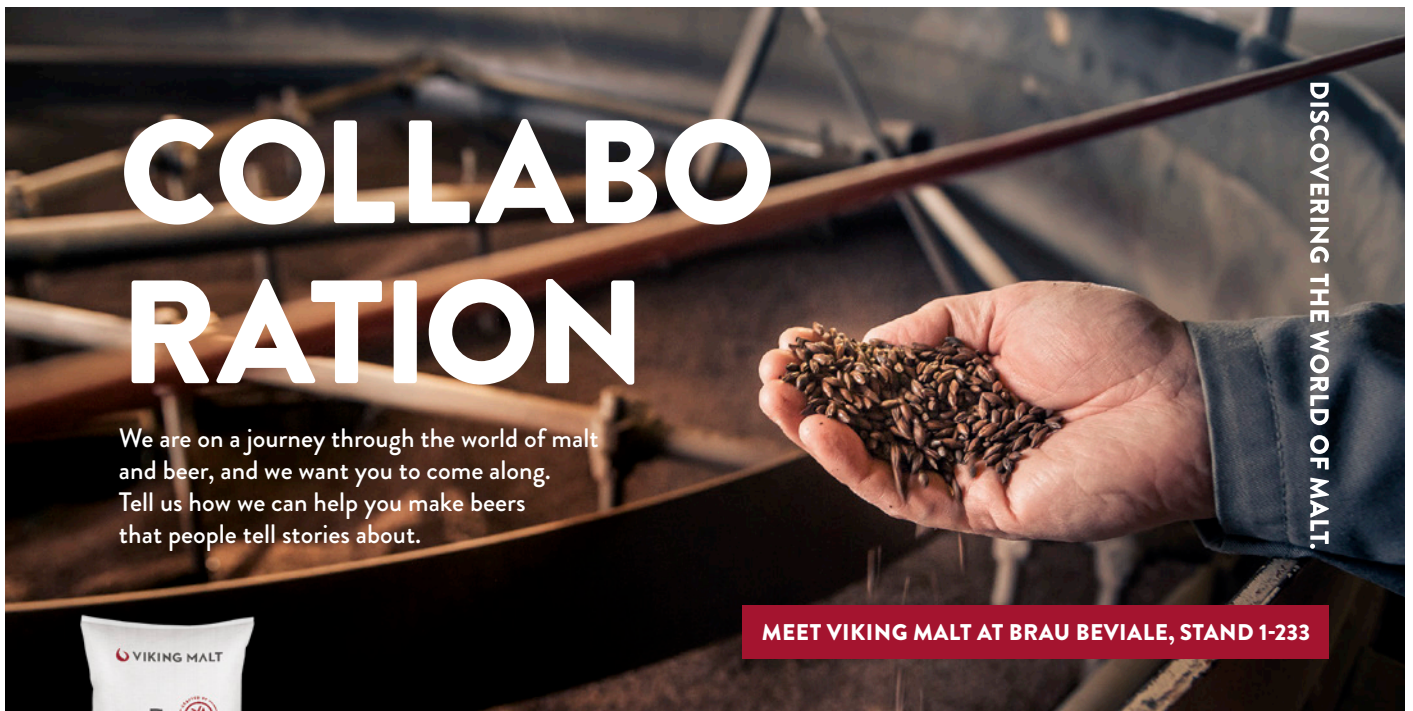
something unique going on?’ Since then, we have grown both as a market segment and as individual breweries, but that has only made us even more busy and focused on running our breweries in a steadily more competitive and ‘noisy’ market.

Should we, perhaps, ask our friends in our brewers’ associations to spend a little time exploring the opportunities? To me, at least, this definitely falls under their area of responsibility – which, if I’m not totally in the wild here, is to promote the interests of their members. And to create more business for the industry as a whole – directly in terms of the money the tourists will spend on tours, samples, beers to take with them and merchandise, as well as indirectly in terms of very effectively boosting the export of Scandinavian beers to their home countries when group after group of influential foodies and beer enthusiasts return home as dedicated ambassadors for our brilliant beers. But, as both the WeeklyPint advertorial and Jan’s article prove, others are moving ahead quickly in this area. So, if we do not want to miss out or be considered unimaginative copyists if it takes too long for us to act, we need to move on this now!

As usual, drop me a line at anders@kissmeyer.dk if you have comments or opinions about this editorial. And, better still, if you think you know the right person or company that could become interested in this extremely low-hanging fruit, let me know and I’ll personally follow up and make an effort to get things moving.

Drop me a line or two to let me know your views at anders@kissmeyer.dk. ☺

Anders Kissmeyer



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