

While the main focus of this book is on using hiking trails to get to breweries and hence beer is central, there is no getting around the fact that for Bavarians, beer is almost a food group and that it should be enjoyed with food. So, I won't shy away from giving you a few tips on the (mostly) hearty and somewhat lighter fare on offer.

THE DEFINITION OF BEER HIKING

Beer hiking is defined differently by its various adherents. For many, it means going for a beer after a hike, be it a brewpub or place that has good beer. For others, it is bringing beer along on a hike, to be enjoyed in a special place, away from the hustle and bustle of the world. In Bavaria, it is often walking on trails to reach brewpubs that you'd not be able to reach easily by public transportation. This has evolved into entire beer hiking trails where you pass multiple brewpubs en route. They can be relatively short or on the longer side, making an overnight stay at one of the brewpubs your best choice. I guess what they all have in common is they let you enjoy a refreshing beer after your time experiencing nature, be it a pleasant easy stroll or a more strenuous endeavor.

TRAIL AND BEER RATINGS

Ratings are by nature subjective and one person's easy hike is another person's difficult one. The hikes weren't always easy to place and it's best to look at the length of the hike and its elevation gain/loss to get the best idea. The same goes with beers. In particular, if you are coming from the US and are used to drinking very hoppy IPAs, you might find Bavarian beer not particularly bitter. The nuances are more subtle. Food also plays a part in a beer's perceived flavor as does the order in which you drink them. Drinking an array of beers at a brewpub can show the order effect well. Drinking a malty beer after a hoppy one can have consequences when it comes to your perception, and hence its rating. In general, I had a good idea what beer I was going to use for each hike and always drank that one first to avoid this. At the end of the day, and hike, each person is going to have their own favorites – by all means, drink the beer that sounds good to you. Since some of the beer names can be confusing, the guide provides some basic concept of what that beer is and its basic taste characteristics.

BEER STYLES

To explain the many styles of beer in Bavaria is outside the purview of this book. In general, you will be drinking lagers but they will not be the often bland, generic ones produced by the large conglomerates. They can vary in color from pale yellow to black. A light-colored beer can be stronger and/or more bitter than a dark one, and vice versa. Though you should admire a beer for its color, try not to let it interfere with the rest of your perceptions of it. I love having a friend who tells me they hate dark beer say that the one I told them to try was really good. Some basic German will help you pick by color. Remember Helles is light in color and Dunkles is dark. Pils is a safe-bet light one and Schwarzbier is black. Rauchbier (typical for Bamberg!) is smoky and though they vary in color, I've only seen a couple of truly light-colored ones. Aside from that, you'd be better off looking at what other people are drinking and order by pointing. In fact, if you go into a small brewpub in Franconia and order "ein Bier," you will get what

everyone else is drinking, the most popular one. That could be a dark beer or a light one, depending on the region. In much of Franconia, darker beer is still more popular, though often drier and fruitier than their southern Bavarian equivalents. Oh, and always remember that Bock is a strong beer, be it dark or light.

There aren't many ales brewed in Bavaria but Weizen, or Weißbier, is one of the most popular styles. It tends to be lighter in color and you'll generally see "dunkel" used in conjunction if it's not. Dampfbier is a rarity and in ways closer to English ale than it is to Bavarian beer.

So, you can see understanding Bavarian beer is not so easy. Well, not as easy as enjoying it. Prost!

