

Belgian Style Ales

The Kingdom of Belgium is a country in northwest Europe bordered by the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and France and is one of the founding and core members of the European Union. Belgium has a population of over ten million people, in an area of around 11,700 square miles (1/3 the size of Indiana). Belgium is politically divided into the Flemish north (Dutch speaking Flanders) and Wallonia, the French speaking south.



Belgian beer comprises the most varied and numerous collection of beers in the world. Belgian beer-brewing origins go back to the Middle-Ages, when monasteries began producing beers. In 1919, the “Vandervelde Act” prohibited the sale of spirits in pubs, inducing Belgian brewers to produce beers with a higher level of alcohol.

Belgian brewers are prone to brew high alcohol beers and are not adverse to the use of “adjunct” ingredients in their beers. Where German typically adhere to the Bavarian **Reinheitsgebot** (purity requirement) dating to 1516, Belgian brewers will use ingredients other than water, yeast, hops and malt. Candi sugar, fruit and various seasonings are common.

Many Belgian beers are bottle conditioned (re-fermented in the bottle) and Belgian drinkers are very particular to use the proper glass for each beer they consume.

BELGIAN STYLE BEERS

(see White Ales or Witbiers in our [White Ales](#) article, or see our article on [Trappist Ales](#))

Belgian Pale Ale

Produced by breweries with roots as far back as the mid-1700s, the most well-known examples were perfected after the Second World War with some influence from Britain, including hops and yeast strains. Belgian Pales are fruity and lightly to moderately spicy with a soft, smooth malt and relatively light hop character and low to very low phenols. May have an orange- or pear-like fruitiness, though not as fruity/citrusy as many other Belgian ales.

Saison

A seasonal summer style produced in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium. Originally brewed at the end of the cool season to last through the warmer months before refrigeration was common. Saison flavors consist of a combination of fruity and spicy flavors supported by a soft malt character, a low to moderate alcohol presence and tart sourness. The fruitiness is frequently citrusy (orange or lemon-like). The addition of one or more spices serve to add complexity.

Dubbel

Dark malt beer originated at monasteries in the Middle Ages, and was revived in the mid-1800s after the Napoleonic era. “Double” the malt. Dubbels are rich, complex and sweet on the palate, yet finish moderately dry. Raisin-y flavors are common; dried fruit flavors are welcome; clove-like spiciness is optional.

Tripel

Pale malt beer originally developed at the Trappist monastery at Westmalle. “Tripel” the malt. Tripels marry spicy, fruity and alcohol flavors supported by a soft malt character. Flavors are reminiscent of citrus fruit such as orange or sometimes lemon. A low to moderate spicy hop character is usually found.

Belgian Blond

Relatively recent development to further appeal to European Pils drinkers, becoming more popular as it is widely marketed and distributed. **Belgian Blond Ales** are smooth and light with a moderate malt sweetness initially, but they finish medium to dry with some smooth alcohol becoming evident in the aftertaste.

Belgian Strong Dark Ale

Most versions are unique in character reflecting characteristics of individual breweries. Moderately malty or sweet on palate, Strong Dark Ales can also be spicy and taste significantly of alcohol. The finish is variable depending on interpretation (authentic Trappist versions are moderately dry to dry, Abbey versions can be medium-dry to sweet).

Belgian Golden Strong Ale

Originally developed by the Moortgat (Duvel) brewery after WWII as a response to the growing popularity of Pilsner beers. The flavors of Tripels are often very similar to Belgian Tripels, but they are usually crisper, lighter and drier than Tripels.

Sour/Lambic Ale

Sour beer flavors are popular in Belgium in Pale, Fruit or Dark ales. Sourness is typically created by the bacteria *Saccharomyces*, *Lactobacillus* or *Brettanomyces*. Lambic beers allow for fermentation by naturally occurring yeast strains. The sourness of the beer is usually the dominant flavor and is sometimes alarming to first time drinkers, but the taste can be quickly acquired and many drinkers find the sour flavor to be very refreshing.