

India Pale Ales

In the early eighteenth century as **Porters** were becoming hugely popular in England, the British East India Company was establishing large colonies of merchants, tradesmen and British soldiers in India. And while England was busy building an empire on which the sun never set, demand for British beer was building in India.

The sea voyage to India took ships to the south Atlantic, around the horn of Africa and finally to India on a journey that would typically last about six months. The changing temperatures and rolling seas wreaked havoc with the beer and the Porters typically arrived sour, stale and flat.



The Royal Navy was eager to solve this problem and provide fresh, tasty beer for British soldiers and sailors, so they put the challenge in the 1780's to British brewers of the day to brew a beer that would last through the voyage to India. George Hodgson of the Bow Brewery in London surmised correctly that higher hop and alcohol levels would help to preserve his own **Pale Ale** through the difficult sea conditions, so he brewed a high hopped, high alcohol version of it that did the job, eventually earning the name **India Pale Ale**, or **IPA** for short. Hodgson's beer arrived in quite pleasant condition in India and soon other brewers like Bass followed suit, creating their own **IPAs** and the beer market in India exploded.

[Click here to read Hop Union's "Introduction to Hops."](#)

As Hodgson brewed his beer well over 200 years ago, we cannot be completely certain what it tasted like, but it seems clear that his export version of an **IPA** was extremely bitter and very high in alcohol. Other brewers copying Hodgson's recipe found that the high level of hops created a longer fermentation time and in order to shorten that time and to brew more beer, hop levels were reduced for the home country versions of **IPA**.

Over time, high hop and alcohol levels faded in popularity and during the twentieth century, the British version of the **IPA** was reworked accordingly. Many beer experts theorize that today's American **IPA** is closer in taste to George Hodgson's original **IPA** than many of its current British counterparts. That being said, there are two relatively distinct types of **IPAs**, the British and American versions, plus the "Imperial" or "Double" versions of the American style.

IPAs are very strong flavored, sturdy beers and as such they will hold up to many spicy and rich foods. Spicy Asian foods like Thai are perfect for them as well as Indian curry dishes (they are *India Pale Ales*, after all!). Sharp cheeses like limburger and many bleu cheeses are also well suited to IPAs. Salmon also pairs nicely with IPA's, but don't forget about the traditional beer and pizza pairing with this style! And drink an IPA from a pint glass while you're at it.



English IPAs

The British invented IPAs, as you have probably just read. Yet the India Pale Ale today is markedly different from the original IPA brewed for export to India by George Hodgson. From a production viewpoint, it was difficult to maintain the high hop levels that Hodgson pioneered in his original recipe as the higher hop levels slowed the fermentation process and more hops were, of course, more expensive. Additionally, it was soon found that while higher hops levels found an audience, an IPA with less hops than Hodgson's version was even more popular among British drinkers at home.

British IPAs today typically range from 5% to 7.5% abv and from 40 to 60 IBUs. IBUs are a measurement of bitterness in a beer that is calculated by specifics of the brewing process itself. The higher the IBU number, the more bitter a beer should be.

British IPAs are generally more balanced than their American counterpart, meaning that they have a higher malt content and a lower hop content than American IPAs (more sweet, less bitter!).

American IPAs

In America, IPAs have taken a more extreme route to popularity. Blessed with a relatively abundant hop crop and very tasty, high alpha acid hops (high alpha acid hops are more bitter than low alpha acid hops), American brewers have created IPAs that harken back to George Hodgson's original recipe with higher hop and alcohol levels. Almost every micro brewer produces an IPA these days and they are among the most popular beer styles with American craft beer drinkers who crave their citrusy or piney hop flavors.

American IPAs are typically a little bit higher in alcohol than their British cousins and while the hop content can be similar, many American IPAs go far beyond the British IPA in bitterness, sometimes getting to 70 or even 80 IBUs. The lesser malt content of American IPAs is usually overshadowed by their high hops.

The flavors found in American hops are highlighted in American IPAs and range from pine to resinous to citrus. In many IPAs, grapefruit flavors are very distinct.

Imperial & Double IPAs

A true showcase for hop flavor is to be found in the Imperial or Double IPA. Created by American brewers to satisfy the growing demand for extremely high hopped beers, Imperial IPAs are American IPAs with extreme hop contents. The word "Imperial" is used to signify an extreme beer, but the word "Double" is often used in its place.

Imperial IPAs usually range well over 7.5% abv and can have IBUs that measure into the 100+ range. There is a theory that most humans can't taste bitterness anywhere over the 90 IBU count, but no matter your taste, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the high hop content of these extreme beers.

