

Scottish & Irish Ales

The British Isles have long been a center of great brewing and many of the beer styles that we recognize today were developed there over the past several centuries. Agriculture, history, tradition and culture conspired to make the British, Irish and Scottish people great brewers, but those same factors also created distinct differences among the three and ultimately, each country left its own stamp on brewing history.

Despite their geographic proximity, agriculture varies dramatically between Britain, Ireland and Scotland. Agriculture is critical to beer since barley and hops are primary ingredients. Barley flourishes in all of Ireland and Scotland and is used both for beer and for whiskey (Scotch or Irish whiskey, depending on the location). To this day, Irish and Scottish beers are low in hop taste and both rely heavily on barley malt for flavor.

Scottish and Irish beers are typically ales, though the Scots also began brewing lagers before anyone else in the British Isles.

Scottish Beers -

For the most part, **Scottish Ales** are slightly malty, low in hops and they are noted for their peaty (earthy or smoky) character. While malt is clearly the primary flavor, it is not usually overly strong.

Scottish Ales are generally defined by their relative strength and alcohol content. Sometime during the 19th century, the shilling system of defining Scottish ales came into common use and persists today. The use of currency (the shilling) to define beer styles may be related to the taxes that were imposed on beers. Taxes were often levied based on the relative strength of beers, so the higher strength Scottish beers are labeled with the higher amount of shillings.

While Scottish Ales usually share the same flavor characteristics, they are defined by their relative strength starting with **Scottish Light Ales**. In shillings, this is what is known as a **60 shilling** beer and is very low in alcohol, typically ranging around 3% abv. As these low alcohol beers are not very durable, there is little presence of this type of beer in the United States.

A slightly higher alcohol beer (about or under 4% abv), the **Scottish Heavy Ale** or **70 shilling** beer is more popular than its lighter cousin, but is still relatively rare in the United States.

Much more popular in the United States is the **Scottish Export Ale** or **80 shilling** beer. Alcohol content ranges from 4 to 5%, which is more in line with what Americans expect in beer and fairly typical for many American beers. Not only do the authentic Scottish brews do well, but many American micro-brew versions of Scottish Ales fit into this category. Beers like **Belhaven Scottish Ale**, **Broughton Merlin's Ale** and **Belhaven St.**

Andrews are popular Scottish imports, while domestic brewers do well with beers like **Robert the Bruce** from Indiana's own Three Floyds Brewing.

In the more extreme range are the **90 - 160 shilling** beers, also called **Wee Heavy** beers. These beers range upwards of 6% abv and sometimes get into the 10% or higher range. **Belhaven Wee Heavy** is a classic example from Scotland. Others in this skull-splitting category include **Broughton Old Jock**, **Tracquair House Ale** and **Orkney Skullsplitter**.

Irish Ales -

Irish Ales, also known as Red Ales, are typically brewed with large amounts of chocolate malt. Chocolate malt is a dark, rich malt that gives Irish Ales their deep red color. An easy-drinking pint. Malt-focused with an initial sweetness and a roasted dryness in the finish. Sometimes brewed as a lager, though generally they are ales.

Cuisine

Both Scottish and Irish Ales are great with red meats, particularly pork and beef. Try them with your next barbecue, or pork chop dinner!

Drink these beers from a Pint Glass.

