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# A Hudson Valley brewery trail

August 20, 2009 By ALISON GREGOR Special to Newsday



The Peekskill Brewery Restaurant, Bar and Brewpub in Peekskill is the newest of the group, situated on the town's Riverfront Green. It doubles as a restaurant serving traditional American dishes. (Credit: Alison Gregor)

Handcrafted beers have slowly been capturing the imaginations (and the palates) of Americans. Along the way, the Hudson Valley has become awash in places to sample brews with their own regional flavor.

The state has even created the Empire State Brewery Trails to help aficionados find the path to a good draft ([iloveny.com/brewerytrails](http://iloveny.com/brewerytrails)).

As a plus, the late-summer and early fall scenery along the Hudson River can be just as pleasurable as the local craft brews.

## ABOUT THE REGION

It stands to reason that craft breweries would flourish in [New York](#). Some of the nation's earliest brewing was done by German immigrants in [New York City](#) - where Stone Street was the first street in [North America](#) to be paved, due to its concentration of beer brewers.

By the mid-19th century, upstate [New York](#) had developed into the country's leading grower of hops. Mildew blight, aphids and Prohibition wiped out that industry, leaving a smattering of abandoned hop barns in Central New York. More recently, the craving for craft beers has spurred the creation of many microbreweries and brew pubs with their own regional flavor.

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## HOW TO TASTE

Like fine wine and good cigars, craft beer is best enjoyed slowly. To assist you in appreciating the flavor, most breweries will offer a tasting flight of their craft brews.

## ALONG THE TRAIL

Hudson Valley breweries keep popping up. You can easily visit a few of them as part of an overnight or weekend trip to the region - but, of course, you'll need to have a designated driver.

## THE PLACES

**Defiant Brewing Co.**, 6 E. Dexter Plaza, Pearl River, 845-920-8602, [defiantbrewing.com](http://defiantbrewing.com)

**THE SCENE** Not technically a brew pub, Defiant does keep bar hours and has a bar where you can sample the brewery's signature beer, Muddy Creek Lager. Besides this sweet lager, with its nutty aroma and sage aftertaste, Defiant also offers a rotating selection and seasonal beers. Its bartenders, all brewing apprentices, are good-humored but take their beer seriously. Instead of beer nuts, patrons get chunks of the brewery's own barbecued meats to nibble while bartenders fill mugs and talk with patrons about the art of beer-making.

**SPECIALTIES** Little Thumper is a rotating beer that follows a simple formula: It always uses a single malt and a single hop. Prohibition Lager has special ingredients making it true to that time when strong drink was banned. The Belgian Style Tripel Ale is a mouthwatering abbey-style ale with a fruity flavor and spicy finish.

**Captain Lawrence Brewing Co.**, 99 Castleton St., Pleasantville, 914-741-2337, [captainlawrencebrewing.com](http://captainlawrencebrewing.com)

**THE SCENE** Billed as "Westchester's only craft brewery," Captain Lawrence brews about five beers year-round - most are on draft. The bar often is standing-room-only and highly convivial during its limited hours, when several bartenders keep their beefy, beer-drinking arms in shape pulling the tap handles. Patrons are welcome to do tastings and fill up their "growlers" 4-7 p.m. Fridays and noon-6 p.m. Saturdays.

**SPECIALTIES** The "Freshchester" Pale Ale has a clean bitterness with a woodsy aroma. The Sun Block Wheat Beer is a hazy Belgian-style wheat beer that's evocative of cream soda. The Captains Reserve Imperial I.P.A. ([India](#) Pale Ale) is a hoppy beer with a citrus taste that won a best beer in New York prize in 2006.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Brewmaster Scott Vaccaro's father, Vincent, conducts free brewery tours on Saturdays, every hour on the hour, and thus his son has dedicated a specialty beer to him: St. Vincent's Dubbel. This caramel-colored classic Belgian-style abbey ale is rich and malty.

**Peekskill Brewery Restaurant, Bar and Brewpub**, 55 Hudson Ave., Peekskill, 914-734-2337, [thepeekskillbrewery.com](http://thepeekskillbrewery.com)

**THE SCENE** The newest of this trail's bunch, Peekskill's microbrewery operation is still quite small. Its few tanks are tucked into a hallway that joins a casual, full-scale restaurant with a large barroom where food is served.



Co-owner Morgan E. Berardi says Peekskill has several original beers, plus a medley of brews from various regional craft breweries, such as Defiant and Captain Lawrence. There are 14 craft beers on tap (not including its own) and about 100 varieties of bottled craft beers.

**SPECIALTIES** Its flagship beer is the [Paramount](#) Pale Ale - a session beer with a slightly minty flavor and just the right amount of bitterness. The Hefeweizen is a mild seasonal beer with a buttery flavor. On a recent visit, a serious beer-drinker scoffed at the seasonal Strawberry Hefeweizen as something "for the ladies," but he missed a fruity and spicy wheat beer that's frothy and refreshing with strawberries in the mug.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Besides pub staples such as the ploughman's platter and brewery wings, the restaurant has traditional American dishes, and offers a beer tasting menu for \$25-\$35.

**Gilded Otter Brewing Co.**, 3 Main St., New Paltz, 845-256-1700, [gildedotter.com](#)

**THE SCENE** New Paltz is a laid-back, funky college town whose residents turn out in droves to support the hometown brewery, which typically provides entertainment on weekend evenings. It's perched near the Wallkill River in an airy building made of stone and light wood with lots of windows. Brewmaster Darren Currier crafts about 20 varieties a year. A tasting might include as many as eight beers, all of which, we found, tasted better once allowed to warm up a bit from the temperature at which they were served.

**SPECIALTIES** The Rail Trail Pale Ale has a zesty citrus flavor and mild bitterness. The Düsseldorf Altbier is a brown ale with a toasted biscuit flavor that is a two-time bronze medal-winner at the Great American Beer Festival.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Try some of the Otter's spent grain brewery pizza - a novel way to repurpose the excess grains used in some beers - or another dish from its full menu.

**WHILE YOU'RE THERE** New Paltz's Historic Huguenot Street (845-255-1660, [huguenotstreet.org](#)) is a nearby tour-able street with quaint 17th century stone houses. The Gilded Otter pays tribute to it with the Huguenot Street American Lager, a very light Pilsner with a lip-smacking corn flavor.

**Hyde Park Brewing Co.**, 4076 Albany Post Rd., Hyde Park, 845-229-8277, [hydeparkbrewing.com](#)

**THE SCENE** One of the breweries that got the whole craft-beer craze started 15 years ago in the Upper Hudson Valley, Hyde Park Brewing Co. not only serves handcrafted lagers and the occasional ale, but also offers choice beef steaks. German-style brewmaster John Eccles tends to be traditional (for instance, he shuns fruit in his beers) and has had plenty of time to perfect his lagers and ales. In summer, there's outdoor dining and live music Wednesday and Friday nights.

**SPECIALTIES** The brew pub's signature beer (also served at sister brew pub, Skytop) is Winkle Lager, a Bohemian-style beer that's crisp and clean with a slightly spicy, almost peppery, finish. The Rough Rider Red Lager is an auburn beer with German and Belgian malts that references Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Big Easy Blonde is a Munich-style Helles (light lager) with a logo that calls to mind World War II plane art.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Brewing apprentice Lucas Marmo is happy to give tours when not too busy with customers. The steakhouse's menu also offers German specialties such as a knockwurst platter and a schnitzel, plus seafood, burgers and pizza.



**Keegan Ales**, 20 St. James St., Kingston, 845-331-2739

**THE SCENE** Keegan Ales is the baby of Long Island native Tommy Keegan, whose father runs the BrickHouse Brewery in Patchogue. Keegan brews three varieties and is working on a fourth. The brewery has picnic tables in the bar area and peanut shells on the floor, plus a small restaurant area that's also used as a performance venue. It's been recognized as one of the best craft breweries in the Hudson Valley and New York State.

**SPECIALTIES** Old Capital is a clean and crisp golden ale with a name referencing Kingston as the first capital of the state. Mother's Milk is a style of beer called "milk stout" - it's rich and creamy with a silky finish. Keegan is currently brewing Joe Mama's Milk (with coffee and molasses) to serve commercially. The brew won the award for best beer at this year's TAP New York festival.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Keegan occasionally gives brewery tours, and the brewery has live rock bands Thursday and Friday nights; acoustic music Saturdays; and jazz music Sundays - very rarely charging a cover.

**Skytop Steakhouse and Brewing Co.**, 237 Forest Hill Dr., Kingston, 845-340-4277, [skytopsteakhouse.com](http://skytopsteakhouse.com)

**THE SCENE** As the sister pub to the Hyde Park steakhouse, Skytop sometimes carries one or two of the same brews, but it also serves up some original beers in a space with eye-catching views of Kingston and the verdant Shawangunk Ridge.

The brew pub has the feel of a Catskill Mountain lodge or chalet, with a big open dining area under hardwood ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and an expansive granite-topped bar. There's also an outdoor cobblestone patio.

**SPECIALTIES** Aiden Michael's Amber Lager is the most popular brew - the ale yeast beer has a pleasing floral bouquet and malty taste (think Samuel Adams Boston Lager or George Killian's Irish Red). The Highland Diesel Scotch Ale is a reddish-amber ale with malty tones. If you've ever wanted to make an ice-cream float with a stout (or even if you've never considered it), you'll appreciate the Iron Mitts Irish Dry Stout, which has an espresso taste of roasted malts that stops just shy of being sweet in the finish.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Skytop's ample portions of Continental fare are quite tasty. The pub is also the home of the Brew HaHa, a comedy night that takes place one Friday every other month. Skytop also offers live entertainment and dancing Friday and Saturday nights.

## WHERE TO STAY

You'll need a break from beer-tasting - and a spot to spend the night if you're imbibing. Options abound all along the trail. Here are some suggestions.

**RiverView Bed & Breakfast**, South Nyack, 347-744-9322, [riverviewbnb.com](http://riverviewbnb.com)

**RATES** From \$150

Try this charming Dutch Colonial bed-and-breakfast inn (circa 1835) or opt for its sister location, the Firehouse in Piermont, which was the hamlet's first horse-drawn firehouse.

**Castle on the Hudson**, 400 Benedict Ave., Tarrytown, 914-631-1980, [castleonthehudson.com](http://castleonthehudson.com)

**RATES** From \$265

This Norman-style castle, built at the turn of the last century, charms with 31 guest rooms, turrets and towers, Romanesque archways and Gothic windows.

**The Thayer Hotel**, 674 Thayer Rd., West Point, 800-247-5047, [thethayerhotel.com](http://thethayerhotel.com)

**RATES** From \$155 (some packages include meals and extras)

This national historic landmark perches on a hilltop at West Point Military Academy, with 151 rooms and stunning views of the Hudson River.

**Maplestone Inn Bed & Breakfast**, 541 Rte. 32 S., New Paltz, 845-255-6861, [maplestoneinn.com](http://maplestoneinn.com)

**RATES** From \$210

This renovated 1790 farmhouse and barn, now a family-run inn surrounded by sugar maples, is an intimate way to experience the farm country of upstate New York. Revel in a gorgeous view of the Shawangunks.

**Journey Inn Bed & Breakfast**, 1 Sherwood Place, Hyde Park, 845-229-8972, [journeyinn.com](http://journeyinn.com)

**RATES** From \$150

Just north of the Hyde Park Brewing Co., Journey Inn is an oasis with seven rooms decorated in a cultural (Australian) or historical (Roosevelt) theme.

## THE LINGO

**Craft brewery:** Produces less than 2 million barrels a year

**Microbrewery:** Brews up to 60,000 barrels a year

**Brew pub:** Venue that brews beer and has a bona fide restaurant

**Growler:** Half-gallon glass container for beer

**Hops:** Bitter-tasting plant added to counter the sweetness of fermented malt

**Session beer:** Made with less than 5 percent alcohol

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