

MELBOURNE & SYDNEY

Taps turned on for craft brewers

Beer tourism is on the rise and one event has itself become a traveller, writes ROSS LEWIS

The local pub isn't enough any more. As the good beer revolution spreads across the world, drinkers are marching towards new freedoms in taste.

With a feast of brews from which to choose, the new-age beer zealot isn't just traversing town to chase a favourite bottle or can.

They're flocking to interstate festivals and flying abroad on tours to century-old mash tuns. Beer trails are booming across the US. Some breweries are growing into franchises that provide a worldwide itinerary for aficionados.

Later this year, actor, dancer restaurateur and beer geek, Paul Mercurio, will ferry a crew of lovers of the European styles to Belgium, where some of the oldest recipes are still producing lambics, Flemish reds, tripels and sours.

And from this month, 30,000 thirsty throats will be soothed at this year's Great Australasian Beer Spectacular



The Great Australian Spectacular sets up at the Melbourne Royal Exhibition Building.

— yes the “p” is deliberate — series. The overarching rule for GABS is all beers must be first-time tries by the contributing breweries. They can't have been previously

released commercially. The result is that about 120 radical beverages are poured from kegs in refrigerated shipping containers into 85ml sample cups for punters to try during five-hour sessions.

The first 2016 event was held in Melbourne last weekend with Sydney taking its turn today.

At the five previous GABS in Victoria, beers such as Two Bird's Taco, yes it had the Cali-Mex taste, Praline (La Sirene's Belgian chocolate ale), Umami Monster from Garage Project that features kelp and sea water and the Yeastie Boys' Gunnamatta, an India Pale Ale infused with Earl Grey tea, tickled the tastebuds.

This year, 7 Cent Brewery produces a drop made with belly button yeast. After a taste test last week the author can

declare there was no lint.

GABS started at The Local Taphouse in St Kilda in 2011 but now fills the exquisitely ornate Melbourne Royal Exhibition Building for five sessions over three days.

It was again the climax to Good Beer Week, which earlier this month featured 270 events in Victoria.

Last year, US magazine Beer Connoisseur rated GABS “one of the top-20 beer festivals in the world”. And this year 18,000 attended the Melbourne series.

Steve Jeffares, who co-founded GABS with business partner Guy Greenstone believed people flocked to the beer extravaganza to try something different.

“It is up to 450 unique beers

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The crowd at GABS 2015.

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