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Five beer festivals that will keep fall fresh and fun

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By JAN ZESCHKY

Sure, summer may well be the season of peak beer, when nothing satisfies and refreshes more than a cool lager, kölsch or dry-hopped sour.

It could also be termed peak beer-festival season, when long sunny days encourage booth hopping and sampling at one of B.C.'s many celebrations of brews.

But one of the great things about craft beer is its cycle of seasons and tasting how styles evolve with the changing weather.

Generally speaking, as autumn creeps in, the days get shorter and the beer gets maltier, as beer drinkers crave something richer and slightly sweeter for the colder nights.

And how better to celebrate the reappearance of certain styles than with tailor-made beer festivals? The fall beer calendar is dominated by two types of celebration, both related to the harvest.

The more modern type celebrates the hop harvest by showcasing local “fresh-hop” or “wet-hop” beers, which are brewed with hops picked fresh from the bine (instead of having been dried) and have a correspondingly vibrant character.

The other, older celebration is Oktoberfest, the legendary Munich festival that is now emulated around the world to the extent that, yes, there is actually a consumer market for lederhosen outside of Bavaria.

Of course, there’s everything in between as well. Here are five beer fests you should definitely check out this fall:

Whistler Village Beer Festival: Main Event

Whistler’s third beer fest comes to a close this weekend with more than 60 breweries vying for your attention at the Olympic Plaza. Dress in layers: the opposite experiences of the first two years — high summer, then West Coast winter — proves there’s no telling what the mountain gods will serve up. But then all that matters is what the beer gods are serving up.

When: Sept. 17-18.

Where: Olympic Plaza, Whistler Village.

Tickets: \$40/day, includes three beer tokens.

More info: gibbonswhistler.com



Some Bavarian-inspired revelry at last year’s Harvest Haus in Queen Elizabeth Plaza in Vancouver. JONATHAN EVANS

Harvest Haus

B.C.’s glitziest Oktoberfest celebration pulls together imported German beer, local Oyama Sausage Co. wurst, pretzels and strudels, the best kind of worst German music and men

with swords into one tent in downtown Vancouver. Dress code: Oompah! Honourable “prosit” for Vancouver’s longest-running Oktoberfest at the Vancouver Alpen Club at 4875 Victoria Dr. (Sept. 23-24, Sept. 30-Oct. 1, Oct. 14-15) and the inaugural Port Moody Oktoberfest (Sept. 29-Oct. 2, Oct. 6-9).

When: Sept. 29-Oct. 9.

Where: Queen Elizabeth Plaza, Vancouver.

Tickets: From \$25/sitting.

More info: harvesthaus.com

Fresh to Death

Vancouver Island is teeming with breweries these days, and many of them will be offering their fresh-hop creations at this wee festival in Victoria. Seeing as the organizing team is the same one behind Victoria Beer Week, it’s pretty much guaranteed that what this event lacks in comparative size, it will more than deliver in quality.

When: Oct. 1.

Where: Centennial Square, Victoria.

Tickets: \$25, includes three beer tokens.

More info: At the [event’s Facebook page](#)

B.C. Hop Fest

But if you can swing it, the best place for a hop harvest festival is on a farm where they harvest hops — particularly in the Fraser Valley, where the crop is enjoying a craft beer-driven resurgence. Expect 30 breweries, five food trucks, farm tours and live entertainment. The Vine & Hops tour company also offers packages with a shuttle bus service between the venue and Vancouver.

When: Oct. 1.

Where: Kinloch Farms & BC Hop Company, Abbotsford.

Tickets: From \$35, including three beer tokens; Vine & Hops shuttle service plus ticket, \$70.

More info: bchop.ca/events/hop-fest/

Harrison Beer Fest

A cozier event as fall begins to segue into winter, Harrison Hot Springs’ annual beer celebration includes a 20-brewery-strong festival and a follow-up Oktoberfest dance. There’s also a cask event the night before. Several local hotels, motels and B&Bs are offering overnight packages as well.

When: Oct. 28 (cask event), Oct. 29 (beer festival, Oktoberfest dance).

Where: St. Alice Hall, Harrison Hot Springs.

Tickets: \$32, includes three beer tokens, food buffet; Oktoberfest is \$44; event packages available.

More info: harrisonbeerfest.com

One notable omission from this list is the B.C. Beer Awards and Festival in Vancouver on Oct. 15, which is now sold out. If you didn’t get tickets, find out who won what on the night at theprovince.com/beer.

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