

## **DRINK LOCAL - nightlife - Alaska's breweries, wineries and distilleries turn out prize-winning products**

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Have you ever compared a freshly picked farmer's market tomato to a store-bought one? There's a difference and it's the same for beer. Have you tried a factory-produced, shipped-up Corona or Coors next to a pint of local IPA?

Every summer I'm inspired to shop at farmers markets and buy local produce and dairy. It's tough -- especially when winter rolls its shaggy white coat into town. But I found a way to support the local economy while assuaging my guilt and enjoying my favorite pastime. Yes, you can eat local, but it's even easier to drink local. And I'm not talking about Kaladi Bros.

Many of my favorite haunts have been drinking local for awhile now. "Almost all of our tap beers rotate through local breweries now," said Marty Kimball, special events coordinator for Kinley's Restaurant. Though Kinley's doesn't serve liquor or local wines, local beer is a must.

"A lot of the reason for using local breweries has to do with availability, diversity and product quality," Kimball said. "Anchorage is the biggest small town ever. Locals know their brew and breweries."

Another plus, Kimball added, is the competitive nature of local versus national brewers.

"There is so much competition in the local craft beer market that customer service and price are kept in check," he said. "If someone can't deliver what they promise, there are options from Homer to Fairbanks waiting to pick up a new tap handle in town."

The Midnight Sun Brewing Co. is one of the bigger players in the local drinking game. In addition to serving its own beer, the brewery also supplies other venues in town.

"We feel local establishments can create a more unique dining experience by offering local beer, wine, mead, spirits," said Barb Miller, vice president of sales, marketing and business. "Seems like the latest wave of new bars and restaurants is very supporting of incorporating local flavor into their menus."

Miller says when the brewery opened, beers that contained 30 to 35 International Bittering Units (a measure of hop bitterness) were dismissed by customers for being too bitter. Miller said its testament to Alaska's changing palate that the brewery's current best seller is Sockeye Red IPA, which boasts 70 IBUs.

Relatively new to the south side, Firetap Alehouse and Restaurant has 32 of its 36 taps serving local ale.

"Our concept right from the beginning was to feature made-in-Alaska beers," said Diane Thompson, manager/owner. The Glacier BrewHouse makes a signature brew for the Firetap, "Red Hot Mama." The venue also carries wines from Bear Creek Winery and spirits from Alaska Distillery.

The Glacier BrewHouse is one of the biggest proponents -- and providers -- of local brew in the state. The brewery sells kegs and growlers of its flagship and seasonal beer, and you can even get root beer or cream soda. BrewHouse beer is in more than 140 restaurants, bars and liquor stores from Anchorage to Nome. It's good beer too. The Big Woody Barleywine recently won a gold medal at San Francisco's 2010 Toronto Barleywine Festival for the second year in a row.

Spenard Roadhouse Bar manager Darcy Kniefel is passionate about her support for living local.

"By supporting local, we support Alaska. This is the place we have all chosen to live," Kniefel said. "We want to see it continue to flourish."

It doesn't hurt that there are some great beers made in state.

"The Alaska beer scene is doing some amazing things and the new spirits coming out are proving that Alaska has the right stuff," Kniefel said.

The Roadhouse has eight taps with a variety of local brews from Midnight Sun, Moose's Tooth, Sleeping Lady, Silver Gulch and more. Kenai Brewing made a signature beer for the restaurant, "Spenard Roadweiser." It's an all-too-drinkable crisp pilsner. The bar also carries vodka and gin from the Alaska distillery and Darcy and her team concoct their own infused vodkas (try a cucumber martini).

Alaska Distillery, known for Permafrost vodka and its infamous Smoked Salmon Flavored Vodka, is quickly gaining fans in town.

"I encourage anyone to try a blind taste test of Permafrost vodka next to any other potato vodka they like, and be blown away by the silky-smooth mouth-flavor and clean flavor," said Amy Mack, Bear Tooth Grill bar manager.

Mack also likes Alaska Distillery gin's ratio of botanicals, which she described as well-balanced and surprisingly smooth.

At Tap Root Cafe, local is the word of the day every day. "We are a place where the locals come to eat, drink and have a good time," owner Rebecca Mohlman said. "The more that we are able to support that as a business, the more money stays in the immediate economy (and) encourages a stronger sense of community."

Tap Root's biggest seller is also Midnight Sun's Sockeye Red IPA (seriously, try it).

"When we say we are out of Sockeye, people have that deer-in-a-headlight look in their eyes," Mohlman said.

Overall drinking local is good for the city, and what's good for the city is good for the citizens.

"Local beverages support local business, local business supports local people," said Lucy Kadarau, marketing manager at the Snow Goose Restaurant and Sleeping Lady Brewing Co.

It's one thing to support the local economy and quite another to enjoy what you support.

"Breweries and meaderies in Alaska are multi-award-winning on a national and international level," Mohlman said. "It's top of the line. So why wouldn't you drink local?"

Cheers to that.

**Caption:** Photo 1: JessicaBowmanColBug\_110510.jpg Photo 2: play\_cvrDrinkLocal20\_110510.jpg Photo 3: SmokedSalmonVodka02\_110510.jpg  
BILL ROTH / Anchorage Daily News Alaska Distillery's Smoked Salmon Flavored Vodka

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