

San Diego and Vicinity – Suds Up Dude!

Southern California, or more specifically the area just north of San Diego is considered by some as a mecca for hoppy beer. After trying to visit as many brewpubs and micros as possible in a week I can see why many argue that there are few other places in the world with a better selection of extreme IPAs (even compared to Portland!). The thing to remember about Southern California as a beer destination is that major metropolitan areas are not the hub for good beer. Los Angeles is bereft of decent brewpubs and craft breweries, and downtown San Diego is similarly lacking despite the ubiquitous Rock Bottom or other mediocre chain (Coronado Brewing Company in San Diego being the one exception). Most of the premier brewpubs and breweries worth seeking out are located North of San Diego proper and long Highway 78 which runs East-West from Carlsbad to Escondido. If you do have to stay in San Diego proper you can find Karl Strauss and Rock Bottom chains and the aforementioned Coronado Brewing Company, but one of the better beer bars located in Mission Beach is the Liar's Club. A true dive with worn out décor but an excellent selection of local and import bottles and draft beers, it is worth seeking out, but if you arrive during a weekend or at night you will sometimes find parking extremely difficult as it is located on the main drag. My suggestion is to go during the day when you at least have a chance of finding a space. There were lots of locals on tap including Alesmith Bitter, but I opted for an "import", draft La Folie from New Belgium. O'Brien's Pub in what appears to be a Korean dominated part of town was easier to reach and had an equally impressive selection – five local Imperial IPAs on tap from Alpine (a micro out by itself East of San Diego), Ballast Point, Stone, and Port among others, and a huge bottle list. I thought the place was cozy but a little worn in line with what you might see at a Gingerman. Also in the suburbs north of town is Alesmith, widely regarded as one of the best small microbreweries on the planet. After seeing their operation the term micro really seems to apply. Although they were closed (tours only on Friday and Saturday) I walked to the back to find the small group of three or four brewers hard at work, and they were nice enough to take the time to talk to me and ultimately sell me some of their beer. While you can occasionally find regular pale ales etc made by Alesmith on tap at places like the Liar's Club, bottle selections include big beers such as an Imperial Stout, Wee Heavy, Evil Dead Red Imperial Red and their barleywine Old Numbskull. Seek this stuff out if you have a chance, it's pricey but damn it's good. The guy that started the company Peter Zien is the only local BJCP Grand Master in the area and everyone that works there seems to be a beer geek. Anyway, as I think I was trying to express when I began, if you are heading to San Diego and have a choice try staying near Carlsbad. In the downtown area you will find a Pizza Port brewpub location (the other is in Solana Beach). Despite sounding more like a restaurant and looking like a surfer hangout (picture picnic tables and surfboards on every wall), this is the same Port Brewing that consistently wins at GABF (each location brews their own and wins on their own) and for which Tomme Arthur brews at what used to be Stone's old location in San Marcos. In addition to their beers both Pizza Ports serve many guestbeers and lean towards imperial anything (but mostly IPAs, Reds, Rye's). Do you see a theme here? I didn't get to Oceanside Aleworks up the road, but I was able to visit Backstreet Brewing, a brewpub that reminded me of BJs (fake brick in a strip center), but the imperial IPA and barleywine were outstanding. Oggis Pizza, another brewpub across Hwy 78 was also restaurant brewpub, although the atmosphere was more one of a restaurant (no separate bar area really), although imperial porters and other housebeers were good enough to warrant a visit if you close your eyes and ignore children yelling in the background. Further East on 78 you can visit Green Flash microbrewery, although I couldn't schedule a stop even though I tried two of their IPAs and a barleywine, the latter although good had hints of green apple. Other places I didn't hit heading East on the hoppy highway 78 was San Marcos brewery and Grill and the Port Brewing location in the same area. At the end of 78 in Escondido you can find Stone's new brewery and brewpub wonderland. This place deserves time to visit if you have it as the system is state of the art and

the brewpub itself with huge windows into the brewery is very impressive. If you are planning to go during a weekend get there early and secure a token for the free tour as they limit the size of the groups. Tastings usually involve 9-10 beers including seasonals like Oaked Double Bastard or Imperial Stout. The bar at the brewpub serves not only Stone beers but a large number of draft and bottle beers from other local breweries (Port, Alpine, Ballast Point, Alesmith, etc) and again weighted to those more diverse styles of imperial anything, smoked beers, Belgian ales etc. As Stone is also now in the distribution business they have a wide variety of other beers in bottle including many Belgians and East Coast varieties. Not far from Stone is one of the best beer stores in the whole Sand Diego area, Holiday Liquors (ask at Stone for directions) where you will find a huge selection of beers to pack tightly within your checked in luggage. Another final hint, Staples has a location going back South on Highway 5 from Carlsbad towards San Diego and they sell rolls of bubble wrap. It's impossible to hit or even remember all of the locations with good beer in Southern California, but if you go I am sure you will agree it sure is fun trying.

- Brother Gavin McBeerstalker I have to head out for a while into Rice Village - I will leave the garage unlocked and the ac on in the office if you are stopping by but will lock the