

- Brew About Tour -

Most people don't head to the Lake Michigan shore during the snowy, cold winter months, but this year was a little different. Berrien County's Brew About Brewery Tour was launched in December of 2015 and wraps up this June, putting local beer lovers on the brewery trail. Seven brewpubs, from Arclight Brewing in Watervliet to Greenbush Brewing in Sawyer, stamped brochures for visitors who stopped in. The tour is free — just the price of a beer at each brewpub — and a full set of stamps delivered to one of the participating locations, Tapistry Brewing in Bridgman, means a visitor walks away with a free pint glass as a reward. “(By early April), we have redeemed about 130 glasses,” said Keith Adams, sales and marketing director at Tapistry, and one of the co-creators of the tour. The other tour creator, Sarah Renfro, also works at Tapistry.

The tour idea was created last fall, Adams said, simply to stir up business and encourage visitors to stop in at local brewpubs during the winter and spring. He said a lot of customers might go to one or two pubs regularly, but may not even know there are other local breweries just a few minutes away. The variety is also a draw for people who don't live along I-94 south of US-31 in Berrien County.

“We have a dozen wineries and a distillery in the county too,” Adams said. “It's a chance for people to get out of the city, go hang out in the country and enjoy some good beer.” More than 20 percent of all beer Americans bought in 2015, about \$22.3 billion nationwide, came from small craft breweries, like the ones on the Brew About tour. That's according to beer industry trade group the Brewers Association, which added that local brewpubs added about \$1.85 billion to the Michigan economy in 2014. The state of Michigan boasts more than 200 craft breweries.

The idea of beer and wine tours isn't unfamiliar to Berrien County. Tapistry is one of four breweries on the Brew About tour that is also on Grape & Grain Tours, a business that schedules buses and passenger vans to escort visitors from New Buffalo for stops at breweries and wineries up and down the West Michigan coast. The Brew About tour, on the other hand, is self-directed — visitors can stop for a beer and a stamp on their “beer map” at any time on or before June 1 to collect their pint glass.

Adams said while the response from the brewery tour has been positive, it's just one of the ideas he, Renfro and others have for next year's promotional push. No final decisions have been made yet, Adams said, but another brewery tour is an option. “We're all working on a few ideas,” he said. “Soon we'll be getting together to plan (ways) to get more people out to our breweries.”

Next year's adventure will be a bigger one; four more craft breweries are set to open in Berrien County by the end of the summer, Adams said.

For more information, call Tapistry Brewing at 269 266-7349.

Berrien County's “Brew About” Brewery Tour:

Arclight Brewing

544 N Main St, Watervliet

Cravings Brewpub

1599 Mall Dr, Benton Harbor

Cultivate Brewing Co.

961 E Shawnee Rd, Berrien Springs

Greenbush Brewing Co.

5885 Sawyer Rd, Sawyer

The Livery

190 5th St, Benton Harbor

Round Barn Brewery & Public House

9151 First St, Baroda

Tapistry Brewing

4236 Lake St, Bridgman

