



CULTURE COURSE

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

10 Chapters

Philip Osztramok

Generated with Claude

Contents

Chapter 1	Why German Beer?	2
Chapter 2	Brewing Before the Law	8
Chapter 3	The Reinheitsgebot	13
Chapter 4	Lager, Ale and Yeast	18
Chapter 5	A Map of German Beer Styles	23
Chapter 6	Brewery, Beer Hall and Biergarten	28
Chapter 7	Oktoberfest: Origins	33
Chapter 8	Oktoberfest Today	38
Chapter 9	Beer in Politics and Society	43
Chapter 10	Tradition, Law and Craft	48

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why German Beer? Scope & Sources

Ask people what they associate with Germany and beer is likely to come up within a few answers, usually along with a tall glass, a pretzel and a very large tent in Munich. Some of that is cliché, but beer really is woven into German history: monasteries brewed it, princes taxed it, a sixteenth-century Bavarian law about its ingredients is still quoted today, and an annual festival that began as a royal wedding party now draws millions of visitors. This opening chapter explains why the subject deserves a course, sketches how beer is made so that later chapters make sense, sets out what the course covers and leaves out, and shows how to tell solid history from the stories that cling to beer. Dates and names are given from general knowledge and checked as each chapter is written.

Why German Beer?

Few drinks carry as much history as beer does in Germany. It was a staple food and a source of tax revenue long before it was a leisure product. Rules about it are some of the oldest food laws in Europe. The country has hundreds of breweries, many of them small and local, and a large number of regional styles, each tied to a town or a district. Beer shapes the calendar through festivals, the map through brewing towns, and the language through words and customs that most visitors only half notice. A course on beer is therefore also a course on food law, regional identity, religion, industry and public life.

The question for the whole course

How did a drink made from grain, hops, yeast and water become a symbol of a nation, and how much of that symbol is history and how much is legend? The chapters follow beer from the early brewers to the craft breweries of today, and the capstone in Chapter 10 comes back to this question.

A One-Paragraph Version

People in the German lands were brewing beer well before the Middle Ages, and monasteries became important brewers in the medieval period (check the details). Hops gradually replaced

older herbal mixtures as the bittering and preserving ingredient. In 1516 the Duchy of Bavaria issued an order about the ingredients of beer that later became known as the Reinheitsgebot, or purity law (check the date and the wording). In the nineteenth century, cold storage and a better understanding of yeast helped bottom-fermented lager to spread across the world. Munich's beer festival began in 1810 as part of a royal wedding celebration (check). Today Germany has a large brewing industry alongside a growing craft scene. Each point is developed in a later chapter.

How Beer Is Made: A Short Guide

Later chapters assume you know the basic steps, so here they are in outline. The detail of each step differs by style, but the sequence is the same almost everywhere.

Ingredient or step	What it does
Water	The main ingredient by volume. Its mineral content affects the taste, which is one reason different towns became known for different beers.
Malt	Barley (or sometimes wheat) that has been soaked, allowed to start sprouting, then dried or roasted. It supplies the sugars and much of the colour and flavour.
Mashing	The malt is steeped in hot water so that its starches turn into sugars, making a sweet liquid called wort.
Hops	The wort is boiled with hops, the flowers of a climbing plant, which add bitterness and aroma and help preserve the beer.
Yeast	Added to the cooled wort, it turns the sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Brewers did not know yeast was a living organism until the nineteenth century (check).
Maturing	The young beer rests, and lagers are stored cold for weeks, before filtering, bottling or serving from the cask.

Two families of beer

Ales use top-fermenting yeast at warmer temperatures, and lagers use bottom-fermenting yeast at cooler ones. Chapter 4 explains the difference and how it shaped the story. Many

German beers are lagers, but the country also has well-known ales, such as Kölsch, Altbier and many wheat beers.

What the Course Covers

Chapters	Theme
2–3	Early brewing, then the Reinheitsgebot and its myths
4–5	Lager, ale and yeast; a map of German beer styles
6	The brewery, the beer hall and the Biergarten
7–8	Oktoberfest: its origins, and the festival today
9–10	Beer in politics and society; the purity law, craft beer and tradition today

What the course leaves out

This is a cultural history, not a tasting guide or a ranking of brands. It does not recommend particular beers, give home-brewing recipes or list every brewery. Technical detail is included only as far as the story needs it. The sibling courses, German Music, German Literature and German Film & Television, treat other parts of German culture in the same spirit.

Scope: Germany at the Centre

The course is built around Germany, and within Germany Bavaria gets a large share of the attention, because so much of the best-known beer history happened there. Neighbouring brewing traditions matter too. The Czech lands gave the world Pilsner, Belgium has a very different tradition, and Britain and Ireland have their own. They appear where they are inseparable from the German story, and the course says where they come from. Edinburgh readers will find British comparisons, such as cask ale and Scotch ale, where they help.

A Note on Drinking

Culture, not encouragement

Beer is described here as history and culture. Alcohol harms health and judgement, and laws and risks differ by country. If you visit a festival or a bar, know your limits, do not drive, and look after the people you are with. Nothing in this course is advice to drink.

Record, Reputation and Legend

Beer history attracts stories. Three kinds of claim need different handling.

Record

Dated laws, charters, tax records, brewery foundation dates and festival years that appear in archives and reliable reference works.

Reputation

"The oldest brewery in the world", "the world's oldest food law", "the best beer in Germany". These are slogans, often repeated by the people who benefit from them, and the facts behind them are usually more complicated.

Legend

Tales told in beer halls and on brewery tours: who invented what, why a style has its name, what a law was really for. Entertaining, but they need a source before you repeat them.

A note on accuracy

Dates, names and figures in this course are given from general knowledge and checked as each chapter is written. Where a point is uncertain the text says so. Before quoting a date or a "world's oldest" claim elsewhere, check it against a reliable reference work.

Where to Read and Taste

- **Museums and brewery visits.** Several German cities have beer museums, and many breweries offer tours that explain the process. The tour guide's stories are best treated as entertainment, and checked.
- **Trade bodies.** The German Brewers' Federation and regional brewers' associations publish facts about the industry (check the current names).
- **Reference books.** Look for histories of brewing and encyclopedic guides to beer styles, which put individual beers in context.
- **Festival publications.** The city of Munich publishes information about Oktoberfest, which Chapters 7 and 8 use.
- **Tasting, in moderation.** If you taste German beers, try a few styles side by side and compare them with something from home, as a way of learning what the chapters describe.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

In three sentences, explain why beer can count as a window on German history. Use at least two points from this chapter.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Put the main stages of making beer in order, and say what malt, hops and yeast each contribute: water, malt, mashing, boiling with hops, yeast, maturing.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Sort these into record, reputation or legend: (a) a law about beer was issued in Bavaria in 1516; (b) a brewery's sign says it is "the oldest in the world"; (c) a tour guide explains

why a certain style got its name. Then say how you would check each.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Four ingredients:** water, malt, hops, yeast
- **Steps:** malting, mashing, boiling with hops, fermenting, maturing
- **Ales and lagers:** top-fermenting at warmer temperatures against bottom-fermenting at cooler ones
- **1516:** Bavarian order on beer ingredients, later called the Reinheitsgebot (check)
- **1810:** the royal wedding that began Oktoberfest (check)
- **Scope:** Germany-centred, with Bavaria prominent
- **Handling sources:** separate record, reputation and legend

Next chapter: Brewing Before the Law, which looks at how beer was made and traded in the German lands before the purity order.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Brewing Before the Law

The purity order of 1516, the subject of the next chapter, did not appear out of nowhere. For centuries before it, beer in the German lands was made in homes, monasteries and town breweries from whatever flavourings were to hand, traded over long distances and taxed by anyone with the power to do so. This chapter follows that earlier story: who brewed, what went into the beer, how hops won their place, and how a few towns made their names by selling beer far from home. Evidence for the early centuries is thin, so the chapter flags the claims that need care. Dates and names are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

Beer Before Germany

Brewing is far older than the German states. Grain was fermented in many parts of the ancient world, and Roman writers described the beer drunk by the peoples north of the Alps, including the Germanic tribes (check the sources and wording). Archaeologists have found traces of ancient brewing in central Europe, though the evidence is patchy and the claims are often stronger in the press than in the reports. What matters for this course is that, in the early Middle Ages, beer was an everyday drink across the region: made from grain, fairly low in alcohol and drunk in place of water of doubtful quality (check the second claim, which is a popular simplification).

A food, not just a drink

Medieval beer was thicker, cloudier and less alcoholic than most modern beers. It supplied calories as well as refreshment, which is why it appears in household accounts, wages and tax records, and why rulers took such an interest in it.

Who Brewed?

The household

The monastery

In the early period most beer was brewed at home, often by women, as part of running a household and feeding its members. A farm or a town house might brew for its own use and sell a surplus (check how far the idea of brewing as women's work applies to the German lands).

Monasteries had grain, water, storage and skilled labour, and they needed beer for the community, for guests and for pilgrims. A famous ninth-century plan of an idealised monastery, kept at St Gall in Switzerland, shows brewhouses (check the date and the details). Brewing became one of the monastic trades, and some abbeys were still brewing after the Middle Ages (check examples).

The town

As towns grew from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, brewing became a trade. Town councils licensed brewers, set the price and quality, and collected tax, and brewers organised into guilds (check the dates, which varied by town).

The lord

Princes and bishops claimed rights over brewing, from the sale of malt to the sale of the finished beer, and several ran their own court breweries. Such a brewery could be a source of income and a symbol of rank (check examples).

Handle "oldest brewery" claims with care

Several German breweries claim to be the oldest in the world, usually based on a licence, a charter or a first mention that may be centuries after brewing began on the site. The Weißenstephan abbey near Freising, in Bavaria, is often cited, with a date in the eleventh century (check the date and the evidence for it). A claim about a licence is not a claim about continuous brewing, so treat these as reputation (see Chapter 1).

What Went into the Beer?

Today we expect beer to be flavoured with hops. For much of the early Middle Ages that was not so. Brewers in the German lands often used a mixture of herbs, called *gruit* (the German is *Grut*), which might include plants such as bog myrtle, yarrow and wild rosemary, to add bitterness and flavour and to help the beer keep (check the plants named, which varied by region). The right to produce and sell *gruit* was often a monopoly held by a lord or a bishop, and so a source of income, a point that matters for what came later (check the details).

- **Grain.** Barley was the main brewing grain, with wheat, oats and other grains used in different places, and the choice affected the beer. Wheat beer has a long history in its own right (check).
- **Herbs.** Gruit mixtures were variable and local, and some plants used had strong effects, which is part of why they were later abandoned (check this popular claim).
- **Honey and fruit.** Added in some places, blurring the line between beer and other fermented drinks.

The Rise of Hops

Hops, the flowers of a climbing plant, are bitter, aromatic and mildly antiseptic, so beer made with them keeps longer and travels better. Hop growing in what is now Bavaria is documented from the early medieval period, with the Hallertau region later becoming one of the largest hop-growing areas in the world (check the earliest record and the claims for it). The abbess Hildegard of Bingen wrote about hops in the twelfth century, noting both their preservative effect and her doubts about them (check the text and the attribution).

Over the later Middle Ages, hopped beer gradually took over across northern Europe, helped by the way it travelled and by the fact that it could be made without the lord's gruit monopoly (check the cause and effect, which are debated). Some authorities resisted the change at first. By the sixteenth century hops were standard in most German brewing (check), and the next chapter shows what happened when a government wrote that standard into law.

Why it matters

The shift from gruit to hops was about more than taste. It changed who controlled brewing, how far beer could be sold, and how long it could be kept. Without it, the long-distance beer trade of the late Middle Ages, and the later purity order, are hard to imagine.

The Hanseatic Beer Trade

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, a network of trading towns around the North and Baltic Seas, known as the Hanseatic League, carried goods between ports (check the dates). Beer was one of its products. Hamburg was among the towns with a very large brewing trade, and its

beer was shipped along the coasts (check the claims about the scale). Bremen and Wismar were also known for brewing, and Einbeck, in Lower Saxony, became famous for a strong beer that was exported widely (check). The Einbeck name is often said to be the origin of the word *Bock*, through the Bavarian pronunciation, a story that comes back in Chapter 5 (check, since it is a popular etymology).

Town	Reputation in the beer trade
Hamburg	Large export brewing trade through the port (check)
Bremen	Brewing town with trade links along the North Sea coast (check)
Einbeck	Strong beer exported widely; linked to the origin of Bock (check)
Wismar	Brewing town on the Baltic coast (check)

A town's reputation depended on the quality of its beer, so councils had a good reason to set rules for brewers: what could go in, how it must be sold, and who could brew. Such rules multiplied in the late Middle Ages. They are the background to the Reinheitsgebot, which was one rule among many, though it became the most famous.

Check the details

Dates for the early period are approximate, and many of the best-known claims (the oldest brewery, the first use of hops, the first beer law) rest on thin evidence or on a first mention that may be late. Confirm any date and any "first" before quoting it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Name four groups who brewed or controlled brewing in the medieval German lands, and give one reason each had an interest in beer.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

What was gruit, and why did the rise of hops matter for lords and bishops as well as for brewers and drinkers?

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

A brewery's website says it is "the oldest in the world" because of a licence dated in the eleventh century. Write two questions you would ask before accepting the claim.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Who brewed:** households, monasteries, towns and guilds, lords
- **Gruit:** a herb mixture used before hops, often a lord's monopoly
- **Hops:** bitter, aromatic and preservative; took over across northern Europe
- **Hanseatic trade:** Hamburg, Bremen, Einbeck and Wismar exported beer by sea
- **Town rules:** councils licensed brewers and set quality and prices, the background to 1516
- **Handling claims:** a licence is not proof of continuous brewing

Next chapter: The Reinheitsgebot, which looks at the Bavarian order of 1516, what it said and what it did not say, and the myths that grew around it.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · The Reinheitsgebot

If any one thing about German beer is famous, it is the Reinheitsgebot, usually translated as the purity law or purity order. Brewers print it on labels, advertisers call it the oldest food law in the world, and visitors repeat that German beer contains only four things. Each of those statements is partly true, partly oversimplified and partly wrong. This chapter goes back to the document itself: what it said in 1516, what it was for, how it grew from a Bavarian rule into a national one, and how much of its reputation was added later. It builds on the town rules and the hops story in German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 2. Dates and wording are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

Before 1516

The 1516 order was one of a series. Many towns had their own rules, and Bavarian rulers had issued others. A Munich ordinance of 1487, issued under Duke Albrecht IV, is often cited as an earlier rule limiting the ingredients of beer to malt, hops and water (check the date and the details), and a rule for the town of Landshut in the late fifteenth century is also mentioned (check). Such rules had several aims: to keep the quality up, to protect the consumer from cheats, to fix the price, and to raise tax.

The Order of 1516

The rule that became famous was issued on 23 April 1516 at Ingolstadt, a town in Bavaria, by the dukes Wilhelm IV and Ludwig X, who ruled the duchy together (check the date, the place and the names). It applied to the whole duchy, in towns and in the countryside, and it was part of a longer text on a range of matters.

What the order said	In plain words
Ingredients	Beer was to be made from barley, hops and water only (check the wording)
Price	Maximum prices were set, with a lower price in summer than in winter (check the figures and the units)

What the order said	In plain words
Penalty	A brewer who broke the rule risked having the beer confiscated (check)
Season	Brewing was tied to the seasons, with limits in the warmer months (check this detail)

What is missing

The order does not mention yeast. Nobody then knew yeast was a living organism (see German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 1), and brewers relied on leftover yeast from a previous batch without naming it. Nor does the text use the word Reinheitsgebot, a name that came much later.

Why Was It Issued?

The popular story is that Bavaria wanted pure beer, as a matter of quality and health. Historians point to several other motives, none of them certain (check the weight given to each).

Bread grain

By limiting brewing to barley, the order kept wheat and rye for bakers. Grain was precious, and a bad harvest meant hunger, so a rule that stopped brewers competing with bread-makers made sense.

Quality and safety

The ban on additives may have been aimed at cheating, and at plants with harmful or unpredictable effects. This is the motive the later advertising stresses (check).

Price and tax

Fixed maximum prices protected buyers and set a framework for the duke's own revenue from beer. It was an economic order as much as a quality rule.

Rule and unity

A single order for the duchy helped the dukes assert authority over local custom. The ducal states were being drawn together, and this was one more uniform rule (check).

The Wheat Beer Exception

A detail often left out of the story is that wheat beer, which uses malted wheat, was not allowed to the public but was brewed by privilege. For a long period the right to brew wheat beer in Bavaria belonged to a noble family, and later to the Bavarian rulers themselves, who made it a profitable monopoly (check the family, the dates and the details). So the supposedly pure law left room for a drink with an extra ingredient, because there was money in it. Wheat beer is the subject of Chapter 5.

From Bavarian Rule to National Law

For three centuries after 1516 the order applied in Bavaria and not in the rest of the German lands, where other rules and traditions persisted. The path to a national law ran through politics and tax.

1. **1871.** The German Empire was founded. Bavaria joined but kept some special rights, including control over its own beer tax (check).
2. **1906.** A national beer tax law required beer for sale in the Empire to follow the Bavarian ingredient rules, in the form of barley malt, hops, yeast and water (check the date and the scope). Bavaria had made its own rule a condition of the deal.
3. **1918 and after.** The name *Reinheitsgebot* came into use in the early twentieth century, and a date of 1918 is often given for the first record of it in a Bavarian debate (check the date and the source). The name helped turn an old order into a symbol.
4. **1919 to 1952.** In the Weimar Republic, Bavaria again insisted on its rule as the price of joining the national tax system, and the principle was kept in the beer tax laws after the Second World War (check the details).
5. **1993.** A provisional beer law, still in force, applies the rule to bottom-fermenting beer, and allows other malts and sugars in top-fermenting beer (check the wording).

1516 versus 1906

The rule people quote as 1516 differs from the one that governed brewers for most of the twentieth century. Yeast was added, wheat malt was allowed in top-fermenting beer, and the legal basis was a tax law, not a ducal decree. It is more accurate to say that the idea is old and the modern law is much younger.

The Court Case

When the European Community opened its internal market, the German ban on imported beers that failed the purity rules was challenged. In 1987 the European Court of Justice ruled that Germany could not use the rule to keep out beers made lawfully in other member states (check the date and the case). German brewers could go on following the Reinheitsgebot, and market it as a mark of quality, but could not stop others selling beer made differently. Chapter 9 returns to the subject.

Myths and Questions

- **"The oldest food law in the world."** It is among the oldest still invoked, but earlier food rules exist, including bread and beer regulations from other places and earlier periods (check the claim, and examples such as medieval English assize rules).
- **"It protected drinkers from poison."** The evidence for this motive is weak; the grain and tax explanations are better supported (check).
- **"All German beer follows it."** Not all. Beer made in Germany for export, and some specialty beers, do not, and the law applied to beers brewed for sale in Germany under the later tax rule (check).
- **"It made German beer better."** Opinions differ. Supporters point to consistency; critics argue that it limited experiment and ruled out styles that use other ingredients, such as spices or fruit (check).
- **"It is a law of Germany since 1516."** It was a Bavarian order, and the national rule came in the twentieth century.

Check the details

The text of the 1516 order is often paraphrased, and the translations differ. The dates for the later stages, the first use of the name and the details of the 1993 law are easy to garble. Confirm any date or wording against a reliable history or the text itself before quoting it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List the ingredients named in the 1516 order, say which important ingredient it did not name and why, and give one point about the order that goes beyond the ingredients.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Give three possible reasons for the order besides "pure beer", and say which you find most convincing and why.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

A label says "brewed under the Reinheitsgebot of 1516, the oldest food law in the world". Write two corrections or qualifications based on this chapter.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **1516:** Bavarian order at Ingolstadt: barley, hops, water, with price rules (check)
- **Earlier rules:** Munich in 1487 and other towns (check)
- **Motives:** bread grain, quality, price and tax, ducal authority
- **Wheat beer:** brewed under a privilege, not forbidden outright
- **1906:** the rule enters national tax law (check)
- **1987:** European court limits the ban on imports (check)
- **1993:** provisional beer law, still in force (check)

Next chapter: Lager, Ale and the Science of Yeast, which explains top and bottom fermentation and the nineteenth-century breakthroughs that took lager around the world.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Lager, Ale and Yeast

The pale golden lager that most of the world now thinks of as beer is, in historical terms, a fairly recent arrival. For most of brewing history, beer was an ale, made with yeast that works warm and fast. Lager came from a particular habit of Bavarian brewers, was transformed by nineteenth-century science and engineering, and then spread across the world faster than any other style. This chapter explains the difference between the two families, the Bavarian cellars where lager took shape, the inventors and scientists who turned it into an industry, and the fact that the whole story happened without anyone understanding what yeast was. Dates and names are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

Two Families of Beer

All beer depends on yeast, but there are two main groups of brewing yeast, and they behave differently.

	Ale (top-fermenting)	Lager (bottom-fermenting)
Temperature	Warmer, roughly 15 to 24 degrees Celsius (check)	Cooler, roughly 7 to 13 degrees Celsius (check)
Where the yeast works	Gathers at the top of the vessel as a foam	Settles toward the bottom
Speed	Fast, a matter of days	Slower, followed by weeks of cold storage
Typical character	Fruity, rounder, more varied flavours	Cleaner, crisper, more restrained
German examples	Weizen, Kölsch, Altbier	Pils, Helles, Märzen, Bock

The hidden story in the yeast

Lager yeast is a hybrid. Researchers showed that it arose when ale yeast crossed with a different wild yeast, and in 2011 a team identified a close relative of the second parent in the forests of Patagonia (check the date, the place and the details). The likely story is that

the cross happened in Bavaria in the late Middle Ages, when wild yeast came in on trade goods. This is a scientific finding that arrived centuries after the brewers made their choice (check the account, which is still discussed).

Bavaria and the Cold Cellar

Bavarian brewers noticed that beer made and stored cold turned out clearer and kept longer. A Bavarian ordinance of 1553 is often cited as banning brewing in the summer months, between roughly late April and late September, because of the danger of fires and spoiled beer (check the year, the dates and the reasons). The result was that brewers made a strong beer in spring and kept it through the summer in cold cellars and caves cut into the hillsides, a practice called *lagering*, from the German word *lagern*, to store. In the cellars, the yeast that settled and survived the cold was bottom-fermenting yeast, selected without anyone planning it.

- **Ice.** Brewers cut ice from lakes and rivers in winter and packed it in the cellars to keep them cold.
- **Trees.** Chestnut trees were planted over beer cellars to shade them, a habit that is the origin of many Bavarian beer gardens (check; see Chapter 6).
- **Märzen.** The last beer of the season, brewed in March, was strong and stored for the summer, and it gave a style its name (check; see Chapter 5).

The Nineteenth-Century Breakthroughs

Until about 1800, lager was mainly a Bavarian local habit. In the nineteenth century, a run of advances in engineering, science and travel changed that.

Copying the best

Gabriel Sedlmayr of Munich's Spaten brewery and Anton Dreher of Vienna are credited with improving lager brewing in the 1830s and 1840s, including by travelling to British breweries to study methods (check the dates and the claims). Both are linked to new amber and dark lagers.

Pilsner

In 1842, the town of Pilsen in Bohemia, now in the Czech Republic, produced a pale, clear, hoppy lager made by a Bavarian brewer, Josef Groll (check the date and the details). Together with new pale malt and the clear glass that was becoming cheap, it set the style that conquered the world. Pilsner is

Czech in origin, though it is now a major German style.

Refrigeration

In the 1870s, the German engineer Carl von Linde developed a practical refrigeration machine, first used in a Munich brewery (check the date and the first user). Brewers no longer needed natural ice or caves, so lager could be made all year, anywhere.

Yeast science

Louis Pasteur, the French chemist, showed in the 1860s and 1870s that fermentation was done by living yeast, and wrote a book on beer in 1876 (check the dates and title). In the 1880s, Emil Christian Hansen, working at the Carlsberg brewery in Copenhagen, isolated a single yeast cell and grew pure cultures, so that each brewery could use a reliable strain (check the date).

Why it mattered

Before this, a bad batch of beer was a mystery. Pasteur's work and pure yeast cultures turned brewing from craft and luck into something closer to a science. The purity order's silence about yeast, discussed in Chapter 3, finally had an answer.

Lager Conquers the World

With cheap rail transport, refrigeration, glass bottles and pasteurisation, lager could be made on an industrial scale and shipped far from the brewery. It spread in several ways (check the details of each).

- **Emigration.** German brewers who emigrated to the United States in the nineteenth century set up large lager breweries, and several of the best-known American brands were founded by Germans.
- **Empire and trade.** Lager breweries appeared in Asia, Africa and South America, often founded by German or Danish brewers.
- **Competition with ale.** In Britain and Ireland, ale and stout held on for a long time, and lager became widely popular only in the later twentieth century. Scotland followed the same pattern, with lager breweries established in the later nineteenth century and growing in importance after the Second World War (check the dates).

Lager's success also had a cost. Mass-produced pale lager, brewed for cost and consistency, pushed many local beers out of the market, a trend that the craft revival of Chapter 10 reacts against.

Check the details

Stories about who invented lager, who built the first refrigerator and who first made Pilsner are often told with more certainty than the evidence allows. Several of the key people knew each other or borrowed ideas, and the credit is disputed. Confirm any date or attribution against a reliable history of brewing.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Compare ale and lager in a short table or list: temperature, where the yeast works, speed and typical character. Give one German example of each.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain how the Bavarian summer brewing ban and the cold cellars helped to create lager, even though nobody understood yeast at the time.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Name three nineteenth-century developments that helped lager spread across the world, and say what each made possible.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Ale:** top-fermenting, warm, fast, fruity
- **Lager:** bottom-fermenting, cool, slow, with cold storage; a hybrid yeast
- **1553:** Bavarian summer brewing ban, leading to cellars and lagering (check)
- **1842:** Pilsner first brewed in Pilsen (check)
- **1870s:** Linde's refrigeration machine (check)
- **1876 and 1880s:** Pasteur on beer; Hansen's pure yeast cultures (check)
- **Spread:** rail, glass, refrigeration and emigrant brewers

Next chapter: A Map of German Beer Styles, which tours the styles of the regions and the rivalries between them.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · A Map of German Beer Styles

Germany does not have one kind of beer. It has dozens, and many of them belong to a place: a city that guards its own recipe, a region that drinks nothing else, a town where the local brewery is the centre of social life. This chapter is a guided tour of the main styles, grouped by family and tied to the places that made them. It is a cultural map, not a tasting list: the point is to show how the story of the earlier chapters (grain, hops, yeast, law) produced such variety, and why people care about local differences. It builds on the lager and ale divide in German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 4. Descriptions are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

The Lagers

The great majority of beer brewed in Germany is lager, and the styles differ mainly in colour, strength and hopping.

Style	Character	Place and note
Pils (Pilsner)	Pale gold, clear, noticeably bitter and hoppy	Czech in origin (see Chapter 4); the most widely drunk style in Germany, with a dry, crisp northern version (check)
Helles	Pale, soft, malt-led and gently hopped	Munich's everyday beer, created in the late nineteenth century, partly as an answer to Pilsner (check the date)
Dunkel	Dark brown, malty, smooth	The traditional Bavarian lager before pale beers took over (check)
Märzen	Amber, malty, medium strong	Linked to March brewing and summer storage (see Chapter 4) and to Oktoberfest (see Chapter 7; check)
Export	Golden, a little stronger and fuller than Helles	Associated with Dortmund and the Ruhr, a brewing and industrial region (check)
Schwarzbier	Very dark but light-bodied, with a roasted note	Associated with Thuringia and Saxony (check)

Style	Character	Place and note
Bock and Doppelbock	Strong, rich, malty; Doppelbock stronger still	Bock is linked to the northern town of Einbeck (see Chapter 2); Doppelbock to monks in Munich, who brewed it for fasting seasons, and many names end in - <i>ator</i> (check)
Kellerbier and Zwickel	Unfiltered, cloudy lager served from the cellar or tank	Strongly associated with Franconia and the beer garden tradition (check)

A word on strength

Most standard German beers sit at around 4.5 to 5.5 per cent alcohol by volume, with Bock and Doppelbock stronger (check the ranges). The style names describe tradition and character, and legal definitions are looser than many people assume.

The Wheat Beers

Wheat beer, or Weizen, is brewed with a large share of malted wheat and top-fermenting yeast, giving a cloudy, fruity beer with notes often described as banana and clove (check the description). Its history in Bavaria is bound up with the royal privilege described in Chapter 3. After the privilege ended in the nineteenth century, Weizen spread, and it grew very popular in the later twentieth century (check).

- **Hefeweizen.** The classic cloudy version, left with its yeast. *Hefe* means yeast.
- **Kristallweizen.** A filtered, clear version (check).
- **Dunkelweizen.** Dark wheat beer.
- **Weizenbock.** A strong wheat beer.

The Regional Ales

A few German cities kept brewing ale after lager took over, and each made its style a point of civic pride.

Kölsch (Cologne)

Altbier (Düsseldorf)

A pale, clean, lightly hoppy ale, conditioned cold, and served in small straight glasses called *Stangen*. The name is protected by a local agreement among Cologne brewers (check the 1986 Kölsch Convention and its legal basis). Only breweries in and near Cologne make it.

A copper-brown, bitter, malty ale. *Alt* means old, referring to the old ale-brewing method that came before lager. Düsseldorf's brewpubs serve it fresh from the barrel, and the city's rivalry with Cologne is a stock joke (check).

Rauchbier (Bamberg)

Beer made from malt dried over beechwood smoke, with a distinct smoky taste often compared to bacon. A speciality of Bamberg in Franconia, a city with an unusually large number of breweries for its size (check the claim).

Weizen in the south

Though wheat beer is found across Germany, Bavaria is its heartland, and a Weizen glass is tall and curved to hold the foam.

The Old Sour Styles

Two northern and eastern styles show what German beer was like before the purity order and before lager. Both are top-fermented, low in alcohol and sour.

- **Berliner Weisse.** A pale, tart, low-alcohol wheat beer from Berlin, traditionally served with a shot of fruit or herb syrup. It was once Berlin's favourite drink, and a nineteenth-century saying compared it to champagne of the north, a phrase that is sometimes attributed to Napoleon's soldiers (check this story, which is likely a legend).
- **Gose.** A sour, lightly salty wheat beer from the Goslar area, then Leipzig, flavoured with coriander (check the history). It nearly died out in the twentieth century and has been revived by craft brewers (check).

Both lie outside the strict reading of the purity law, which is why their revival is part of the story in Chapter 10.

Beer Mixes and Newcomers

Drink	What it is
Radler	Beer mixed with lemonade, in Bavaria and elsewhere; the name means cyclist. A popular story credits a Bavarian inn-keeper in the 1920s with inventing it for a rush of cyclists (check, as it is probably a legend).
Alsterwasser	The northern name for a similar mix, taken from a Hamburg lake (check).
Colabier or Diesel	Beer mixed with cola; a youth habit rather than a tradition.
Craft styles	IPAs, stouts and barrel-aged beers now brewed by a new generation of small breweries (see Chapter 10).

Place, Pride and Protection

The rivalry between Cologne and Düsseldorf, over Kölsch and Altbier, is among Germany's best-known local contests. Other regions have their own: Bavaria against the north over wheat beer and Pils, and Franconia against Munich over what makes a proper beer garden. Behind the jokes lies a serious point. Many styles are linked to a particular place, and the European Union can protect a regional name through its system of protected geographical indications (check which German beers are protected). The idea is that a name like Kölsch should mean something.

Check the details

Style descriptions are generalisations, since every brewery makes its own version. Origin stories for styles and for mixed drinks are full of legend. Confirm dates, protected names and strength ranges against a reliable reference before quoting them.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Pick three German lager styles and give a one-line description and a place or tradition for each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Kölsch and Altbier are both ales brewed in a lager country. Say where each comes from, and why a city might protect the name of its beer.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Why do Berliner Weisse and Gose fall outside a strict reading of the purity law, and why has there been a revival of both?

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Lagers:** Pils, Helles, Dunkel, Märzen, Export, Schwarzbier, Bock, Kellerbier
- **Wheat beers:** Hefeweizen, Kristallweizen, Dunkelweizen, Weizenbock
- **City ales:** Kölsch (Cologne), Altbier (Düsseldorf), Rauchbier (Bamberg)
- **Old sour styles:** Berliner Weisse and Gose
- **Mixes:** Radler and Alsterwasser
- **Protection:** regional names can be legally protected (check)

Next chapter: Brewery, Beer Hall and Biergarten, which looks at the places where beer is made and drunk.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Brewery, Beer Hall and Biergarten

So far this course has been about what is in the glass. This chapter is about where the glass is: the brewery that makes the beer, the hall or pub where it is served, and the beer garden, the most famous of all German drinking places and one with a surprisingly legal history. These places matter because much of German beer culture is social. Beer is drunk at a regular table, in a garden under trees, at a long bench shared with strangers. The chapter explains how those places grew up, what rules and customs go with them, and how to behave in them. Dates and details are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

The Brewery in the Town

Until the late nineteenth century, a typical German brewery was small and local, run by a family or a monastery or a ducal court, and tied to a particular town. Industrial lager brewing (see German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 4) created larger firms, and the twentieth century brought mergers and takeovers, so that a few big groups now account for much of the beer sold. Yet Germany still has a very large number of independent breweries, among the highest of any country, many of them in Bavaria and especially Franconia (check the current number and the claim).

Brewery taverns

Many breweries keep a tavern of their own, called a *Brauereigaststätte*, or have a brewpub, a *Brauhaus*, where beer is made on the premises and served fresh. This is the oldest model of all, since brewing and selling started together, and it is why the brewery's name is often also the pub's name.

Beer Halls and Brauhäuser

The beer hall is a large public room, often vaulted, with long tables and benches, where many people drink and eat together. Munich is the home of the type.

- **The Hofbräuhaus.** Founded in 1589 by Duke Wilhelm V as a court brewery for the Bavarian rulers and opened to the public later (check the dates). It is now one of the best-

known beer halls in the world and a tourist destination (check).

- **Big halls.** Large halls in Munich seat thousands, with brass bands and a lively mood, and a distinctive atmosphere called *Gemütlichkeit*, a word for a feeling of cosiness, warmth and belonging that is hard to translate (check).
- **Cologne and Düsseldorf.** The Brauhaus in these cities serves its own Kölsch or Altbier (see Chapter 5). In Cologne a waiter in a blue apron, a *Köbes*, carries trays of small glasses and keeps refilling until you place a beer mat over the glass to stop (check this custom).
- **The Stammtisch.** A regular table, often marked with a sign, reserved for a group of regulars who meet at set times. Sitting at someone's Stammtisch uninvited is considered rude (check).

The Beer Garden

The Biergarten is a garden or terrace, usually under chestnut trees, where beer is served at outdoor tables. It is a Bavarian invention with a story that links back to the cold cellars of Chapter 4.

The cellar, the chestnuts and the law

The brewers who stored beer in summer cellars planted chestnut trees above them, since the roots were shallow and the dense leaves gave cooling shade (check). They began serving beer at tables set up over the cellars. The local innkeepers complained about the competition, and in 1812 the Bavarian king, Maximilian I Joseph, issued a decree that let brewers sell beer on their own premises (check the date and the name). The innkeepers then won a concession, which was that the brewers could sell beer but not cook meals, and so the custom began that visitors bring their own food (check the details). It is a famous example of a rule that produced a custom.

The Rules of the Garden

Bring your own food

In a traditional Bavarian beer garden you may bring your own picnic, and the beer is bought from the garden. Tables with checked cloths are often for those who bring

Self-service and waiter service

Some areas are self-service, with a queue at the tap and a refundable deposit on the glass. Others are table service. Check before sitting down.

food, and tables without cloths for those who buy from the kitchen (check this convention).

A legal definition

Bavarian rules recognise the traditional beer garden, and a Bavarian regulation of 1999 protects the custom of bringing your own food (check the date and the name of the regulation). Neighbourhood noise rules can still limit opening hours.

Shared tables

Benches are shared, and it is normal to ask if a seat is free: *Ist hier noch frei?* The convention is to share the table and not to spread out.

Customs and Etiquette

- **The toast.** Say *Prost*, make eye contact with each person as you clink glasses, and do not cross arms with someone else's. A superstition says that avoiding eye contact brings bad luck, a belief often repeated in guides (check).
- **The beer mat.** A *Bierdeckel* is placed under the glass and, in some places, used by the waiter to keep a tally of drinks in pencil marks.
- **Paying.** Many places expect you to say what you have had when you pay, and tipping is customary by rounding up or adding a few per cent (check the current convention).
- **The pour.** A proper pour has a collar of foam. Pouring a Pils is slow and takes several minutes in a traditional pub (check), and wheat beer is poured at an angle and finished with the yeast swirled in.
- **Glassware.** Most styles have a matching glass, from the small Kölsch cylinder to the large Maß, the one-litre mug, of Oktoberfest (see Chapter 8).
- **Age.** The legal age for beer in Germany is 16, with some conditions (check the current rule), lower than in the United Kingdom.

Check the details

Customs vary by region and by place, and many travel-guide rules are repeated without checking. The history of the beer garden, including the dates of the decree and the

regulation, should be confirmed against a reliable source. As Chapter 1 said, none of this is advice to drink.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain how the beer garden grew from the cold cellars of Chapter 4 and from a dispute with innkeepers.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Say what a Stammtisch is, and how a Cologne Brauhaus differs from a Munich beer hall in how the beer is served.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

You are visiting a Bavarian beer garden for the first time. List four things you should know before you sit down, using this chapter.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Brewery tavern:** Brauereigaststätte or Brauhaus, brewing and serving on one site
- **Hofbräuhaus:** Munich, founded 1589 as a court brewery (check)
- **Biergarten:** grew from cellars shaded by chestnut trees; 1812 decree (check)
- **Bring your own food:** a custom born of a compromise with innkeepers
- **Stammtisch:** a regulars' table

- **Prost:** make eye contact when you toast

Next chapter: Oktoberfest: Origins, which looks at the royal wedding of 1810 and the early years of the festival.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Oktoberfest: Origins

Oktoberfest is the largest beer festival in the world, held every year in Munich on a meadow called the Theresienwiese, and known locally as the Wiesn, short for the meadow. It is famous for its beer tents, brass bands and costumes, and for the millions of visitors who come. But it began as something quite different: a public celebration at a royal wedding, with a horse race at its heart. This chapter traces how a one-off party became an annual fixture, how it changed in the nineteenth century, why a festival called Oktoberfest begins in September, and how it survived wars, epidemics and economic disaster. Dates and names are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

The Wedding of 1810

On 12 October 1810, Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria, who later became King Ludwig I, married Princess Therese of Saxe-Hildburghausen (check the date and the names). Bavaria had recently become a kingdom, in 1806, thanks to its alliance with Napoleon (check), and the wedding was an occasion for the royal house to show itself to its new subjects. Citizens of Munich were invited to celebrate on a meadow outside the city gates, and the celebrations ended with a horse race, on 17 October (check).

Item	Detail
Who married	Crown Prince Ludwig and Princess Therese (check)
When	12 October 1810 (check)
Where the party was	The meadow outside Munich, named Theresienwiese after the bride (check)
Main event	A horse race on the last day, watched by the royal family and the public
Who suggested it	The idea of the race is usually credited to an army officer, Andreas Michael Dall'Armi (check the name and the story)

Record versus reputation

The wedding and the horse race are well documented. The tidy tale that the festival was a spontaneous invention by a single person, and that the whole thing was planned as an annual beer festival, is a reputation, not a record. Beer was served, but beer was not the point of the first celebration (check).

From One Party to an Annual Fair

The people of Munich enjoyed the occasion so much that it was repeated the following year, this time with an agricultural show attached, and the festival became a yearly event (check). The horse race remained the centrepiece for decades. The agricultural show, in which farmers showed livestock and machinery and prizes were awarded, was an important part of the Bavarian state's efforts to improve farming, and an agricultural show of this kind is still held on the Wiesn at intervals of several years (check).

- **The fair.** Over time stalls, entertainers and amusements gathered, and the event became a fair as well as an exhibition and a race.
- **Beer.** Beer was first sold from small stalls, and by the middle of the century brewers were building larger booths (check the dates).
- **The royal presence.** The Bavarian rulers attended and used the occasion to present themselves to the public.

The Nineteenth Century: From Stalls to Tents

As the century went on, beer took over from the horse race and the agricultural show as the main attraction. A few milestones are usually cited (check each).

Beer stalls

From the early decades, local brewers set up stalls, which became larger over time and were run by a growing number of landlords.

Gas and electric light

New lighting technology allowed the festival to run into the evening. Electric lighting is often said to have appeared on the Wiesn around 1880 (check).

Big tents

Costume parade

Large tents seating thousands appeared in the later nineteenth century, built for individual Munich breweries, and the pattern of brewery tents that defines the modern festival took shape (check the date).

A procession of costumed groups was added in the later part of the century, showing off the regional dress of Bavaria. It continues as a parade through Munich on the first Sunday (check the first date).

Why September?

The festival was moved earlier, from October into the second half of September, in the nineteenth century, because the weather in Munich is warmer and the evenings longer then (check the year, often given as 1872). Today it starts in late September and ends on the first Sunday of October, or a few days later, depending on the dates (check the current rule). That is why the Oktoberfest begins in September.

Cancellations and Crises

The festival has been cancelled or reduced many times, and the list shows how closely it tracks the history of Bavaria and Germany (check each).

- **Early cancellations.** The festival did not run in years of war and epidemic in the nineteenth century, including the Napoleonic wars and the cholera outbreaks of the 1850s, and in the war years of 1866 and 1870 (check).
- **First World War.** A scaled-down festival took place in 1914, and the festival did not run in the later war years (check).
- **Inflation.** In 1923 and 1924, the hyperinflation of the early Weimar Republic made the festival impossible (check).
- **The 1930s.** The festival was held under the Nazi government, which used it for its own purposes, and Jewish stall-holders and brewers were pushed out (check how this is now remembered in Munich, including recent research and memorials).
- **Second World War.** No festival was held from 1939 to 1945. In 1946, a small autumn festival without beer tents took place (check), and the full Oktoberfest returned in 1950 (check).
- **1950.** The tradition of the opening ceremony, in which the mayor of Munich taps the first keg and calls out *O'zapft is!* ("It's tapped!"), is usually dated to 1950 (check the date and the mayor's name, Thomas Wimmer).

- **1980.** A bomb attack at the entrance to the Wiesn in September 1980 killed a number of people and injured many more, and is remembered in a memorial (check the facts, and treat the subject with care).
- **Recent times.** The festival was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic (check).

Check the details

Counts of the number of times the festival has been cancelled, and the numbers of visitors and beers served, differ between sources. The founding story has been polished over two centuries. Confirm any date, number or name before quoting it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the first Oktoberfest in three or four sentences: what was celebrated, what the main event was, and where it took place. Then say what was not the main event.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain two changes in the nineteenth century that turned a horse race and fair into a beer festival, and say why the festival starts in September.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Choose three occasions when the festival was cancelled or reduced, and say what each shows about the history of Bavaria and Germany.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **1810:** wedding of Crown Prince Ludwig and Therese; horse race on the Theresienwiese (check)
- **1811:** repeated with an agricultural show; the festival becomes annual (check)
- **Nineteenth century:** stalls become tents; lighting; costume parade (check)
- **September start:** moved earlier for better weather (check)
- **Cancellations:** wars, cholera, inflation, the pandemic
- **1950:** the first keg tapped by the mayor of Munich (check)

Next chapter: Oktoberfest Today, which covers the tents, the Maß, the costume, the food and practical advice.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Oktoberfest Today

The festival that began as a wedding party in 1810 is now a major event with several million visitors, a dozen or more huge tents, and a set of rules and rituals that are surprisingly strict. This chapter describes the Wiesn as it is today: who is allowed to serve beer, what the beer is, what the opening ceremony involves, what people wear and eat, and what a first-time visitor should know. It ends with other German festivals, which are often more local and less crowded, and with the imitations found around the world. It builds on the history in German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 7. Details, prices and figures change from year to year and are flagged where they should be checked.

The Setting

The festival is held on the Theresienwiese, a large open field close to the centre of Munich, and runs for about two and a half weeks from late September to the first weekend of October (check the current rule for the dates). The site is part funfair, with rides and stalls, and part a collection of large beer tents, which are temporary buildings put up every year and taken down afterwards. The visitor count is usually given as several million per year (check the recent figures).

Who May Serve Beer?

Only breweries from Munich may supply the main tents, and there are six: Augustiner, Hacker-Pschorr, Hofbräu, Löwenbräu, Paulaner and Spaten (check the list, since brewery groupings and ownership change). The rule is set by the city, which regulates the festival, and is intended to keep the event local (check the legal basis).

Feature	What to know
The tents	Around fourteen large tents and some smaller ones, each run by a landlord on behalf of a brewery, each with its own character and a capacity from hundreds to several thousand (check the number and the names)
The beer	A special Festbier, brewed for the event, a little stronger than ordinary Helles, at around 6 per cent alcohol by volume (check)

Feature	What to know
The measure	The Maß, a one-litre glass mug, is the standard serving (check the legal measure, and the argument about how much foam is allowed)
The price	Rising year by year and now well into double figures in euros per Maß (check the current price)
The service	Waiting staff carry as many as ten or more full Maß at once, and are paid largely by tips (check)

A beer for the festival

The Festbier, or Wiesn-Bier, is made by the six breweries to a specific standard, and it follows the purity law (see Chapter 3). The Märzen style of Chapter 5, once the traditional beer of the festival, has been replaced by a lighter golden beer in recent decades (check). The history of a festival beer is itself a record of changing taste.

The Opening

The festival opens on the first Saturday with a parade of the landlords and brewery wagons, pulled by teams of horses, through Munich to the Wiesn. At noon, in the Schottenhamel tent, the mayor of Munich taps the first barrel with a wooden mallet, and calls out *O'zapft is!* The number of blows needed is a matter of public interest, and the beer may be served in all the tents only after the first barrel is tapped and a salute is fired (check the details). On the first Sunday, a large costume parade of groups from all over Bavaria and further afield passes through the city (check).

Costume

Many visitors wear traditional Bavarian dress, called Tracht. For men this is usually Lederhosen, leather breeches, with a checked shirt, and for women the Dirndl, a dress with a bodice, blouse and apron. Wearing Tracht is not obligatory, but it is common and fits in at the festival (check).

- **The apron bow.** A well-known custom says that a bow on the left of a Dirndl apron signals that the wearer is single and on the right that she is taken or married (check, since it is a

folk custom with regional variants).

- **Quality.** Real Tracht is a serious craft and can be expensive. Cheap costumes sold as fancy dress are widely seen, and some locals find them silly (check).
- **Reuse.** Many Bavarians own Tracht for life and wear it at other occasions and festivals.

Food and Music

Beer at the Wiesn comes with food, and each tent has its own kitchen.

- **Hendl.** Roast half-chicken, a classic festival dish.
- **Schweinshaxe.** Roast pork knuckle.
- **Brezn.** The large soft pretzel, eaten with beer or with Obatzda, a Bavarian cheese spread.
- **Weißwurst.** The white sausage, by tradition eaten in the morning, with sweet mustard and a pretzel (check this tradition).
- **Steckerlfisch.** Fish grilled on a stick.
- **Sweets.** Gingerbread hearts, *Lebkuchenherzen*, with messages in icing, worn on a ribbon around the neck.

Each tent has a brass band, and the programme includes folk songs, the traditional toast *Ein Prosit der Gemütlichkeit*, and in the evening popular songs that people sing standing on the benches (check the toast). Standing on the benches is often treated as a rite of passage, and in some tents, only after a certain hour.

Practical Advice

If you ever go

Check the dates and the rules with the city's official festival information before you travel, and not with unofficial sites (check). Tables in the tents are often reserved well in advance by groups; walking up without a reservation works best on weekday afternoons. Bags are limited in size, and there are security checks (check the rules). Prices, hours and rules change from year to year.

- **Get there early.** Tents can fill and be closed to new entrants at busy times (check).

- **Eat as well as drink.** The Festbier is stronger than most visitors expect, and a Maß is a litre.
- **Look after yourself and others.** Know your limits, keep your belongings safe, and make sure you can get home without driving (see the note in Chapter 1).
- **Try the quieter side.** A traditional area of the grounds with older rides and a quieter atmosphere has been set up in recent years (check the name and the details).

Other Festivals and Imitations

Munich's is the biggest, but Germany has hundreds of other beer and folk festivals, many of them more local and a good deal calmer.

- **Cannstatter Volksfest.** In Stuttgart, one of the largest and often called the second-largest festival of its type (check the claim).
- **Bergkirchweih.** A beer festival on a hill in Erlangen, Franconia, held among cellars, in the manner of the beer gardens of Chapter 6 (check).
- **Freimarkt.** A large autumn fair in Bremen (check).
- **The world over.** Cities from Ontario to Brazil to Japan hold a local Oktoberfest, some of them very large, and many pubs and breweries in Britain, including in Edinburgh, put on their own versions (check examples). They borrow the costumes, the sausages and the toasts, but not, in general, the Munich rules.

Check the details

Visitor numbers, beer prices, the amount of beer served and the schedule vary every year, and the same figures are often quoted out of date. Confirm anything you rely on against the city of Munich's official festival information.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Who may serve beer in the main tents at Oktoberfest, what is served and in what measure, and what is the opening ceremony?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe the traditional costume for men and for women, and name three foods you would expect to find at the festival.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A friend is planning a first trip to the Wiesn. Write four short pieces of advice, using this chapter, and name one other German festival they might try instead.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Site:** the Theresienwiese, about two and a half weeks from late September (check)
- **Six breweries:** Augustiner, Hacker-Pschorr, Hofbräu, Löwenbräu, Paulaner, Spaten (check)
- **Festbier:** about 6 per cent, served in a one-litre Maß (check)
- **Opening:** parade, then the mayor taps the first barrel: O'zapft is!
- **Costume:** Lederhosen and Dirndl, common but not obligatory
- **Food:** Hendl, Schweinshaxe, Brezn, Obatzda, Weißwurst
- **Elsewhere:** Cannstatter Volksfest, Bergkirchweih, Freimarkt, local Oktoberfests worldwide

Next chapter: Beer in Politics and Society, which looks at beer halls and politics, East German brewing, beer tax and the European single market.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Beer in Politics and Society

Beer in Germany has never been only a drink. Its price has started riots, its halls have hosted political meetings, its tax has paid for states, and its rules have been argued over in courts. This chapter looks at the times when beer and public life met: the protests, the beer halls of the 1920s, the very different brewing industry of East Germany, the tax and deposit systems that shape the trade, and the way drinking habits have changed. Some of the subjects are serious, and the chapter treats them factually. It builds on German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 3, which introduced the purity law and the court case of 1987. Dates and details are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

Beer, Protest and Satire

Because beer was a staple, a rise in its price was felt directly, and in the nineteenth century it sometimes led to disorder. A famous episode in Munich in 1844 is known as the beer riots, when a rise in the price of beer and a complaint about its quality led to brawling and damage to breweries (check the date and the details). The authorities in Bavaria came to regard the price of beer as a matter of public order, which links back to the price rules of the 1516 order.

- **Strong-beer season.** Each spring, around Lent, Bavaria celebrates the strong beer, or Starkbier, season. At the Nockherberg in Munich, a famous evening of political satire is held, in which politicians are teased by actors in front of the very people being mocked (check the tradition and the details).
- **Political Ash Wednesday.** On the day after carnival, Bavarian parties hold rallies in beer halls, where speeches are delivered, traditionally with a good deal of rhetoric (check).
- **The Stammtisch.** The regulars' table of Chapter 6 gives its name to casual political talk, the *Stammtischparole*, which describes opinions voiced loudly without much thought.

The Beer Halls and the Nazis

The big beer halls of Munich were large public rooms, which made them a natural place for meetings. In the political turmoil after the First World War, several parties and groups used them, and the Nazi party held many of its early meetings in them (check). The best-known episode is the Beer Hall Putsch, an attempted seizure of power led by Adolf Hitler and others,

which began in a Munich beer hall, the Bürgerbräukeller, on 8 November 1923 and failed the following day (check the date, the venue and the details). Hitler was tried and imprisoned, and the episode was later celebrated by the Nazi regime as a founding event (check).

Handling this period

The beer halls were not the cause of any of this, and most beer drinkers in them were ordinary people. The halls were used because they were big and central. The regime later claimed the putsch as a founding myth, and a bomb attack by a carpenter, Georg Elser, on Hitler at the Bürgerbräukeller in 1939 is remembered as an act of resistance (check the date and the details). Munich now treats these places with care, and the Bürgerbräukeller itself was demolished in the 1970s (check).

East Germany: Another Brewing World

From 1949 to 1990, East Germany had a state-run economy, and its breweries were nationalised and run as publicly owned enterprises (check). The brewing tradition continued, and the region included well-known names, but the industry had its own conditions (check each point).

Feature	East German brewing
Ownership	State-owned breweries grouped into combines (check)
Supply	Shortages of ingredients and equipment, and a limited range of styles (check)
Quality	A few well-regarded beers, among them Pilsner from the Saxon town of Radeberg, which was exported and served in prestige hotels (check)
After 1990	Privatisation, closures and takeovers by western firms; many old local beers were lost, and some were later revived (check)

The sudden opening of the market in 1990 had mixed results. Some East German brands survived and found a national audience, and others vanished. The memory of East German beer is part of a wider nostalgia for the products of the former state, sometimes called Ostalgie (check).

Tax, Deposits and Rules

- **Beer tax.** Germany taxes beer by volume and strength, and the rate is lower for small breweries, which helps independent brewers survive (check the rates and the thresholds).
- **The bottle deposit.** Germany has one of the world's best-known deposit systems. Customers pay a deposit on returnable bottles and crates, and get the money back when they return them, which keeps a very high share of bottles in circulation (check the amounts and the figures). Crates of returnable bottles are a familiar sight.
- **Drinking age and driving.** The legal age for beer is 16 under some conditions, and the limit for driving is lower than many visitors expect, with strict penalties (check the current rules).
- **Advertising and health.** Rules on advertising and public information have tightened, in line with other countries (check).

One Market, One Law?

As Chapter 3 explained, when the European Community moved to a single market, the German rule that banned the import of beer failing the purity law was challenged. In 1987, the European Court of Justice held that Germany could not keep out beer from other member states simply because it was made differently (check). The result was a compromise: German breweries could still follow the purity law and use it as a selling point, and foreign beer could be sold in Germany. In practice, German beer drinkers mostly went on drinking German beer, and the imported share is small (check).

A law that became a brand

The court ruling ended the Reinheitsgebot as a trade barrier, but it did not end it as a symbol. Since then, the purity law has been used mainly as a marketing claim, which is the subject of the capstone chapter.

Changing Habits

Beer remains central to German life, but habits have shifted (check each trend).

- **Lower consumption.** Beer consumption per head has fallen over several decades, with wine, soft drinks and other drinks gaining ground.
- **Non-alcoholic beer.** Alcohol-free beer has become a large and growing part of the market, partly because of drink-driving rules (check the share).
- **Mixed drinks.** Radler and similar mixes (see Chapter 5) have grown in popularity.
- **Fewer, bigger breweries.** The industry has concentrated into larger groups, while the number of small breweries has also grown.
- **Women and beer.** Brewing was once largely women's work (see Chapter 2) and then largely men's, and more women now brew and work in the industry (check).

Check the details

Dates and details of historical episodes, tax rates, deposit amounts and consumption figures should be confirmed against a reliable source. This chapter touches on the Nazi period and on attacks and resistance, and these should be read in a proper history of the period, not only here.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Why did the price of beer matter so much in nineteenth-century Bavaria, and what does the story of the 1844 riots suggest about beer and public order?

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain why Munich's beer halls became political meeting places in the 1920s, and why it would be wrong to blame the beer halls themselves.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Give three differences between brewing in East Germany and in West Germany, and say what happened to East German breweries after 1990.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Price and order:** beer price rises caused unrest, as in Munich in 1844 (check)
- **Satire:** Starkbier season and the Nockherberg evening (check)
- **Beer halls:** big public rooms used for political meetings, including the 1923 putsch (check)
- **East Germany:** nationalised breweries, limited supplies, privatisation after 1990 (check)
- **Tax and deposit:** lower tax for small breweries; returnable bottle deposits (check)
- **1987:** court ruling on imports, the law becomes a brand (check)
- **Trends:** lower consumption, more alcohol-free beer, craft growth

Next chapter: the capstone, Tradition, Law and Craft Today, which follows beer from monastery to microbrewery and asks what the Reinheitsgebot means now.

German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Tradition, Law and Craft Today

The course began with a question: how did a drink made from grain, hops, yeast and water become a symbol of a nation, and how much of that symbol is history and how much is legend? This final chapter returns to it. It looks at where German beer stands today, with a famous law that is both respected and questioned, a craft movement that borrows from abroad and revives the old, and a growing market for beer without alcohol. It then follows one thread through everything the course has covered: the line from the monastery brewhouse to the microbrewery. Dates and details are given from general knowledge and flagged where they should be checked.

The Purity Law Today

As earlier chapters showed, the Reinheitsgebot of popular memory is a mixture of a 1516 Bavarian order and a twentieth-century tax law (see German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot 3), and it is now applied through the provisional beer law of 1993 (check). Most large German breweries still follow it and say so on their labels, and it is a strong part of the image of German beer abroad.

The case for

Supporters say the law guarantees simple ingredients, supports consistent quality, protects a national tradition and gives consumers a clear promise. They also point out that it has not stopped German brewers making a very wide range of beers within it (check).

The case against

Critics say it is outdated, that it excludes legitimate ingredients such as spices, fruit and unmalted grains, and that it is used as a marketing slogan more than as a real guarantee of quality. They note that the law does not cover the brewing process, additives used in processing or the use of pesticides in the crop (check these arguments).

The middle position

Many brewers treat it as a useful label for a certain kind of beer, not as the only legitimate way to brew. A beer outside the

The history lesson

The law is much less old and much less pure than its reputation suggests (see Chapter 3),

law can be sold under a different description (check how this is handled in practice).

and it shows how a rule can acquire a meaning far beyond its purpose.

The Craft Revival

The industrial lager of the twentieth century left most German beer drinkers with a choice of a few familiar types. From the 1980s and 1990s, craft brewing, which had flourished in the United States and Britain, began to take root in Germany too, later than elsewhere and against the weight of tradition (check the timeline and the claim). Small breweries began to appear, and the pace increased in the 2000s and 2010s (check).

- **New styles.** German craft brewers began making pale ales, India pale ales, stouts and sour beers, borrowing styles from the United States, Britain and Belgium. Some were brewed outside the purity law, and others kept within it.
- **Old styles revived.** Gose, Berliner Weisse, smoked beers and other styles that nearly died out came back (see Chapter 5).
- **German hops.** Hops from the Hallertau and other regions have become a major export, and new hop varieties are bred for the craft market (check).
- **Local pride.** The craft movement shares the old German love of local beer, which is why many craft breweries stress their town or neighbourhood.

A British comparison

Britain's craft scene, including Scotland's, grew from a fight to save traditional cask ale from industrial keg beer (check). In Germany the revival often runs the other way: it is a push to add variety to a market that was already full of traditional lagers.

Beer Without Alcohol

Alcohol-free beer has become a big part of the German market, helped by strict drink-driving rules and a health-conscious public (check the market share). Brewers have improved the taste with better processes, and some firms have positioned alcohol-free beer as a sports or lifestyle drink. It is notable for the purity law debate too, since the process of removing alcohol is not covered by the old rules (check). The old medieval idea of a low-alcohol beer as an everyday drink (see Chapter 2) has, in a sense, returned.

The Monastery Brewers

The thread begins with the monasteries, and they have not gone away. A number of Bavarian monasteries still run breweries, among them Andechs, Weltenburg and Ettal, and some have beer gardens and visitors who come for the view as much as for the beer (check the list and the details). Their beers are in the same range of styles as any other, though the setting gives them a particular reputation. The Doppelbock tradition of Chapter 5, said to date from monks brewing strong beer for Lent, is a living link to that history (check).

The Thread: Monastery to Microbrewery

Looking back across the ten chapters, a few themes appear again and again.

Theme	Where it appears
Beer as food, tax and law	Early brewing and town rules (Chapter 2); the purity order (Chapter 3); beer tax and the single market (Chapter 9)
Local identity	City ales and regional styles (Chapter 5); the beer garden and Stammtisch (Chapter 6); local festivals (Chapter 8)
Science and technology	Cellars, refrigeration and pure yeast (Chapter 4); craft hops and processes (this chapter)
Rules that made customs	The summer ban that made lager (Chapter 4); the innkeepers' dispute that made the beer garden (Chapter 6)
Legend against record	"Oldest" claims (Chapters 1 and 2); the myths of 1516 (Chapter 3); the origin of the Wiesen (Chapter 7)
Beer and history	The beer halls and the putsch, East Germany, and the festival through crisis (Chapters 7 to 9)

An answer, with caveats

Beer became a symbol of Germany because it was always more than a drink: a food, a tax base, a subject of law, a reason to meet, and a source of local pride. Much of the symbol rests on solid history, such as the town rules, the cellars, the nineteenth-century science

and the festival. Some rests on legend, such as the oldest-in-the-world claims and the idea of a perfect, unchanged law. The best way to enjoy the subject, and to keep it honest, is to ask of each claim whether it is record, reputation or legend, as Chapter 1 proposed.

Check the details

Figures for the number of breweries, the craft share, the alcohol-free share and hop exports change every year. The details of the 1993 law and the debate around it should be read in a current source. Confirm the facts about particular monasteries before quoting them.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give one argument for and one argument against the Reinheitsgebot as it works today, and say what the history in Chapter 3 adds to the discussion.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Describe two ways the craft revival in Germany connects to the older parts of the story, and one way it breaks with it.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Write a short paragraph, in your own words, that traces the thread from the monastery to the microbrewery, using at least four chapters of the course.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **The law today:** a provisional beer law of 1993, followed by most large breweries (check)
- **For and against:** consistency and tradition against outdated limits and marketing
- **Craft:** new styles, revived old styles, German hops, local pride
- **Alcohol-free:** a growing share of the market (check)
- **Monasteries:** still brewing, as at Andechs, Weltenburg and Ettal (check)
- **Method:** separate record, reputation and legend

Course complete

You have followed German beer from the household and monastery brewhouse through the purity order, the cellars, the styles, the beer garden and the Wiesn, to the craft revival. Keep the habit that runs through every chapter: look up the figures marked "check" before you rely on them, and ask of each good story whether it is record, reputation or legend.