

## A Home for a Perfect Pair— Munich's Beer- and-Oktoberfest Museum

Beer and Oktoberfest—two things synonymous with the heart of Munich. The city's museum offers visitors an educational and nostalgic look at what makes Munich, Munich.

BY LUCY GORDAN

Photos courtesy of the Bier-und-Oktoberfest Museum.

**T**ucked away on the narrow street called Sternecker at no. 2, is Munich's Bier-und-Oktoberfest Museum. It's located two blocks from the city's main square *Marienplatz* and from its picturesque 800-year-old food market *Viktualienmarkt*. Opened in September 2005, the Museum's six-story building, Munich's oldest residential building, constructed after the great fire in 1327, when a third of the city was destroyed, dates to around 1340. Some of the façade paintings have been restored and some of the original wooden beams have been salvaged, as have the central "Heaven's Stairs," which are a typical feature of Munich's medieval architecture. These led upstairs where there were three apartments on the second, third, and fourth floors, each having a kitchen with a chimney opening into one big chimney for the building, a sitting room, and a bedroom, for a total of twelve apartments. (Elevator and wheelchair access are available.)

Although Munich is nicknamed the "capital of beer," this thirst-quenching, very popular drink was not invented here. It's best to start your tour with the twelve-minute



documentary in German with English subtitles that presents a concise history of beer and its production.

The documentary explains that beer is one of the world's oldest beverages, probably dating back to the sixth millennium BC. The earliest Sumerian writings contain references to beer, but it's also likely that beer-like, home-brewed beverages were invented in several ancient cultures throughout the world; for certain in China, Syria, Babylonia, Peru, and Egypt, where it was used for medicinal purposes and included in burial provisions for the journey to the hereafter. It appears that the Egyptians taught the Greeks how to brew beer, who later taught the Romans, who in turn, beginning in c. 55 BC, taught the northern tribes they conquered.

During the rise of Christianity, the popularity of beer grew tremendously. This was primarily due to the fact that monasteries were some of the first organizations to brew beer as a trade. Monks built breweries as part of their mission to provide food, shelter, and drink to travelers and pilgrims.



**Opposite:** The exterior of the Bier-und-Oktoberfest Museum. **Left:** Visitors looking a coin thrown to the crowd at the first Oktoberfest. **Below left:** Food and drink are available at the Museum's keller.



participated in the European Union's Leonardo Project: working in a hotel in Sweden and a restaurant in France. Back in Munich, which he loves, Bulka left the hotel business and worked for five years in computer graphics until a friend in-charge of developing the Museum's website told him about his present job.

"Every year we get more and more visitors. We're now up to about 20,000; about 80 percent are German," said Bulka. "At first we weren't in the guide books, but now we are. We're obviously also a destination of the many private beer tours of Munich. If someone clicks on our website and then on [info@Bier-und-Oktoberfestmuseum.de](mailto:info@Bier-und-Oktoberfestmuseum.de), we can arrange an English-language tour of the Museum and provide contacts for beer tours and tastings."

"Open from Tuesday to Saturday from 1:00 to 7:00 p.m. with an entrance fee of 4 Euros, the Museum is privately-owned," Bulka told me, "by the Edith-Haberland-Wagner Foundation which also owns over 50 percent of the *Augustiner Bräu*. Established in 1328, this brewery, the oldest still independent brewery in Munich, had belonged to the Wagner family and Edith Haberland-Wagner, who died eleven years ago, was the last Wagner. Of course, it had belonged to the Augustine Order of monks until the secularization of all monasteries in 1803. Anton and Therese Wagner bought the brewery from the monks in 1829. The other monastic breweries were also bought by private people then too.

"Although here you can see a model of an early cooling machine," continued Bulka, "ours is not a technical museum. On the ground floor we have the restaurant and keller. All the displays and artifacts have explanations in both German and English. Those on the second floor are devoted to the history of beer brewing, particularly in Munich plus the reconstruction of what an apartment's kitchen would have looked like in the nineteenth century. In Munich we used to have over 100 breweries, so, although we didn't invent beer, Munich was influential in the history of brewing beer. The Museum owns a large collection of early (c. 1860s) beer bottles, of steins of all different shapes, materials, and sizes, not to mention attractions like a fat lady's mirror, magician props and posters as well as souvenirs from many of the Oktoberfests. The general public is also generous in donating beer memorabilia to build up the collections."

The first recorded brewery in the area dates to 1040. It was a Benedictine monastery, Weihestephan in Freising, and is now The Technical University of Munich and

An important date in Bavarian beer history is 1516 when William IV, Duke of Bavaria, adopted the *Reinheitsgebot* (Purity Law), perhaps the oldest food regulation still in use (it was formally passed as a German law in 1987). The *Gebot* ordered that the ingredients of beer be restricted to water, barley, and hops; yeast was added to the list after Louis Pasteur's discovery in 1857. The Bavarian law was applied throughout Germany as part of the 1871 German unification as the German empire under Otto von Bismarck, and has since been updated to reflect modern trends in beer brewing. To this day, the *Gebot* is considered a mark of purity in beers, although this is controversial.

After the documentary I met with the Museum's director, Czech-born Lukas Bulka, whose first job at age fifteen was serving in a beer garden belonging to the local restaurateur Schottenhamel family who still runs a tent at the Oktoberfest. He then moved on to work for the Geisel family, now for four generations the kings of hospitality in Munich, rotating jobs between their four first class and deluxe hotels and Michelin-starred restaurants. Bulka later

Traditional Paper & Chocolate



Left and right: The Museum's keller.



the center of world brewing technology. Today there are only six breweries left in Munich: Augustiner, Hofbräu, nicknamed “Haus” which belongs to the state of Bavaria, and the others, Löwenbräu, Paulaner, Hacker-Pschorr, and Spaten, have been sold to big international beer companies.

The third floor is the “clubhouse” of the Oktoberfest Museum, which was founded almost 40 years ago by Xaver Heilmannseeder, proprietor of the Löwenbräukellers” and of the Löwenbräu tent at the Oktoberfest. Heilmannseeder left considerable funds in his will to enable the club to organize temporary exhibitions about Oktoberfest, as does the fourth floor. Right now there is a photo exhibition called “1328”, the year the Augustiner brewery was founded. The topic of ‘Oktoberfest-then and now’ is so multifaceted,” explained Bulka, “that it can’t be captured adequately in a permanent exhibition. Therefore we’re developing an audio-visual tape to capture all aspects of the event, which this year from September 18 to October 4 will be celebrating its 200th anniversary. Besides us, the Münchner Stadt Museum (Munich City Museum, [www.stadtmuseum-online.de](http://www.stadtmuseum-online.de)) will bring the Oktoberfest’s history to life with an exhibition: ‘The Oktoberfest 1810-2010’. The fifth and sixth floors house the Museum’s archives and the director’s office.”

An eye-catching exhibit is a case with several medieval clay mugs and pitchers, each glazed gray with a blue Star-of-David. “They have no association with Judaism,” Bulka told me. “Rather they are associated with the chemistry—fire and water—used in beer brewing during the fourteenth century. One explanation is the point at the top symbolizes the fire necessary to brew beer and the point at the bottom symbolizes the water you need to draw from underground to make beer. Another is that, since in the fourteenth century few people could read, that if the Star-of-David was hung outside, people knew it was a place they

could get fresh beer. Another sign for fresh beer is called a ‘Hop’s Crown’. There’s one hanging out at the wood-paneled and beamed Spatenhaus in front of the Opera House; ours dates to 1850.”

Other interesting items are a guild’s ark from around 1650 where the brewers locked their documents and recipes and a beer brewers’ guild meeting board, on which each brewer who attended would hang his name, a bit like clocking in on the job. It dates to 1798 when the *Frauenkirche* (Church of Our Lady), Munich’s cathedral, and *Peterskirche* (St. Peter’s Church) regulated how much beer each brewer could produce and sell. “We take the ark out every two years on Brewers’ Day,” Bulka told me. “This year it’s June 19. There’s a procession downtown at which the new brewers get their diploma.”

Still another, although only a small model, is the cooling machine made by the Linder Company. It produced ice, which was a major breakthrough for brewers because it not only allowed them to produce top-quality beer all year round but also to export it.

In spite of its proximity to the world-famous *Hofbräuhaus* and the *Augustiner Grossgastätten*, two of several restaurants in the city serving Munich’s cult beer, don’t leave the Museum without stopping at its very own *keller* (open from 5 p.m. – midnight) for a tasting, a stein, and a choice of very reasonably-priced snacks: pretzels and cheese or traditional full meals: goulash, sausages, and *schnitzel*. I recommend the *spargel* (asparagus) if they’re in season. The *keller*, which can accommodate up to 110 people, is open to the general public as well as for private parties even without visiting the museum. It serves all Augustiner beers and rotates those of one of Munich’s other five breweries each month.

Visit [www.bier-und-oktoberfestmuseum.de](http://www.bier-und-oktoberfestmuseum.de) for more information. **GL**