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OUT & ABOUT

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To truly sample Maine's beer scene, go off the beaten path

These destination breweries offer a more relaxed vibe and more to do while you're there.

BY ALEXANDRA HALL

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The fire pit is one of many places to sit at Sebago Brewing Co.'s destination brewery and tasting room in Gorham. Photo courtesy of Sebago Brewing Co.

Craft beer lovers across the country know Portland as a nexus of phenomenal breweries. And anyone looking to sample its bounty might understandably zero in on clusters that offer an array of options – on Industrial Way and in East Bayside in Portland, and, increasingly, along Route 1 in Freeport.

But for beer lovers with a sense of adventure, more interested in trying something different than hitting the trendiest spots, several destination breweries in southern Maine await.

Often reminiscent of a college campus, these breweries proffer a slew of activities beyond drinking and pontificating about tasting notes. (There's plenty of that, to be sure, but also enough other diversions to build an afternoon – if not more – around.) They may require going a bit out of your way but, in exchange, promise plenty of space, smaller crowds, better parking and, as a result of all of the above, a more relaxed vibe. Here are a few that are more than worth the trek.

Funky Bow Beer Co.

For co-founder Paul Lorrain, it all starts in the tap room. Not with the beer, but with faces. "You look around and everyone's smiling," he says. "Lots of kids, lots of dogs, everyone's happy. It's very safe and welcoming, no matter who you are, you're welcome." He and son Abraham Lorrain have taken that idea and run with it, building not just a well-respected brewery (see their signature, hugely popular G-string Pale Ale) but also a sprawling indoor-outdoor complex complete with multiple fire pits, an 18-hole disc golf course, and two pickleball courts. On weekends, expect a new live band each day. Oh, and the wood-fired pizza with speck grains is so good, it even gives the beer a run for its money.

21 Ledgewood Lane, Lyman, 207-409-6814; 1-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sunday, plus expanded summer hours. funkybowbeercompany.com

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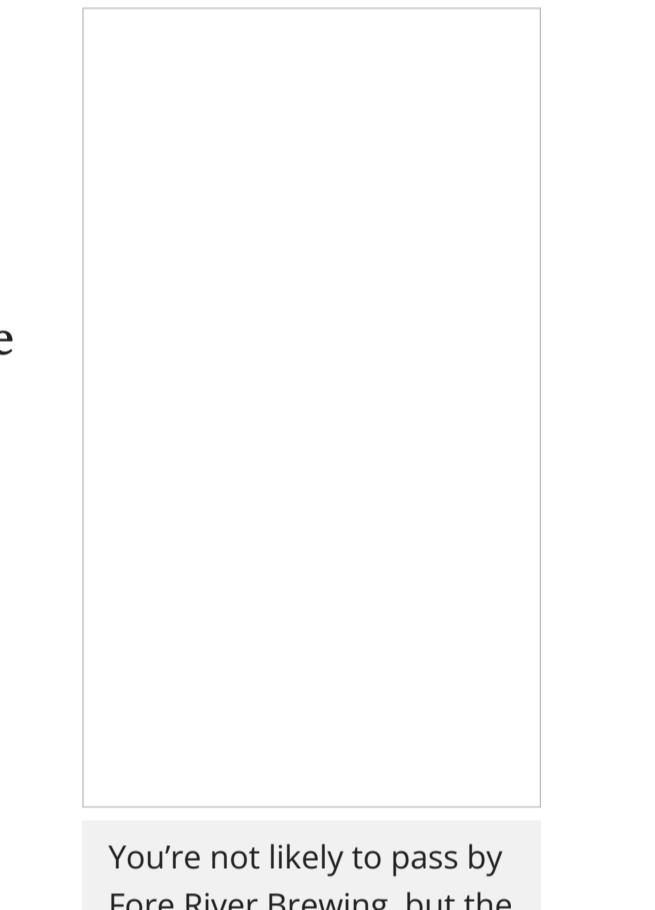
Gneiss Brewing Co.

German-style ale and wheat beers might be what first lures aficionados here, but it's the setting that keeps them coming back. Nestled in the woody foothills of the White Mountains, the biergarten (where well-behaved dogs are welcome) and indoor tasting room are the rustic background for downing pours of head brewer and co-founder Dustin Johnson's ales, sours, lagers and stouts. Outside find fire pits, cornhole and giant Connect Four set up among several seating areas spaced out throughout the gravel-covered grounds.

94 Patterson Road, Limerick; noon to 6 p.m. Saturday, noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, plus expanded summer hours. gneissbeer.com

Fore River Brewing Co.

Count on plenty of outdoor and indoor space to relax and spread out, not to mention an abundance of parking at this well-organized brewery spotlighting IPAs and sour and wild ales. "The atmosphere is super laid back, but there's never more than a five- or six-minute wait for a beer," says manager Clara Ellis. Weekends see live music and vittles from a different source each day (pizza from Brickyard Hollow on Fridays, sandwiches from Cafe Louis on Saturdays, charcuterie boxes from Union Kitchen on Sunday). Meanwhile, the expansive, fenced-in yard is dog-friendly and often the site of marathon fire-pit hangout sessions and cornhole games.



You're not likely to pass by Fore River Brewing, but the South Portland spot is worth seeking out. Photo by Clara Ellis

45 Huntress Ave., South Portland; 3-8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, noon to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, noon to 8 p.m. Sunday, plus expanded summer hours. foreriverbrewing.com

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Flight Deck Brewing

Named for its setting in Brunswick Landing – the former small-arms firing range on the redeveloped Brunswick Naval Air Station – this environmentally focused outpost is tricked out with creature comforts galore. Serving stouts, ales, sours and lagers made using 100 percent renewable energy (even their ingredients come from sources using solar panels, anaerobic biodigestion and renewable credits), the covered pavilion and dog-friendly patio have plenty of Adirondack chairs and picnic tables, and wood-fired pizza made from heritage grains in a copper-clad oven.

11 Atlantic Ave., Brunswick, 207-504-5133; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday. flightdeckbrewing.com



Nate Wildes, owner of Flight Deck, at the brewery on the former Brunswick Naval Air Station. Shawn Patrick Ouellette/Staff Photographer

Sebago Brewing Co.

Designed specifically as a destination brewery on bucolic Shaw Cherry Hill Farm, Sebago's tasting room – which also has a full bar and restaurant – sits next to 250 acres of hiking and biking trails. "We wanted to have our tasting room next to a great recreation resource like that, so people can enjoy them and then come and have a beer afterward," says co-founder Kai Adams. What's more, many of the 80 to 100 beers that Sebago brews every year are tied to that same land, using hops and other ingredients from the neighboring farms. All of them go down smoothly while sitting by the property's huge granite fire pit, or watching the sunset on the lawn.

616 Main St., Gorham, 207-856-2537; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday and Monday. sebagobrewing.com

Alexandra Hall is a longtime New England lifestyle writer who lives in Maine.

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Fri, Sep 02 @5:00pm

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