



This way to the beer. The temperatures for brewing or serving are often cool in Lithuania – as are receptions for outsiders.

Kupiškio brewery makes Magaryčių Alus in which farmhouse subtleties garnish lightly toasted malts and actual hazelnuts, seamlessly leading to herbal, wooden hops bitterness. One can almost imagine the old food bunker in which this brew is conditioned.

Butautu Dvaro is another brewery from Aukštaitijos Bravorai which strays from the cheap but practical plastic bottles seen everywhere else. Settled in an old manor, or dvaro, which Soviets supposedly used for revelry during the occupation, these brewers crank out the cleanest and most approachable beers even though fermentation is still open and worts are cooled in coolships like most countryside breweries. The brewery's Šviesus possesses that toasted malt signature and its Tamsus has the raisin-y angles. But they are both meant to greet the unsuspecting palate subtly.

Like every beer made by a member of Aukštaitijos Bravorai, similar diplomacy coupled with modest barnyard notes and spicier hop lengths can be found in Taruškų brewery's 500-milliliter glass bottles – a luxury in these parts. The Taruškų Šviesus is unique in its flavor profile and impeccably rendered. With such an impressive display of technique, creativity and business acumen, one might say the future of Lithuanian brewing heritage lies not only in the Vilnius specialty bars, but also in the continued success of this brewery group.

Getting Your Fair Share

If you find it attractive to hire an interpreter in hopes that brewers open their doors for you, Vidmantas Laurinavičius of Alaus Brolija (Beer Brotherhood) can be of great help. He can be reached at info@alutis.lt. If that seems too daunting, the best time of year to discover Lithuanian culture all in one spot is the Kaziuko Mug festival in early March. This artisans' fair brings in thousands of visitors from everywhere across the country to revel in all sorts of local products found in hundreds of booths set up along main boulevards and squares all around Vilnius.

Over a dozen countryside brewers make the drive down from the northeast to the capitol to showcase their wares, making it the easiest way to sample beers from a large collection of the remote breweries without having to put on your best Lithuanian accent when calling to request a visit. Here, you can taste a host of other brewing traditions such as the brews of Piniava Alutis, in which raspberry tree branch or red clovers serve as a false bottom in the mash tun.

You can also sample the hearty local cuisine and meet some of these countryside brewers, who seem friendlier at the festival than at home. You can also meet some of the brewers, such as Jonas Morkuno. If you ask about yeast and techniques, you are likely to hear one of the running gags of the farmhouse brewers. They will jokingly offer to share their car or their house with you before they part with their yeast and brewing secrets.

Who says hospitality is not a Lithuanian trait?