



## Pints Up

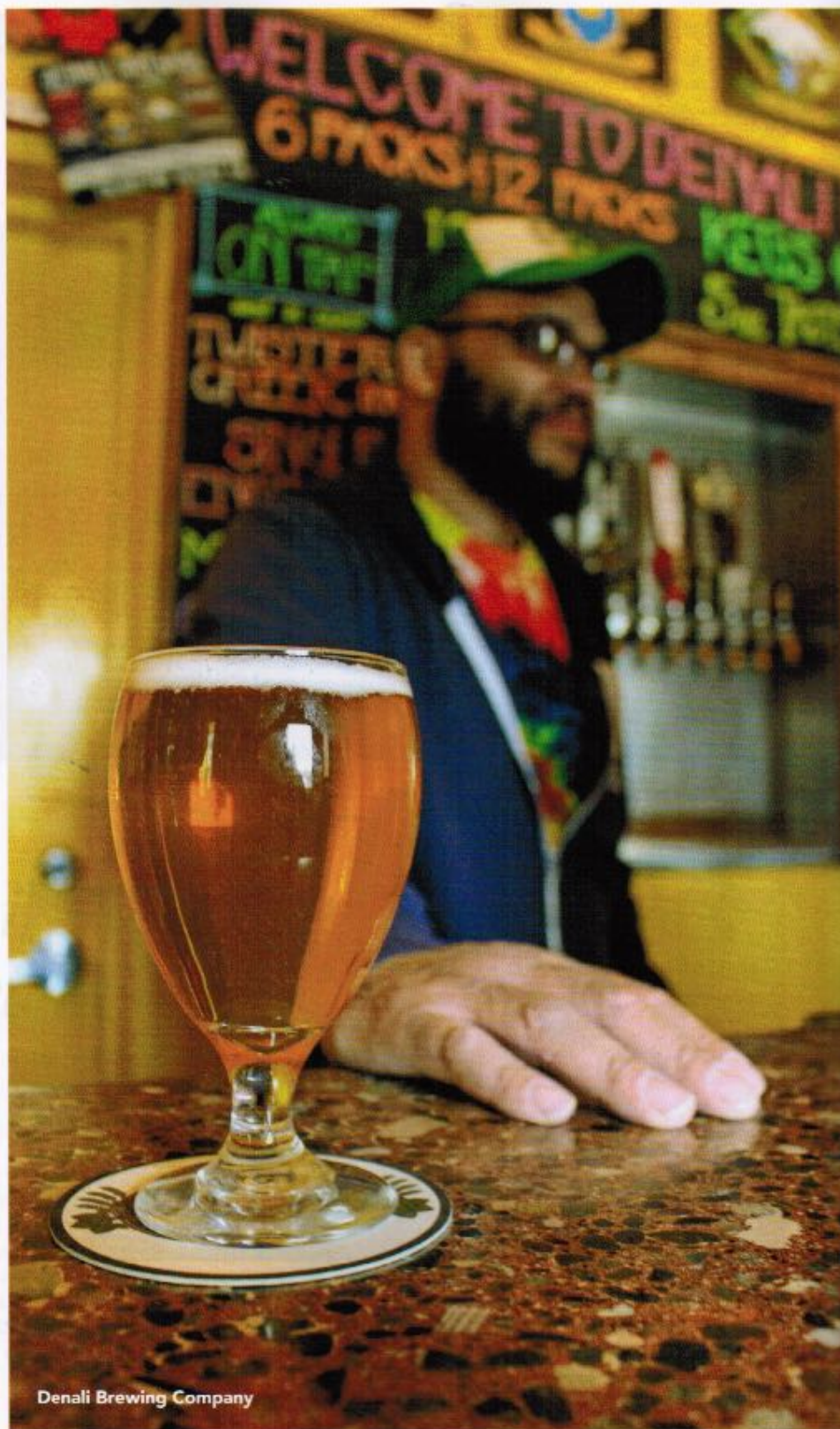
When the weather dips in Anchorage, make your way to the city's booming breweries

BY KAREN ASP

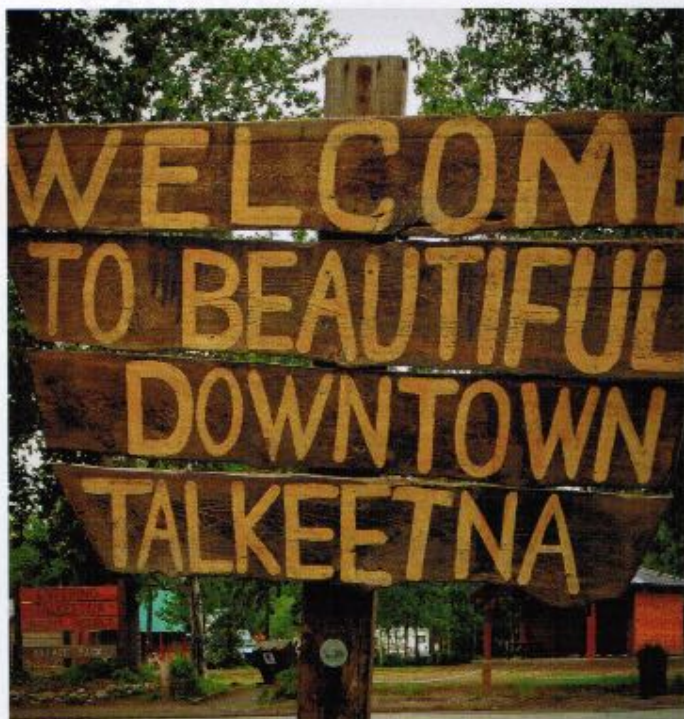
Alaska may not top your list as a winter getaway. The darkness, coupled with the sheer cold, might make it sound as inviting as visiting Death Valley in summer — for the opposite reason, of course.

But there is a good reason to visit Anchorage, namely its burgeoning beer scene. During my visit in March, when the days are starting to get longer, I visited 12 of the state's more than 30 breweries.

The beer scene is hot here in winter, because, unlike bears, folks in Anchorage aren't into hibernating. Instead, they prefer to head to social establishments in droves. Be it a Wednesday or Saturday, places are packed and lively as can be, locals seeking camaraderie. And what better way to do that than with a pint?



Denali Brewing Company



## HIP SIPS

The easiest and safest way to visit multiple breweries is through a designated bus tour. I've done many of these tours around the country but never one that starts on a train — until now. I've signed up for Hops on the Rail through Big Swig Tours, and my journey starts with a three-hour train ride from Anchorage to Talkeetna, a small hamlet north of Anchorage. During that time, I do little but stare out the windows, catching a glimpse of Denali and several moose.

Once in Talkeetna, I'm greeted by Bryan Caenepeel, owner and founder of Big Swig Tours, who hands me a boxed lunch from the Roadhouse, a beloved local bakery where climbers often fill their bellies before tackling Denali. We then pile into a van and make our first stop at Denali Brewing Company, Alaska's second largest brewery. As Caenepeel

explains, brewing beer isn't easy in Alaska, because all equipment and ingredients, hops included, have to be shipped in.

Despite this hurdle, "As soon (as) a brewery opens its doors, it's ready to expand," he says. "It's hard for breweries to keep up with production."

That was the case for Denali Brewing Company, which has grown to a 30-barrel brewery that makes beer, mead and spirits. I take a tour with a Twisted Creek IPA in hand, and while it earns my best-of vote, there's not one beer among the many I sample that I don't like.

From Talkeetna, we head by van to Palmer to tour Arkose Brewery. A husband-wife team runs this small-brewery situated in a valley, affording visitors 360-degree views of the Chugach and Talkeetna mountains.

At the next stop, Odd Man Rush Brewing in Eagle River, >

## IF YOU GO



With roughly 1,600 eateries, including trucks and carts, you won't go hungry in Anchorage. Three not to miss: **Snow City Cafe** for its award-winning breakfasts. 1034 W. 4th Ave.; 907-272-2489; [snowcitycafe.com](http://snowcitycafe.com)

**South Restaurant and Coffeehouse** for the hip vibe. 11124 Old Seward Highway; 907-770-9200; [southak.com](http://southak.com)

**Simon & Seafort's Saloon & Grill** where you can't beat the happy hour prices and sunset views of Cook Inlet and Mount Susitna. 420 L St.; 907-274-3502; [simonandseafort.com](http://simonandseafort.com)



**Kincaid Park**, a free park in Anchorage with nearly 40 miles of groomed trails, is a must for cross-country skiers. 9401 Raspberry Rd.; 907-343-4355; [anchorageparkfoundation.org/directory/kincaid](http://anchorageparkfoundation.org/directory/kincaid)

For a bigger adventure, book a guided tour in Palmer through **Lifetime Adventures** to

cross-country ski at Hatcher Pass, a recreational playground for locals where Olympians often train. 800-952-8624; [lifetimeadventure.net](http://lifetimeadventure.net)



Cozy accommodations await at **Copper Whale Inn**, where you'll be within walking distance of local hot spots. Bonus? Views of Cook Inlet and the mountains. 440 L St.; 907-258-7999; [copperwhale.com](http://copperwhale.com)



Renting a car is best, especially if you want to extend your trip and ski (cross-country as well as downhill) at **Alyeska Resort** in Girdwood, about 40 minutes southeast of Anchorage. The journey takes you along the Seward Highway, one of the most beautiful drives in the country, with picturesque scenes of the shoreline of the Turnagain Arm and peaks of the Chugach Mountains. 1000 Arlberg Ave.; 800-880-3880; [alyeskaresort.com](http://alyeskaresort.com)



Beers on tap  
at Uncle Joe's  
Pizzeria in  
Anchorage



Midnight  
Sun Brewing  
Company  
8111 Dimond  
Hook Dr.;  
907-344-1179;  
midnightsun  
brewing.com



Anchorage  
Brewing  
Company  
148 W. 91st Ave.;  
907-677-2739;  
anchorage  
brewing  
company.com



ice fans will feel at home in a hockey-themed brewery that was designed using reclaimed materials and includes walls of cassette tapes where, depending on your age, you might find your favorites from younger years.

Our last stop deposits us back in Anchorage for the day's smallest brewery, Resolution Brewing Company. It's only a three-barrel operation, but it's kicking out Belgian-inspired ales like nobody's business.

#### THIRSTY FOR MORE?

Four breweries is a good start, but I'm thirsting for more. Fortunately, eight breweries have set up shop in Anchorage so I don't have far to go.

One of my favorites is the Anchorage Brewing Company, which has a Zenlike tasting room with wood accents everywhere, including walnut tables. A waist-high wall made of concrete and Japanese cedar separates the room from 13 9-foot oak barrels

called foudres, making them feel part of the atmosphere. While the tasting room is pleasing to the eyes, the beer is more than pleasing to the palate. Most on the lineup use Brettanomyces, a complex wild yeast, giving beers like the Mosaic saison a deliciously funky flavor.

Another highlight is Midnight Sun Brewing Company, where I catch a free brewery tour, which happens every Thursday at 6 p.m. Midnight Sun is Anchorage's oldest brewery, and it churns out creative beers using ingredients like carrots and tangelos, the likes of which I saw being hand-peeled.

Given how challenging the logistics are for brewing beer in Alaska, I walk away with a new appreciation for the many brews I've sipped here, not to mention a suitcase full of bottles and crowlers — machine-filled, aluminum cans that are filled upon request. Now if only I could persuade Alaska to build a beer pipeline that goes straight to my house in the Lower 48. ■