



Esquire

Is It Possible to Drink at Every Single Brewery in One State in Just One Day?

Yes. Here's how to do it—and survive.



BY AARON GOLDFARB FEB 10, 2017

Being a stunt journalist is kind of like being a heroin addict. You're always chasing that higher high. You learn [how to drink all night without getting drunk](#), you explore a life of [drinking every day before noon](#). You up the ante and see if you can eat and drink [an entire hotel minibar](#). You successfully [bar crawl an entire airport terminal](#)...then decide to see if you can brewery crawl an entire damn U.S. state.

There are over 5,000 breweries in America. But there are only 16 in Rhode Island, our nation's smallest state. Would it be possible to visit them all—*drink at them all*—in a single day? The good people at [Visit Rhode Island](#) thought so, but I also think they really wanted me to visit Rhode Island. And so, without telling my wife about my reckless plan, I hopped a train to Providence.

I'm picked up at the station by Alexa, my chauffeur and chaperone, and the unluckiest woman in all the land. She will drive me to all 16 breweries, she will play "bad cop" and force me to leave breweries the second I've plowed through a flight of beers, and she will politely laugh at all my jokes as I get increasingly drunker. She has a great attitude, though, and seems up for the task.

"No one walks *anywhere* in Rhode Island," she assures me as we speed off in her Volkswagen, as if toe blisters and sore hammies are my biggest concern for the day.

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1

Our first stop, at 9 a.m. sharp, is **Ravenous Brewing**, the second smallest brewery in the state as well as the northernmost, located in the town of Woonsocket, near the Massachusetts border. We struggle to find it at first, and I'm quite concerned. Getting even a minute off schedule could screw up my entire day. But, eventually, Alexa finds the tiny brewery, tucked in the corner of an industrial parking lot where food trucks are stored for the night. We are welcomed by owner Dorian Rave, a cool name for a cool guy who was formerly a Central Falls police captain.



"I started this as kind of an F-U to my ex-wife," he tells me. She had continually bashed his home-brewing dreams. "Don't print that." Pause. "OK, you can print that." Now he has a new wife and his own one-man brewery, about as big as a coffee shop and just as cozy, with Edgar Allen Poe iconography everywhere, even if Rave doesn't seem to be that big of fan. I try his five beers and they're all pretty good, especially the Coffee Milk Stout.

"What's coffee milk?" I ask.

"You know how kids drink chocolate milk? Or strawberry milk?" Alexa says. "In Rhode Island kids drink [coffee milk](#)."

It's actually the state's official beverage I learn. I will learn about many of the state's official whatevers during this day. Go ahead, quiz me.

2

Our next stop is **Narragansett**, Rhode Island's largest brewery, and the only spot I'll visit today that you've actually heard of. What you might not know, however, is that Rhode Island's most famous brewery brews all its beers in Rochester, New York.

Started in 1890 in Cranston, Rhode Island, Narragansett Lager was at one time the best-selling beer in all of New England. In the 1960s, though, the brewery was sold, and by 1981 Narragansett was closed for good. In 2005, a group of Rhode Island investors, lead by former Snapple exec Mark Hellendrung, purchased the brand with an aim to resurrect it. Unfortunately, that meant initially brewing in Rochester. So what am I visiting—and more importantly, *drinking*—in Pawtucket, Rhode Island?



Next to an "adult day care" sit several beat-up warehouses, 131,000 square feet worth, that were at one time the Bancroft wooden tennis racket factory. (If you're wondering, you can buy 131,000 square-feet of Pawtucket warehouse space for a mere \$1.25 million.) It doesn't look like much—from the outside it doesn't even look safe to enter—but these buildings will soon form an ambitious "craft beer collective." Primarily funded by Narragansett, which will finally have its own Rhode Island brewing space, it will be shared with another half-dozen or so smaller breweries looking to scale up.

There are plenty of shiny 300-barrel fermenters, but no brewing is going on just yet. So employees B.J. Mansuetti, Jim Crooks, and I are forced to sit on pallets of 'Gansett cans in the chilly, unfinished warehouse, sipping on Rochester-brewed beer as they point to where various parts of the facility will soon be.

"People will be drinking here in six weeks, believe it or not. By St. Patrick's Day," Crooks notes optimistically. "It will be our own sort of adult day care," he cracks.

While checking Twitter in between stops, I notice that my state, New York, has just surpassed [300 total breweries](#). Brooklyn, where I live, now has 12 itself—and I haven't even been to all of them. Visiting every brewery in the Empire state in a single day would be an impossibility; you'd need an extra liver and teleportation technology. Such would be the case in most states: Even in a relatively non-beery state like North Dakota, which only has a dozen breweries, some are over 400 miles apart. That leads me to believe if I accomplish this, I will be the first person to ever have visited (and drank at!) every single brewery in a single state in a single day. Not only that, I aim to literally drink (*taste*) every single beer currently available in the state.

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single brewery in a single state in a single day.**

"The tourism board had never heard of any one wanting to do this," Alexa tells me, a sentence I always like to hear when pulling off a stunt.

3

Down the street from Narragansett—everything is down the street in this tiny state—sits **Foolproof Brewing**, the biggest success story in Rhode Island craft beer. It was opened in 2013 by Nick Garrison, who had been working in the aerospace industry, though not as a rocket scientist, he insists. Foolproof has become so popular it is now sold in seven states and the brewery has undergone three expansions.

"But you seem like you know all this stuff, so I won't bore you with a tour," Garrison tells me as we peek into the brew house. I hunker down at Foolproof's brightly-appointed tap room, where I sample 10 different beers in under 10 minutes. Foolproof likes to make beers with unusual ingredients that are evocative of unique life experiences. I'm particularly impressed with Shuckolate, a chocolate/oyster stout made for Valentine's Day, as both those ingredients are said to be aphrodisiacs. I suggest Garrison add tiger penis to next year's batch.

4

We head back into Providence for a stop at the city's old craft brewery, **Union Station**. Opened in 1994 in a former train depot, it is now owned by the John Harvard's brewpub chain. Standing at the bar as the lunch crowd begins filing in, I try eight beers plus a housemade root beer.

5

As I enter **Trinity Brewhouse** just down the block—yes, we drive—I'm greeted by state senator [Joshua Miller](#). Excellent! I presume I'm about to get a key to the state for my historic drinking efforts. Not quite. Instead I learn Miller is the long-time owner of Trinity and that's there's no such thing as a key to a state.



We take a seat at a beat-up corner booth, and Miller regales me with the kind of stories you'd expect a long-time bar owner and long-time politician to have. He's pro-marijuana. He had a bit part in *There's Something About Mary*. He once told an "Alex Jones Infowars guy" to "go fuck yourself," leading to radical right-wingers attempting to shut down Trinity. Fun! Miller has been in the bar business since 1975 when, as a 21-year-old college junior, he and some buddies bought Met Café for a mere \$20,000. By the early 1990s he was helping change state legislation so he could capitalize on the country's looming microbrewery craze.

"People still come in here and they'll try to order a Bud. Or a Corona," he tells me. "They don't seem to understand that we make our own beer! You almost wonder how they don't need to have a seeing-eye dog with them." I try nine different house beers, some first brewed in 1994, and squeeze in a lunch of beer-battered fish and chips.

6

We're somehow ahead of schedule. I've honestly never enjoyed bar crawling so much. There's no time for small talk, no time for doing anything but quickly exchanging niceties with taproom staff before having them lay out a full flight of beers to pour down my face. At each additional brewery I arrive at, I'm usually asked to recount my day so far. By this point in the afternoon that only takes a minute; by the evening a full recap of the day's events could use up my entire allotted time.



We again leave the city and head back to Pawtucket, which is apparently the armpit of Rhode Island, according to everyone I speak to. It's the home of shuttered mills, high crime rates, failing public schools, elevated teen pregnancy, and triple-A baseball. **Bucket Brewery** is a play on one of the much-maligned town's most pervasive epithets.

"You don't get to pick your nickname," founder Nate Broomfield tells me. "But you can claim it."

7

Amazingly, some 38 beers into my day, I don't hate beer yet, nor Rhode Island, but the day is only halfway over. Alexa shuffles me on to **Crooked Current**, also in Pawtucket, in a shopping center that features a yoga studio, a Latin dance company, and an African-American theater troupe. Sad as it is to say, Crooked Current is the only brewery in the state run by a female brewmaster—and Nichole Pelletier is probably the most inventive one in the entire Ocean State. Working on Rhode Island's smallest brewing system—it's made of plastic and as big as a Poland Springs office water cooler—she makes some truly inspired culinary beers. With Valentine's Day approaching, she currently has a series of brews that taste like the orange peel-filled and cherry-covered chocolate candies that come in a heart-shaped box.

"It's a luxury to be so small," she tells me, because she's able to experiment without too many people noticing. In a way, that could define the entire state's beer scene—a state whose official motto is, fittingly, "Unwind." With happy hour approaching, it's time to head back to Providence for some more unwinding.

"Will traffic be an issue?" I ask Alexa.

"Traffic is never an issue."

There's no time for small talk, no time for doing anything but quickly exchanging niceties with taproom staff before having them lay out a full flight of beers to pour down my face.

8

TGIF, and the breweries are finally beginning to fill up with office workers and drinkers. Especially **Long Live Beerworks**, over which beer geeks are currently going gaga. Its founder, Armando DeDona, is a laid-back guy with slicked-back hair. He gave up a frustrating life as a mason in his late 30s and headed to brewing school in Sunderland, England, living in a tiny dorm room among teenage college kids. He now makes the kind of juicy, New England-style IPAs that are all the rage at the moment, yet he remains ridiculously humble.

"I really like the Lonely Weekend IPA," I tell him. It's my 50th beer of the day and one of the best.

"Yeah. It's all right I guess," he responds.

9

I would have gladly stayed at Long Live for the rest of the night, but we must move on. We next hit **Revival Brewing**, which resides in the low-ceilinged basement of a bar called Brutopia and is laid out like a crumbling frat house: pinball machines, ping pong tables, well-worn sofas, and high-fivin' dudes playing video games.

"People always get either the (low-alcohol pilsner) What Cheer? or the (10 percent ABV tripel) RIPTA—nothing in the middle," the taproom bartender Eli tells me. I get all 11 available beers. In the corner some college bros are getting RIPTA'd themselves while munching on styrofoam cartons of fried calamari. Alexa informs me that fried calamari is [Rhode Island's official state appetizer](#).



10

We head south for the final stops on the day's journey, entering the dark country roads of Exeter. Armando had already told me that **Tilted Barn Brewery** is "our Hill Farmstead," referencing the Vermont farmhouse brewery that is perhaps the best brewery in America and certainly one of the most bucolic. Tilted Barn is located on 30 acres of land you can't believe were squeezed into this mostly urban state. I'll later learn those 30 acres, including buildings, are worth less than my Brooklyn brownstone.

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Matt Richardson certainly has the shortest commute of any Rhode Island brewery owner: his house sits a few feet from the 1800s-built barn he brews in. He tells me his wife is currently at home taking care of their three children while he acts as bartender at the lively tap room. His four beers are excellent; I particularly enjoy the Mount Yasur coffee porter. He even sells Christmas trees, though I'm not in the market. Unfortunately, I have to use the flashlight app on my iPhone to find my way to the port-a-potty outside.

11

Proclamation Brewery is currently the hottest brewery in the state, but they were not open for my endeavor, the whole brewery team having headed up to Boston for that weekend's Extreme Beer Festival. Apparently, they don't find a man drinking at every brewery in their state quite extreme enough. I consider breaking into the brewery just to show them the extremes I am willing to go to, but instead simply have Alexa stop the car in front of the brewery. There I pound a can of their Double Dry-Hopped Tendril IPA. It's lovely.



12

In my brief time here, I've begun to realize that, in many ways, Rhode Island is like Massachusetts on steroids. The Patriots will win the Super Bowl in just two days, and no matter where we visit, whether high-end or low-brow, gentlemen are clad in Pat Patriot hats and Thomas Edward Brady replica jerseys.

Rhode Island's love affair with the Patriots is perhaps best summed up by the remarkable work of art painted on the side of a building facing Kingstown Road in South Kingstown. It shows a hairy-wristed right hand spread open, with giant Super Bowl rings on every finger but the middle one. "This one's for you, Roger!" exclaims the sign.

Across the street from this wonderfully subtle sign sits **Sons of Liberty**, the only distillery on my tour. I'm getting cocky. I started my day by having just a sip of most beers, but as we hit nightfall I'm drinking full glasses. I'm now not even opposed to having some drams of whiskey, like the inventive offerings made by Sons of Liberty. I greatly enjoy their Grapefruit Hop whiskey and their Pedro Ximénez Sherry Finish—and yes, I also have the complimentary beers.

13-15

Whalers Brewing just up the road is the most raucous scene I encounter all day, a massive Moby Dick-decorated warehouse space full of URI students playing cornhole as their dogs run amok. **Grey Sail** is the state's southernmost brewery (it's on the Connecticut border) and produces its most famed beer of the moment—Captain's Daughter, a delicious, mosaic-hopped double IPA. **Newport Storm Brewery** is the only brewery located in the tiny vacation town. Of course, it's mid-winter right now—28 degrees today—so there aren't exactly a lot of visitors. In fact, there are zero customers left at 9 p.m. to watch me down three rums and eight beers with such New England-y names as infeRIority Complex and Rhode Sodah.



16

There is no ceremony, no streamers, no politicians nor eager fans upon my 10:30 p.m. arrival at my final destination, **Coddington Brewing Co.**—just a few locals eating calamari and watching the end of the Celtics game. Opened in 1995, Coddington is the third-oldest brewery in the state, and it's looking worse for wear. The lighting is unpleasant, the employees aloof, the rarely-updated menus housed in those plastic sleeves that always end up covered with nacho gunk. But now is not the time to get tripped up. I order a full flight of seven beers, and a paper placemat is laid in front of me with circles identifying each one.

Brewmaster Marshall Righter comes out to say hello to me. He tells me he's retiring from the brewing business and spending this late evening training his replacement. He's not that old though, so I wonder why he's leaving the beer game.

"Moving to Jamaica. *Cannabis*," he tells me. I consider following him.

**Whereas I started my day by having just a sip of most beers, as we
hit nightfall I'm finally drinking full glasses.**

Instead, I plow through my flight of beers so I can complete my mission, get the hell out of Coddington, and let Alexa drive me back to my hotel. Remarkably, she doesn't seem to hate me yet, even after watching me spend 14 straight hours drinking without even a sip of alcohol herself.

I return to the Dean Hotel just as some rowdy conventioners are headed out for the evening. I'm surprisingly not too drunk, not even too tired. I'm just really fucking sick of beer. It feels like I will never get the taste of beer out of my mouth. Entering my room, I immediately head to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I find my sink filled to the brim with ice and two "Hi—Neighbor! Have a 'Gansett" pounder cans shoved in it. A welcome gift. I'm unfazed. I turn on the water and pull out my Oral-B. The sink begins overflowing as I brush.

One state completed, 49 to go.

The Day's Stats

Breweries visited: 16

Beers sampled: 97

BONUS! Whiskies sampled: 7

BONUS! Rums sampled: 3

Miles driven: 93.1

Steps walked: 3,617

Hours spent drinking: 14