



PHOTO BY ROBIN TIERNEY

Denver grows into a mecca for brew fans

By Robin Tierney
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Can't wait until Oktoberfest to cool off with world-class brews? Denver kicks off multiple mega-beer festivals just after Labor Day.

In September, "the city's more beer crazy than ever," said Rich Grant, editor of the blog Walking and Drinking Beer and spokesman for the second annual Denver Beer Fest. Running Sept. 10 to 19, events range from brewery tours to beer-paired dinners. "Denver is an ideal site for beer making with [its access] to clean mountain water."

The world's largest brewfest takes place Sept. 16 to 18. At the Great American Beer Festival, 522 breweries will compete for medals in 79 categories. IPA, fruit beer, gluten-free — this is sampling heaven, with 2,238 beers slated to be served.

"The Great American Beer Festival is a true testament to the passion for the American craft beer

IF YOU GO

Denver Beer Fest
 DenverBeerFest.com

Great American Beer Festival
 GreatAmericanBeerFestival.com

Denver Oktoberfest
 oktoberfestdenver.com

renaissance," said Adam Lambert, a Dogfish Head vice president in Milton, Del. Attending the festival since 2002, he called Denver "a 'real people' city with great weather, easy transportation and a topnotch foodie-drinks scene."

At this year's GABF, local farmers, chefs and independent brewers will team up to pair craft beer with locally sourced foods.

There's plenty to do in LoDo (Lower Downtown), the revitalized former warehouse district. With the new "Your Keys to the City" initiative, passers-by can play a dozen wildly decorated saloon-

style pianos along the 16th Street Mall, a mile-long plaza open only to pedestrians and free hybrid buses that run every five minutes. Artfully designed chess tables also brighten the mall, which stretches from Millennium Pedestrian Bridge (look for its soaring 200-foot white supports resembling ship riggings) on South Platte River to the new library and Denver Art Museum.

"The [LoDo] area used to so awful. Build lofts? Insane!" recalled Grant. Then came art galleries — and improvised bars. "People would set boards across two barrels."

The Old West architecture and frontier vibe remain. Oxford Hotel is a trip into yesteryear with its Cruise Room, downtown's first bar. The grand 1885 Beaux-Arts Union Station is the keystone of Denver's new transportation hub.

The gleaming Colorado Convention Center — GABF's central site — exudes Denver attitude with Lawrence Argent's 40-foot-tall "Big Blue Bear" sculpture peeking into its windows. The Mile High City never runs dry of cheerworthy views — or parties. Winds GABF winds down, Denver's Oktoberfest kicks off.

