



Refresh

# South Africa's six-pack

**Gone are the days when the 'Rainbow Nation' was solely a wine-loyalist. Beer brewpubs now dot the city, and we bring you a list of the best six.**

Text **Lucy Corne**

**A**lthough South Africa is known for its wine, the country has long been a beer-drinking nation. Until recently, the beer consumed was almost exclusively pale lager—a style that makes up around 90% of the world's beer consumption, but as in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the Far East, South Africa's beer scene is changing.

▲ The copper brewhouse in the main dining area at Brauhaus am Damm.





Lucy Come

▲ Above: Saggy Stone Brewing Company is aptly named, for its architecture features stones that look aesthetic albeit precarious. Right: Bridge Street Brewery is located in a former fibreglass factory.

The ‘craft beer revolution’ was a long time coming, ever since the launch of the country’s oldest running microbrewery in 1983, but in the past couple of years, beer has started to boom, and small, often family-run breweries are now pleasing the palates of thirsty customers across the country. Brewpubs—bars where the beer is brewed and served on the premises—are particularly popular. Here’s a list of some of South Africa’s finest.

### Saggy Stone Brewing Company

Saggy Stone in Robertson, Western Cape, is a notably family-friendly pub, with expansive grounds and a dedicated children’s play area. Their beers are easy-drinking thirst-quencher—perfect for the region’s scorching summers. The flagship, California Steam, is big on booze at 6.5%, but the relatively high alcohol content isn’t evident in the flavour—so beware! For something lighter, sip on Desert Lager, a slightly fruity lager, or Big Red, a darker Irish ale. The menu offers a small taste of South African cuisine, with bar snacks that include an ostrich burger



Courtesy, Donovan at Bridge Street Brewery

and a platter of spicy chicken livers—a local favourite. Chow down in the garden or inside the quaint, cottage-like pub, which brewer Adrian Robinson hand-built to house his new-found passion for pints. The Robertson region is best-known for its wine, so there’s plenty in the area if someone in your party is more partial to grape than grain.

### Bridge Street Brewery

A former fibreglass factory might seem an unlikely location for a trendy brewpub, but Bridge Street in Port Elizabeth, Eastern

Cape, has turned its once-industrial home into a funky space frequented by Port Elizabeth’s cool set. Join them for tasters (and most likely a full pint or two) on the vast deck, which overlooks River Bakken. Beers are brewed in the English style, the low carbonation leaving plenty of room for Bridge Street’s creative menu of elevated pub grub—think gourmet sausages, pizzas topped with springbok carpaccio and a range of hot and cold South African-style tapas. The pints start light, with the very moreish Celtic Cross Premium Pilsner. Then there’s the Boar’s Head Best Bitter,



which is stronger on flavour, though not on alcohol content. The Black Dragon Chocolate Stout is another favourite. It is a rich, velvety brew that's ideal with dessert. If you're more about beans than hops and malt, the adjoining café serves great coffee.

### Nottingham Road Brewing Company

Established in 1996, Nottingham Road in KwaZulu-Natal is one of the country's longest-running breweries. The secret of its success lies not only in its beers, but also in the cosiness of the pub, highly reminiscent of an ale house located in the

roads, there is no better place to snuggle than the region's best-loved brewpub.

### Clarens Brewery

Clarens is a town of artists and crafters, sitting on South Africa's mountainous border with the Kingdom of Lesotho. Taking pride of place on the edge of the pretty Village Square, the Clarens Brewery has become a major draw card for visitors, along with the many craft shops showcasing local products. Food at the brewery is kept simple and includes a superlative snack platter featuring locally made cheeses, breads and chutneys.

### So what is craft beer?

South Africa doesn't yet have concrete guidelines as to what constitutes a craft beer, but those in the industry tend to turn to the definition laid down by the American Brewers' Association. This goes into detail regarding quantities and ownership, but is essentially covered by a simple phrase: "small, independent and traditional". Craft breweries are also known as microbreweries, or in the case of the tiny, garage-style setups, nanobreweries.



▲ Above: Brauhaus am Damm is set against the magnificent Magaliesberg mountain range. Right: The whirlpool, plate heat exchanger and one of the 12 lagering tanks at Brauhaus am Damm.

English countryside. The on-site hotel certainly helps as well—Notties, as the brewery is lovingly known—is one of the country's only places where the designated driver can swap car keys for room keys and enjoy a pint of Pickled Pig Porter with dinner. Along with the much-loved porter—a dark beer similar to a stout—Notties pours the Tiddly Toad Light Lager, Pye-Eyed Possum Pilsner and Whistling Weasel Pale Ale, the brewery's flagship beer. The brewery, with its pub, hotel and pretty grounds, sits on the Midlands Meander, a route known for its artisanal products. And after a day shopping for hand-crafted souvenirs, farm cheese and ornaments on the often fog-shrouded



Ekkehard Pape, Brauhaus am Damm





Wendy de Beer, Cockpit Brewhouse



▲ Clockwise from above: Malted barley being added to the mash tun by the brewmaster at Cockpit Brewhouse; Cockpit Brewhouse features aircraft-related books and collectibles; If beer is not your thing, get yourself a pitcher of sangria at Bridge Street Brewery.

even bolder, brewmaster André de Beer likes to experiment, producing a string of occasional beers alongside the five staples. He likes to call them 'extreme beers', and rightly so, for they tend to feature more malt, more hops, more flavour and more alcohol than the average pint. The beers don't upstage the food though, which has been carefully designed with a pint in mind. The pie comes highly recommended, as does finishing off with a slice of beeramisu and a hot cup of stoutuccino.

**Brauhaus am Damm**

Undoubtedly the grandest of the brewpubs is this vast place perched on the edge of the Olifantsnek Dam (a scenic reservoir). The feel is distinctly German, with the beers, the food and the heritage of the brewer all hailing from that most beer-loving of lands. Come early for a decent spot on the deck, and come hungry if you hope to tackle some of the huge portions of food, including the eisbein, a salty hunk of pork knuckle that makes for perfect beer-drinking fodder. Smaller portions are also available of course, and include snacks like beer bread, smoked sausages and freshly baked pretzels. Whether you're eating or not, this setting in the north-western reaches of the Magaliesberg Nature Reserve is the perfect place to sip a beer—choose from the easy-drinking



Courtesy Donovan at Bridge Street Brewery

The beer selection is impressive, with everything from an easy-drinking blonde ale to bold Belgian beers designed for sharing. The brewery actually grew from a love of cider, and a trio of apple-based ciders are also on tap—one infused with berries and another using the fruit for which this region is known: cherries. No one is forgotten here though, so there's something even for the little ones and the designated drivers: fresh fruit juice on tap!

**Cockpit Brewhouse**

Until recently, Cullinan, in Gauteng, was best known for its mine—the

diamond found here in 1905 is still the largest gemstone-quality diamond ever unearthed. Today, the town has a new gem though, in the form of the Cockpit Brewhouse. The pub and restaurant sit in one of the mine-owned cottages in this picturesque Victorian town, where diamonds are still discovered. The taps offer something for every palate, starting with the 'entry-level' Helles Belles Blonde Ale, and progressing to a couple of beers for true connoisseurs, such as the award-winning Mustang American Pale Ale, whose American hops lend it an aroma of tropical fruit. For those seeking something



Courtesy Donovan at Bridge Street Brewery

▲ The menu at Bridge Street Brewery features a range of South African-style hot and cold tapas.

Farmer's Draught, the Brauhaus Pils or the Brauhaus Dunkel, a dark beer that pairs deliciously with pork dishes. The striking copper brewing kettles are on display for all to see, and brewery tours are available if you book in advance.

**Fact file**

**Getting there**

- Saggy Stone Brewing Company is a two-hour drive from Cape Town. Jet Airways has daily flights to Doha from Mumbai, Delhi and Kochi. From Doha, you can catch a connecting flight to Cape Town using our codeshare partner Qatar Airways.
- Bridge Street Brewery is in Port Elizabeth. To get there, you can catch a Jet Airways flight to Doha from Mumbai, Delhi or Kochi, and then a connecting flight from Doha to Port Elizabeth with our codeshare partner Qatar Airways.
- Similarly, for Nottingham Road Brewing Company and Clarens Brewery, from Doha you can catch a connecting flight to Durban using our codeshare partner Qatar Airways. From Durban, you can drive to either of the breweries.
- For Cockpit Brewery and Brauhaus am Damm, you can first fly to Doha from Delhi, Mumbai or Kochi using Jet Airways. From Doha, catch a connecting flight to Johannesburg using our codeshare partner Qatar Airways. The brewpubs are both short road trips from Johannesburg.

**Accommodation**

Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban and Johannesburg offer plenty of accommodation options for every budget. Ellerman House Hotel ([www.ellerman.co.za](http://www.ellerman.co.za)) in Cape Town is perched over a hill, and offers magnificent sea views. In Port Elizabeth, The Windermere ([www.thewindermere.co.za](http://www.thewindermere.co.za)) is an excellent luxury stay option. In Durban, African Pride Audacia Manor ([www.africanpridehotels.com](http://www.africanpridehotels.com)) is a little-known boutique hotel boasting an excellent location, and in Johannesburg, The Residence Boutique Hotel ([www.theresidence.co.za](http://www.theresidence.co.za)) is a great option for those looking for a personalised holiday.

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