



Cool Beers from the Hot South

Sunshine Euro Stars

John Porter looks at the cool stars of the brewing scene from Europe's hottest holiday destinations

Some beers travel very well, while others, frankly, don't. The experience of enjoying a chilled glass of the local brew while watching the sun set over an idyllic Mediterranean harbour is familiar to many of us - as is the disappointment of cracking open a bottle of the same beer back in Blighty and not being nearly as impressed.

In the interests of European harmony, it should be noted that there are undoubtedly many Europeans who force down a pint of indifferent keg bitter in one of Spain's many Brit-themed bars and also ask themselves what the fuss is about.

Luckily, though, the best of Europe's sunshine beers are finding their way into the fridges and founts of UK pub and bar operators, as consumers become more cosmopolitan and more people seek out food and drink with provenance attached.

CGA's World Lager classification, which includes sunshine beers, shows steady growth, accounting for 6% of ontrade beer sales by volume in the year to November 2011, and rising to 8% in the year to the start of October 2013. While the Word Lager category as a whole has also seen its growth rate slow, down from 11.3% the year to November 2011 to 5.5% in the year to the start of October 2013, CGA makes the point that "World Beer continues to grow in importance to the beer category and to bars"

Spanish Fliers

Graham Archibald, national account director for importer Morgenrot Group, says: "With the majority of Brits still heading over to France, Spain and Italy, brands from these countries benefit by having a unique connection with the consumers."

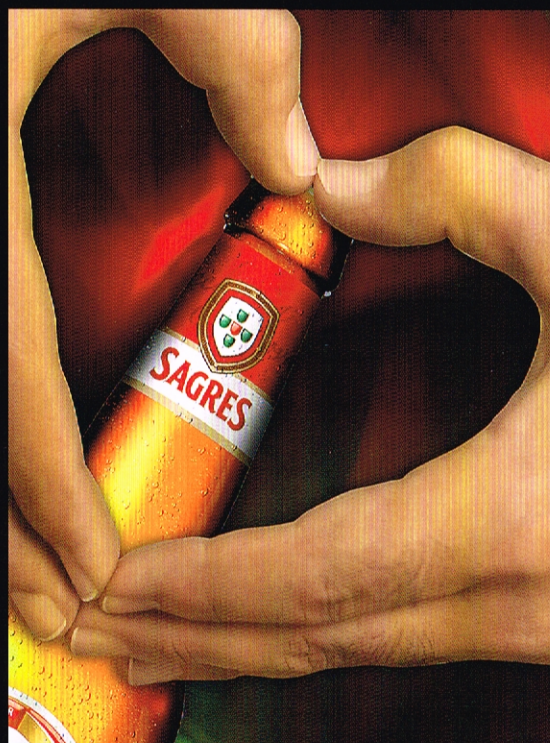
"The best of Europe's sunshine beers are finding their way into the fridges and founts of UK pub and bar operators, as consumers become more cosmopolitan and more people seek out food and drink with provenance attached"

"After a good summer by UK standards, the southern European brands certainly benefited. Spanish food and drink in particular has been booming and moving into more and more pubs and this has certainly helped our craft Spanish brand Alhambra.

"I expect the buzz for Spanish to continue in 2014 as casual dining continues to be a key trend.

The right premium beer brands can provide a massive difference in helping get more money in the till by exciting consumers and tempting them to trade up to something a little extra special.

"Not only this, they can help define the bar. It's not necessarily about stocking 100 beers, it's about stocking the right beers which complement the setting, theme and food."



Sunshine Stars

The two biggest brands in the World Lager category fall firmly into the sunshine camp. San Miguel, brewed under licence by Carlsberg UK, and Peroni, imported by Miller Brands. Peroni has seen draught sales increase by 19.4% in value over the past year as more operators make it part of their core range.

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Sam Rhodes, director of customer marketing at Miller Brands, says: "World Beers provide an opportunity for consumers to trade up and licensees to increase profit margins. The sector is evolving rapidly, showing that people are more open to discovering quality beer. Outlets need to capitalise on World Beer and stock higher awareness brands to drive sales"

Eating out trends play an important part in the appeal of sunshine beers. As sales of grazing and sharing style dishes increase, beers developed to be enjoyed alongside tapas, antipasti and meze are increasingly earning their keep in UK pubs and bars looking to drive food sales.

Two Pints of Lager and a Plate of Tapas

Aiming to address the fact that wine is drunk on the majority of food occasions in pubs and bars, Carlsberg UK launched a two pint carafe for San Miguel in March 2013. David Scott, director of brands & insight, says: "By creating a beer vessel that is designed to be kept on the table we are keeping beer at the forefront of people's minds. It taps into the Spanish way of life of sharing beer with small dishes such as tapas."

Carlsberg UK also imports Mahou, the premium lager from the same stable as San Miguel in Madrid, as well as offering Italian brand Angelo Poretti on draught. Both have grown a presence in the wider ontrade from a base in the restaurant sector, which is a well-trodden path for sunshine brands.

The Art of Food and Beer

Estrella Damm is one of the fastest growing premium world lagers in the UK. Wells & Young's has built links with Spanish food and culture for Estrella Damm. Summer 2013 saw the brand team up with Somerset House to bring renowned Spanish chef, Ferran Adrià's exhibition on 'The Art of Food' to London. And the 'beer of Barcelona' has also supported the London Restaurant Festival Tapas Tour and the Gastro Pub of the Year Award category at the National Restaurant Awards.

Genna Burchell, Brand Manager for Estrella Damm at Wells & Young's said: "Estrella Damm brings a taste of the Mediterranean to the UK which is all about sharing good food and good experiences with friends. The beer is now becoming widely recognised as a great accompaniment to a variety of dishes, stretching beyond the traditional Spanish Tapas so this year we have focussed on introducing even more drinkers to the art of beer and food matching". Estrella Damm has also launched a new ceramic, illuminated fount which achieves fantastic stand out on bar.

Italian Jobs

While Miller Brands' Peroni is by far the biggest brand from Italy, but it's not the only one. Carlsberg's Angelo Poretti and Heineken's Birra Moretti continue to win mainstream listings beyond the Italian restaurant sector, while importer James Clay also reports growing interest for in its Birra Menabrea Italian brand on draught from independent bars and restaurants, although the bottled version remains the biggest seller.

The French Connection

Meteor UK, which distributes beers from French brewer Meteor, launched the Meteor Blonde variant in time for the summer of 2013. Karl Weddell, the brand's UK representative, says: "The weather certainly gave our brand a big boost this year with sunshine beers from Europe definitely benefiting."

Meteor has seen growth of 20% in the past 12 months and has started to move outside of the French restaurant sector into pubs and style bars. The French restaurant roots have definitely helped to position the brand as premium."

There are plans to offer an increased range of permanent and seasonal beers in 2014, with the Meteor portfolio also including Abbey beer Wendelinus. The ontrade market is still extremely competitive, says Weddell, prompting operators to seek a point of difference in their drinks range.

"Many are realising that beer is a great way to achieve this, and are being creative with the beer lists they are putting together. Rather than just looking for the biggest brand from a country, they are instead searching out the lesser known, artisan brands.

These offer something a bit different when it comes to flavour, beer style and heritage, which intrigues the UK's increasingly food and drink obsessed consumer."

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The craft beer boom has also helped importers, he believes. "Consumers are paying more of an interest in brewing practices and ingredients, and this is making them look beyond the mainstream brands.

Despite the growing diversity of imported brands, there is still plenty of scope to develop the market. While none of the sunshine beer countries can match the UK's 1,000-plus breweries, figures from trade body Brewers of Europe show that France has 442 active breweries, Italy 391, and Spain 159 including 70 microbreweries.

As the number of brands expands, Graham Archibald at Morgenrot sounds a note of caution that maintaining the premium feel of imported beers requires commitment. "If you are expecting the consumer to pay a premium for a beer, you had better make sure that it is presented in a manner fitting the premium tag.

This means using the correct branded glassware and ensuring the perfect pour every time. Training is essential to maintain this."

So pour a little sunshine into your customer's glass - but make sure it's the right beer, in the right glass.

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