



# Big Things Brewing in Buffalo

by Bryen Dunn

Like many other American cities, Buffalo, New York, is undergoing a development boom in the downtown core as people are migrating back not only for an emerging arts and culture scene, but to call it home again as well. Art galleries, theatres, live music venues, restaurants, and other independent retailers have sprung up throughout. While some might not have even considered visiting Buffalo based on their own preconceived notions from the past, it's now time to take note of some of the grand changes taking place in this city a mere two hours from Toronto.



### Pearl Street Speakeasy

patio in the city, and a selection of microbrews distilled right on the premises. Established in 1996, the wraparound outdoor balcony is somewhat reminiscent of those in New Orleans, and helps to connect the multiple service bars on the premises. The historic building was constructed during the late 1800s in what was then known as the Canal District, often referred to as “the most evil square mile in America” at the time.

The Flying Bison Brewery opened on Ontario Street in 2000, but plans are to relocate to 840 Seneca Street in the downtown Larkin District in the coming year. As well, Big Ditch Brewing Co. has selected a downtown Buffalo building to be its headquarters and production facility. It’s ideally situated on Ellicott Street across from the recently opened Italian eatery Tappo, operated by local celebrity restaurateur Michael Andrzejewski. Other breweries worthy of note are Southern Tier Brewing Company, Community Beer Works, and Cosmic Frog Handcrafted Ales. While most breweries are happy to offer a short guided tour of their facilities, die-hard beer enthusiasts will want to check out the “Brewer for a Day” event at Ellicottville Brewing Company and the “Good Beer Club” at Mister Goodbar. As well, annual beer events include Beerology at the Buffalo Museum of Science, featuring presentations on beer-related science and brewing history, as well as Buffalo Brewfest ([www.buffalobeerweek.com](http://www.buffalobeerweek.com)).

Beer enthusiasts wanting to get a taste of what Buffalo is all about can check out one of the many beer focused bars scattered throughout the city, such as Alternative Brews, Amherst Ale House, Blue Monk, Buffalo Tap Room, Coles, Colter Bay, and Sterling Place Tavern. Despite this growing trend to drink local, Labatt Blue still accounts for approximately one quarter of the beer sold in the area. Labatt USA is headquartered in Buffalo, and it’s the only American city where a Canadian beer is most popular.

Buffalo has also become a great dining destination. Sample Restaurant in Allentown offers a menu of plates for sharing, Betty’s on Virginia Street is where you’ll find hearty home-cooked meals with vegan options on the menu, while Seabar Restaurant on Ellicott Street serves up nouveau sushi creations, fresh seafood, and artisan sakes. Anchor Bar is a must visit as this is where the original Buffalo Wing was created back in 1964. If time allows, two up and coming new areas to explore are Amherst Street between Delaware and

It was once home to the most millionaires per capita, more than any other American city and much of the architecture of that time period is still very prominent. In fact, this current revival is incorporating many of those historic buildings that have remained vacant for so many years. Many of these properties once had connections to the thriving brewery scene of the late 1800s, so it’s interesting to see this new resurgence including the development of several new microbreweries as well.

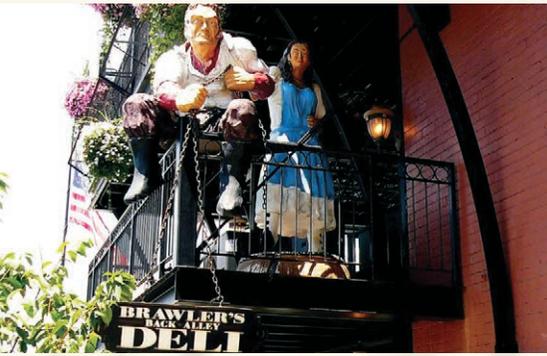
## Brews and Bites

Buffalo Brew Pub, New York State’s oldest brew pub, opened its doors in 1986 and started to chip away at the monopoly control of the few major players. The newly designated downtown Brewery District ([www.buffalobrewerydistrict.com](http://www.buffalobrewerydistrict.com))

is fast becoming a destination point for both locals and tourists alike. At the nucleus is the mega-complex Pearl Street Grill & Brewery. This multi-level brew pub features top notch pub grub, the largest



Pearl Street Grill & Brewery



Brawler's

Elmwood and Hertel Avenue between Delaware and Colvin. This area of Amherst Street is referred to locally as Black Rock, where places like Black Rock Kitchen and Sportsmen Tavern are leading the revitalization. The strip along Hertel Avenue is known as Little Italy, which is where you'll find great eateries, bakeries, and espresso shops.

## Amazing Architecture

Another great thing to do in Buffalo is to take a day to just explore the city's architecture. Approximately 80 sites are included on the National Register of Historic Places, and many of the major American architects of the 19th and early 20th century built masterpieces in Buffalo, most of which are still standing. The Guaranty Building designed by Louis Sullivan was one of the world's first skyscrapers, and the Ellicott Square Building was once the largest office building in the world when it first opened. The Hotel Buffalo (originally the Statler Hotel), built by August Esenwein and James A. Johnson, was the first hotel in the world to feature a private bath in each room, and it's currently being restored to reopen as an upscale hotel. The H. H. Richardson Complex (originally the New York State Asylum for the Insane) was the largest commission designed by architect Henry Hobson Richardson, and there are current plans to develop the space into a mixed use arts centre and boutique hotel. Buffalo City Hall is a spectacular art deco building designed by George Dietel and John J. Wade, and offers great city views from the upper deck. As well, there are several buildings designed by the renowned Frank Lloyd Wright, second in number only to Chicago. Architectural Walking Tour maps are available both online and in the offices of the Visit Buffalo tourism office. Joel runs Buffalo History Tours ([www.buffalohistorytours.com](http://www.buffalohistorytours.com)) and is a great source of information on both architecture and brewing.

Since 2009, there's been a significant move to reclaim Buffalo's waterfront to be transformed into a focal point for social and recreational activity. One of the latest development announcements for the city is Buffalo RiverWorks, which will see a few of the skyline's iconic unused grain elevators



Pearl Street Dinner

converted into a large scale entertainment and recreation complex. Grain elevators were invented here in 1842, and remain the largest collection in the world, inspiring architects and painters from abroad. Located at 333 Ganson St, this prime waterfront attraction will house restaurants, a brewery, a performing arts venue, skating rinks, an artificial sand beach, and several bars including one high above, reachable only by the outside circular staircase. Future plans may also call for a 100-room hotel that would incorporate an L-shaped feed mill, which would serve as sleeping quarters. RiverWorks will add to the nearby already established Silo City complex.



Another great outing is the Olmsted Park and Parkway System, created by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in the late 19th century. It was fashioned after a similar system in Paris, and remains the oldest coordinated park system in the country. This collection of inter-connecting public parks led to Buffalo being referred to as the "City of Trees." During the 20th century, the city began calling itself the "City of Light," both because of the plentiful abundance of hydroelectric power made possible by nearby Niagara Falls, and because it was the first city in America to have electric street lights.

## Out and About

However, Buffalo's most common moniker, "The Queen City," is definitely akin to how things are shaping up at present. With New York being one of the earlier states to legalize gay marriage, the city has welcomed an increasing amount of LGBTQ tourists. Buffalo consists of 32 different neighborhoods, including the pedestrian-oriented, mixed use neighborhood of Elmwood Village ([www.foreverelmwood.com](http://www.foreverelmwood.com)), and the gay-friendly arts community of Allentown

([www.allentown.org](http://www.allentown.org)). These two adjacent locales offer a plethora of nightlife options and also host their own annual street festivals: Elmwood Festival of the Arts and Allentown Art Festival. The legendary Cathode Ray has been a homo hangout for decades, and around the corner is Fugazi's, a smaller bar frequented by the younger set. Also recommended are The Underground on Delaware Avenue and Q on Allen Street, both friendly pub-style haunts popular with the locals. For the wee hours, Marcella's is the biggest of the gay bars with drag performances, DJ's, and dancing most nights.

Adding to the queer city vibe is Buffalo's magnificent arts community, home to over 50 private and public art galleries, and over 20 professional theatre companies. The Albright-Knox Museum is among the country's oldest public arts institutions, specializing in modern and contemporary art split

between two separate wings. Across the street is the Burchfield Penny Art Center, celebrating the works of Charles E. Burchfield, in addition to showcasing a variety of Western New York State and Ontario artists. A must see is Shea's Performing Arts Theater on Main Street, a stunning example of 1920s Neo-Spanish Baroque that remains a Buffalo landmark. Buffalo also has a significant

musical history, claiming fame to Rick James, The Goo Goo Dolls, and Spyro Gyra. As well, queer indie artist Ani DiFranco operates



Lafayette Lobby Elevators



PanAmerican Grill

her Righteous Babe record label here, along with Babeville, a mid-size concert hall located within a renovated church where up and emerging acts of various genres often perform. Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center is located around the back side of Babeville, and presents several queer themed art exhibitions and film screenings. The intimate quarters of Buffalo United Artists also has been presenting queer-slanted showcases of theatre, music, and other endeavours for 20 years at their downtown location.

Next time you're thinking of a getaway, why not shuffle off to Buffalo for a weekend of boys, babes, and brews!



Lafayette Bridal Suite

## Getting There

Forget about driving and catch the double-decker Megabus from downtown Toronto to downtown Buffalo in about three hours. It's a bit longer than driving, but a lot more relaxing. Once you're in Buffalo there's no real need for a vehicle as most everything is in easy reach by foot, transit, or a short cab ride. If driving, the Peace Bridge from Fort Erie is usually quicker than crossing at Niagara Falls, but you can also call 1-800-715-6722 to compare border crossing times.

## Accommodations

Lafayette Hotel ([www.thehotellafayette.com](http://www.thehotellafayette.com)) offers two floors of luxurious hotel accommodations. The recently restored Lafayette was built for the Pan-American Exposition, and today emits that same aura of the past. The property contains a pub, fine dining restaurant, a boutique bar, and Butterwood Sweet and Savory, located in the basement that was once a speakeasy. Up the street Lofts on Pearl ([www.loftsonpearl.com](http://www.loftsonpearl.com)) is a boutique hotel featuring 31 very spacious loft style hotel suites. Both properties offer five-star luxury at two-star prices.

## Information

Buffalo Tourism – [www.visitbuffaloniagara.com](http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com)  
Buffalo Nightlife – [www.cityofnightbuffalo.com](http://www.cityofnightbuffalo.com)

## Events

National Buffalo Wing Festival – [www.buffalowing.com](http://www.buffalowing.com)  
Taste of Buffalo – [www.tasteofbuffalo.com](http://www.tasteofbuffalo.com)

*Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities. He's willing to take on any assignments of interest, attend parties with free booze, listen to rants, and travel the world in search of the great unknown. He's eager to discover the new, remember the past, and look into the future.*

