

INDIA PALE ALE

FROM A HAPPY ACCIDENT TO HOP HEADS

Of all beer styles, IPA is the most romanticized, mythologized, and misunderstood. “It inspires the fiercest debate, the greatest reverence, and the wildest conjecture in the world of beer.” So says Pete Brown, author of the “India Pale Ale” section of the *Oxford Companion to Beer*.

The original India Pale Ale, or IPA, was made by English brewers to be shipped to India for consumption by British soldiers, civil servants and traders more than 200 years ago.

Back then, the journey took six months or more. Ships would head out into the Atlantic, then south across the equator, often stopping in Brazil before making the treacherous run around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, then up through the Indian Ocean and back across the equator, arriving in India half a year after leaving England.

Brewers were not certain how well their beer would survive this long, tumultuous journey with temperature



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swings of 20 degrees Celsius or more as the ships travelled through the tropics. But they knew that stronger beers with higher alcohol and greater additions of hops could survive and age well in barrels for a year or more at home. So they tried sending a stronger, hoppier pale ale to India and by happy accident, they discovered that it did more than just survive the journey, it was actually improved by the unusual conditioning process.

The result was a light-coloured, sparkling, hoppy ale that was very refreshing and drinkable despite its relatively high alcohol content. This newly discovered style was a hit in the hot climate in India. And, as people returned home to England after years of living and working in India, they wanted their favourite beer at home as well. By the mid-1800s, India Pale Ale was the drink of choice in London.

However, with the advent of industrial refrigeration (invented by brewers, by the way) and scientific

advances in understanding the role yeast plays in the brewing process, by the end of the 19th century, lager took over as the world's most popular beer style. Combined with the temperance movement and taxation policies that made higher-alcohol beer more expensive to brew, by the early 20th century most beer in Britain was brewed with less than four percent alcohol by volume (ABV).

We then jump ahead to the early days of the North American craft brewing movement in the 1980s. West Coast brewers began to use locally grown hop varieties such as Cascade and Chinook, which had much more intense flavour and aroma profiles compared to traditional European hop varieties. Like their British predecessors, they quickly realized that the IPA style is perfect for showcasing hop flavours, with the strong malt foundation capable of supporting a wide range of hops.

This new so-called “American IPA” quickly became the flagship of

the modern craft beer revolution—“the most popular craft beer style on the planet” according to Pete Brown—and a juggernaut that has seen huge growth in the marketplace over the past decade. Now, craft brewers are judged based first and foremost on their IPAs, especially on the West Coast.

A contemporary IPA will have about six to seven percent ABV with a major, complex hop component. Expect a herbal, citrusy/pine aroma and flavour from the hops, along with a slightly sweet, rich and creamy malt base. Most are pale to amber in colour.

Most BC brewers produce an IPA, though some fit more in the classic British style, which, simply put, is more malty and less hoppy than the American IPA. Good examples of this include Vancouver Island Brewing's Double Decker IPA, Nelson's Paddywhack IPA, and Mt. Begbie's Nasty Habit IPA.

There are also several BC breweries producing fantastically hoppy IPAs that rival anything from south of the border.



India Pale Ale

A CONTEMPORARY IPA WILL HAVE A MAJOR, COMPLEX HOP COMPONENT. EXPECT A HERBAL, CITRUSY/PINE AROMA AND FLAVOUR FROM THE HOPS, ALONG WITH A SLIGHTLY SWEET, RICH AND CREAMY MALT BASE. MOST ARE PALE TO AMBER IN COLOUR.

Central City Brewing's Red Racer IPA in its distinctive green can is one of those, as is Driftwood Brewing's Fat Tug IPA, which was recently named Best IPA in the *Northwest Brewing News*' 2011 Readers Choice Awards.

For many, the first taste of a potent IPA seems overwhelmingly bitter – there are definitely a lot of strong flavours involved. But as your palate learns and adjusts, you will be able to pick out the different nuances that unique hop varieties impart: citrus, tropical fruits, berries, floral, pine, grass, and sometimes even nutty or vanilla-like flavours.

Because IPAs showcase such a diversity of hop flavours, they pair well with a wide variety of foods. Pairing with Indian food is a natural and other spicy Asian dishes also go well with hoppier IPAs. Roasted meats and smoky barbecue work well with the more malty versions. Even desserts can be paired with IPAs that feature citrus or tropical fruit flavours and aromas.

Start your adventure into the world of IPA and you'll soon be a full-blown "hophead."



LIGHTHOUSE BREWING SWITCHBACK IPA

Canada **\$12.25** 166421 6x355ml
Switchback is the newest addition to BC's IPA line-up. Positioned somewhere between Red Racer and Fat Tug, this is a solid IPA with a nice balance between citrusy and pine-scented hops. Refreshing and quaffable.



HOWE SOUND BREWING DEVIL'S ELBOW IPA

Canada **\$7.50** 606426 1L
Squamish's Howe Sound Brewing is one of BC's great success stories, having grown from a brewpub founded in 1996 into one of the province's major players today. Devil's Elbow IPA balances a taste bud-tlinging bushel of hops on a strong malt foundation.



NELSON PADDYWHACK ORGANIC IPA

Canada **\$11.95** 680595 6x341ml
More of an English-style IPA, this is not as assertive in the hops department as some of the others mentioned here, but it is still worthy of attention. Paddywhack is just one of many excellent beers in Nelson's all-organic craft brew line-up.



CENTRAL CITY RED RACER IPA

Canada **\$13.45** 456517 6x355ml
Don't be deterred by the idea of IPA in a can—but do pour it into a glass so you can enjoy the full experience. Pouring orange with a thick, creamy head and a potent, tropical/grapefruit hop aroma, this fantastic IPA shows off an array of hop flavours on a strong base of malt.



TREE BREWING HOP HEAD IPA

Canada **\$12.95** 692103 6x330ml
This Okanagan entry was one of the first hoppy IPAs on the market and it has stood the test of time. The flavour profile here is more towards malt than hops, but if you're new to IPAs, this is a good stepping stone to some of the hoppier options out there.



DRIFTWOOD BREWING FAT TUG IPA

Canada **\$5.50** 844399 650ml
Most of the province's craft brew geeks call Fat Tug their favourite beer. It even beat out a bunch of heavyweight IPAs from south of the border to win Best IPA in the Northwest Brewing News Reader's Choice Awards. Doesn't get much better than this.