

Brewery on High

HIGH UP IN THE ALPS, A BREWERY AND A FOOD INDUSTRY BY ROSHNI BAJAJ SANGHVI



Also known as “the last beer stop before heaven,” the BierVision microbrewery (top) produces about 2 lakh litres of specialist beers annually. These include the flavour-packed house brew, Monsteiner Huusbier (bottom).

A lawyer, an architect, a hotel manager, and a graphic designer wanted a beer. So they decided to brew it themselves. The four men, friends who grew up in the tiny Swiss village of Monstein, thought it would be a good idea to make their own beer for their parties. In 2000, they converted a 100-year old building that previously housed a dairy, into the highest brewery in Europe. They hoped their beverage would bring more travellers and breathe life to their little Alpine hamlet of just 185 residents. And it did.

Today the BierVision Monstein brewery has made the eponymous village a highlight of the region and is a must-stop on the Davos-Monstein vintage bus tour. It produces five beers year-round,

including two organic ones. The basement tasting room has scores of mugs hanging from hooks on the walls. Each mug has the name of one of the brewery's 1,200 investors.

At 1,560 metres above sea level, you can be sure that the beer is always chilled and the views are always giddy. But there are even greater advantages to brewing in the mountains. Beer is 90 to 95 per cent water. At BierVision, this water comes from four Alpine springs. Carlo Wasescha, CEO of the brewery, says that the water is soft and delicious and needs no processing. About a third of the malt used is organic mountain barley malt, grown 1,000 metres above sea level or higher.

There are many perks of being a brewery in a small village



THE VITALS

Discover Davos A 1948 cherry-red vintage bus provides the perfect vantage point to take in the lovely Alpine villages and landscapes of the region. This three-hour-long excursion runs from mid-June to mid-October. It starts at Davos Platz at the tourist office and covers the village of Monstein. It culminates in a visit and tasting session at the BierVision microbrewery. Tours are in English or German. For reservations, contact the Davos tourist office (www.davos.ch; info@davos.ch). This activity is free of charge with the **Davos Klosters Card** which visitors receive upon checking in at any hotel in the Davos-Klosters region, even for a single night. See www.davos.ch/inclusive for more details. To contact BierVision Monstein brewery email info@biervision-monstein.ch.



Monstein village still retains its traditional character with wooden houses with larch shingles and bright flower boxes (top); Giant metal vats at the brewery are used to ferment and age beers (bottom).



community. After the brewing process, the wet spent grain, typically a brewery's waste, is upcycled. Some of it is used to make a long-fermented bread at a bakery nearby. There's a local dairy farmer who uses beer and hops from BierVision to make cheese. Malt makes good animal feed, so some of it is also given to a local pig farmer and pork butcher (incidentally these pigs also drink beer as part of their feed). Brewers' grain, beer, hops, and salt are used to cure the final products of meat, sausage, and bacon.

The brewery also makes whiskey in the winter when, as Wasescha says, "They don't have much [else] to do due to the cold temperatures." A lady nearby turns this whiskey into a rich, heady egnog, bottled in delicate slim bottles typically used to contain limoncello. And if anyone thinks beer and chocolate aren't the best bedfellows—BierVision's beer truffles will convince you otherwise. Up in these mountains, there is more than one way to get high. ●

BIERVISION MONSTEIN'S BREWS

Monsteiner Huusbier

The brewery's unfiltered "house beer" is made with mountain hops and roasted barley. It's got a creamy head and cloudy golden body, and is deeply aromatic, nutty, and malty, with a touch of tartness.

Monsteiner Weizenbier Häusträffel

BierVision's wheat beer is made in the style of a German *hefeweizen*. It's cloudy, sweet, and smells of banana and clove.

Monsteiner Wätterguoge Bier

A *dunkel*, or dark German lager, made with smoked malt, this amber brew has delicious notes—caramel, toast, smoke, nuts, milk, fruit, and even shortbread.

Monsteiner Bio Mungga Bier

An organic blonde ale made with wheat and rye. Mungga smells of grain, yeast, and malt underpinned with grass and citrus zest.

Monsteiner Capricorn Bier

Dark, intensely alcoholic, and smoky, this organic barley beer combines two styles of beer—one made with caramelised malt, the other a complex, dense, and dark variety.