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Where the biggest beer, wine, and liquor drinkers live in the U.S.

By **Roberto A. Ferdman** July 29, 2014

America's thirst for alcohol might not be that exceptional globally speaking, but certain parts of the country do seem especially parched.

No state handles its alcohol quite like New Hampshire, according to per capita consumption data shared by the Beer Institute. The libertarian New England state guzzles down more booze per person—some 40.8 gallons per year—than any other U.S. state, by The Beer Institute's estimates. In fact, it's not even all that close. Next in line are North Dakota, Montana, Nevada, and Vermont, which sip on just under 35, 34, 33, and 32 gallons per person, per year, respectively.

Part of that might be the result of cross-border sales—there is no sales tax in New Hampshire, after all, and the state's liquor commission believes as much as 50 percent of its alcohol sales are bought by residents of neighboring states. But the per capita estimates are meant to account, at least in part, for that quirk. Meaning that while the nearly 41 gallon number might be a tad inflated, it's unlikely off by the five gallons of alcohol that separates New Hampshire from the second biggest alcohol guzzling state.

Of all the states, Utah is by far the least enamored with alcohol, throwing back just 14 gallons of alcohol per year person person. Next in line are Kentucky and New York, which consume 19.5 and just under 21 gallons respectively.

On a booze by booze level, however, the story is a bit different. When it comes to beer, no state holds a candle to North Dakota. By the Beer Institute's estimates, North Dakotans drink more than a pint per day

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on average—the most of any state in the country. New Hampshire is second, at 0.96 pints per day; Montana is third, at 0.90; and South Dakota is fourth, at 0.86. The least beer crazed states are Utah, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York (in that order). Each of them downs less than half a pint a day per person.

Washington D.C., however, is the definitive wine capital of the U.S..

No state or district drinks more wine per capita than the country's capital. And it's not particularly close, either. Residents of Washington D.C. drink more than half a glass of wine per day on average, or roughly 25 percent more than any other state — though comparisons between an urban city and entire states are statistically questionable. Next are New Hampshire, which is responsible for just over 0.42 glasses per person, per day, Massachusetts, which consumes just under 0.35 glasses per person, per day, and Vermont, which polishes off just under **0.34** glasses per person, per day. Last are West Virginia, Mississippi, and Utah, which drink a paltry 0.08, 0.07, and 0.06 glasses per person, per day, respectively.

New Hampshire is America's biggest fan of hard alcohol. The Northeastern state is the only one that consumes more than a shot of hard alcohol per person, per day (it's responsible for more than 1.22 shots per person per day, for good measure). Delaware is second, at 0.98 shots per person per day; Washington D.C. is third, at 0.95; and North Dakota is fourth, at 0.83. At the bottom of the list are West Virginia, Utah, and North Carolina, which drink 0.38, 0.32, and 0.29 shots per person, per day.

Before anyone—even those living in New Hampshire—pounds their chest, it's worth noting that Americans aren't all that hard alcohol-obsessed. Not globally speaking, anyway. The U.S. is 10th internationally in that regard. South Koreans drink more than four times as much liquor as Americans, according to estimates by market research firm Euromonitor; Russians drink roughly twice as much.

In fact, a step back from state-by-state preferences shows a few overarching—and rather underwhelming—trends in America's alcohol consumption countrywide. Per capita expenditure on alcohol, for one, isn't anywhere near historical highs. At just over 12 percent it's currently much lower than it was in the 1970s, when it was nearer to 17 percent, and the early 1900s, when it was approaching 20 percent.

There's reason to believe that downward trend will only continue—at least for the foreseeable future. Per capita expenditure on alcohol is slated to shrink even further over the next five years, according to estimates by market research firm IBIS World. Much of that is the result of a shift away from certain spirits. While vodka might be America's favorite hard alcohol, demand for the eastern European grain alcohol is falling. "Vodka sales, which have been growing in the mid single digits for the past five or so years, are slowing

down," Spiros Malandrakis, an industry analyst at Euromonitor, said in an interview. Last year, vodka sales grew up only 1 percent.

But America's taste for alcohol isn't dissipating, so much as changing. "All the momentum is shifting to craft beer and whiskies," Malandrakis said. Wine culture, while changing to embrace an increasingly younger audience, is also expanding. "Wine sales fell during the recession, but they're on its way up again." Some of that shift is sustainable. Bourbon and Irish whiskey sales are not only growing in the double digits, but also becoming increasingly premium. That should continue. "If I had to pick a specific spirit going forward, I would probably say bourbon," Malandrakis said.

But craft brews are probably hitting their peak around now, according to analysts. The craft beer boom, which has seen the number of breweries in the U.S. skyrocket from fewer than 700 in the late 1990s to more than 3,000 today, according to The Beer Institute, is likely growing too fast for its own good.

"While we're not there yet, we're definitely approaching bubble territory," Malandrakis said. "There can't be a massive craft brewer. That's just an oxymoron. The moment a craft brewer makes beer on a mass scale, it's no longer a craft brewer."

Still, the current trends in American alcohol consumption are little more than that—momentary fads. What beers, wines, and spirits we drink might last a generation, but rarely do they span more than that. What's more, like with many other things, even when certain alcohols become uncool, it's only a matter of time before they're all rage once again.

"Alcohol consumption is cyclical by nature," Malandrakis said. "Believe it or not, we tend to drink what our grandparents drank, not what our parents drank."

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