

TEXAS HIGHWAYS--SHINER—MALLORY

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PROST! **Shiner**

SAVOR THE FLAVOR OF THE 'BREWIN'EST'
LITTLE TOWN IN TEXAS

or

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...OR SALUD OR CHEERS OR WHATEVER PUTS A HEAD
ON YOUR BEER AT THE 'BREWIN'EST' LITTLE TOWN IN TEXAS

SHINER—a name revered across the cold-mugged landscape of country taverns and big-city bars. It's one of Texas'—and, increasingly, America's—favorite specialty beers, brewed with German tradition.

But Shiner is also a tiny Czech-German town nestled between San Antonio and Houston. Home of Spoetzl Brewery (the sole source since 1909 of Shiner Beer), the community remains synonymous with the brew that bears its name.

You know you're in Shiner, for instance, when you visit Howard's, a typical convenience store...except that it sports several varieties of Shiner beer *on tap* and a beer garden out back.

You're know you're in Shiner when you stay at the Longhorn Saloon, a "bed & brew" equipped with big-screen TV, foosball, darts, and bar stocked with wine, champagne, and—guess what!—kegs of cold Shiner beer...all included in the night's lodging.

You *really* know you're in Shiner during Bocktoberfest (Oct. 13, 2001), an annual daylong concert celebrating the sounds and suds of Texas. Some 30,000 people pack Spoetzl Brewery's five-acre front yard, while seven bands (headlined by Texas singer-songwriter Robert Earl Keen) belt out tunes from a stage flanked by 30-foot-high inflatable Shiner Bock bottles. **[by mid-July, confirm Keen as headliner with Joe Brown]**

To say the atmosphere is rousing is to say bock is beer!

Self-proclaimed "Biggest Shiner Fan in the World," Michael Crow of Austin, swashbuckles in a wide-brimmed hat fashioned from three Shiner Bock cases. Nearby, appropriately-named Jason Brou of Alvin dons a cloth chapeau—one that looks like a chicken. Everywhere you look, the youthful crowd lounges on lawn chairs and blankets, slurps Shiner beer, and munches festival food—Shiner-made sausage, kolaches, turkey legs, and funnel cakes.

The event's finale showers Shiner with fireworks.

Half Moon and Home Brew

Bocktoberfest's liveliness belies Shiner's true character—a quaint, historic town where community spirit folds around civic pride like kolache dough around hot fruit filling.

You know you're in Shiner when Virginia Pustka turns out kolaches and the Shiner Hobo Band strikes a polka beat at St. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church's spring and fall picnics.

You're know you're in Shiner when folks gather, just as they have for generations, at Welhausen and Green Dickson Municipal Parks for family fun and civic events.

You truly know you're in Shiner when you pass locals and they wave:
Nobody's a stranger in Shiner!

During the 1880s, German and Czech immigrants gravitated to these verdant, rolling hills, settling near a trading post called Half Moon, named for a crescent-shaped forest. When the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway bypassed the town in 1887, Half Mooners relocated to rail-side property owned by Henry B. Shiner, namesake of their new town.

After years of shipping beer from San Antonio and Houston, interest in hometown brew came to a head in 1909. Locals formed the Shiner Brewing Association and set up a brewery on the banks of Boggy Creek. After a rocky start, it prospered under German immigrant brewmaster Kosmos Spoetzl. In 1947, three years before his death, Spoetzl constructed the white brick Alamo-style brewery which now produces 8,000 cases and 500 kegs of beer a day. Shiner makes three brews year-round (Bock, Blonde, and Honey Wheat) and two seasonal ones (Summer Stock, and Winter Ale).

A brewery tour puts you in the “brewhouse” with its shiny copper cookers to see how Shiner is made. A visit to the cozy hospitality room gives you a cold, sudsy sample.

While Spoetzl Brewery is the top local tourist draw, visitors like Melissa Armstrong of Austin and Beth Zajicek of Humble (former college roommates who meet in Shiner to catch up) find a fascinating other side to Shiner.

The friends are impressed with homemade sausage at Patek Grocery, where brothers Bob and Paul Patek produce 7 or 8 varieties the way their father, Joe, did when he opened the market in the 1940s. As customers select sausages, Shiner beer, and groceries, the radio spouts polka music (aired daily on Hallettsville’s KHLT 1520-AM and Gonzales’ KCTI 1450-AM).

Melissa and Beth also are impressed with the red brick Romanesque Revival-style Saints Cyril & Methodius Catholic Church, built in 1921. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it bears the names of the two missionaries who brought Christianity to Bohemia and Moravia. The soaring structure’s majestic altar, painted murals, square tower with octagonal spire, and stained glass windows from Bavaria resemble a European cathedral. “It’s amazing to discover such a beautiful church in such a small town,” says Melissa.

Shiner Soirée

Indeed, for a town of only 2,000, Shiner boasts an eclectic mix of attractions.

A good start to a Shiner soirée begins at the Main Street office. You can’t miss it—just look for the cigar factory.

During the 1890s, the Louis Ehlers Cigar Factory employed five labor union men who earned a penny for each “Katy Lee” brand cigar they hand-rolled. Today, the small wooden structure houses a museum filled with cigar paraphernalia and old photos...as well as the Main Street and Economic Development Board offices.

The cigar factory is open to visitors, and, next door, so is an 1853 pioneer cabin, birthplace of one of Shiner’s most colorful characters, William Green Jr.

A wealthy landowner, Green built a two-story building downtown in 1911 which housed a hospital, pharmacy, and bar. He kept buckets of beer for his horse to drink whenever he rode it into the bar.

Russell and Roxanne Boothe restored the ornate Green Building in 1999 and established the Shiner Restaurant & Bar, featuring eight-foot-tall picture windows, polished cherrywood antique bar, and 14-foot-high pressed metal ceiling. It’s open only for private events. But any Wednesday through Saturday, you can step inside the rear of the Green Building at B’Marie. The gift shop and tearoom serves pastries, coffees, and ice creams—from coconut fudge to pumpkin pie—plus salads, sandwiches, and soups.

From the Green Building, mosey down 7th Street and wet your whistle at the Home Plate. Owned by Robert and Donna Fikac, the restaurant-bar’s baseball theme comes naturally: Robert’s sons are hardball standouts (Jeremy plays for a San Diego Padres farm club and Jerod plays for San Antonio’s Incarnate Word College). Besides, in the off-season Dave Pavlas (pitcher for the

Pittsburg Pirates' AAA Nashville Sounds) draws Shiner drafts from the drinkery's bar, which once graced a saloon in Half Moon.

The watering hole also specializes in hamburgers and live music, while doubling during the day as a domino parlor for mostly old-timers.

Other good eatin' in Shiner includes: Werner's Restaurant's steaks, seafood, and plate lunches; Country Corner Cafe's Tex-Mex; and Friday's fried chicken, hamburgers, and baked goods.

Farther down 7th Street find the Gaslight Theatre, Shiner's first opera house. Built in 1895, the vaudeville-style facility once hosted plays, balls, bazaars, and town meetings. Later used for storage, it was re-converted to a playhouse in the mid-1970s, and now stages three dinner-theater productions a year.

Shining Legacies

Across the street from the theater is the museum-like Peachtree Emporium (open by appointment). Owner Jean Kaspar loves to show off her collection of 50 Texas saddles, mostly from the 1920s and 1930s. Her great-grandfather, banker and legislator Capt. Charles Welhausen (for whom Shiner's Welhausen Park is named) was a saddle-maker, as was her father, Carl C. Welhausen, who founded Texas Tanning & Manufacturing (later Tex Tan of Yoakum). Jean's collectibles also include cookie jars, dolls, and Shiner memorabilia—all housed in the 1893 Wolters Brothers Mercantile building.

Shiner's largest historical treasure trove also bears the Wolters name, the Edwin Wolters Memorial Museum. Edwin, whose father and uncles started the

mercantile store, was an avid collector. Housed in the 1915 home in which he lived, his collection features everything from antique guns to polka band instruments, from Spoetzl Brewery memorabilia to dinosaur bones. Curators Bernie Siegel and Virgie Knief guide you through the museum—plus an adjacent shed full of antique farm implements and an 1884 Half Moon home with hand-stenciled ceilings.

History also hangs heavy at Kaspar Wire Works. When barbed wire replaced smooth wire fencing in the 1890s, an inventive local ranch hand, August Kaspar, constructed all kinds of baskets from farmers' discarded wire. Today, his grandson, Don, runs what has become the world's largest maker of newspaper racks. A free factory tour shows how these and Kaspar's other specialty wire products are made.

A different Kasper—spelled with an “E”—left another turn-of-the-century legacy. In the 1890s, German immigrant John F. Kasper passed by Matagorda Bay's lighthouse on his way to Shiner. Later, as cotton ginner and contractor, he built most of Shiner's streets, as well as a large Victorian model home. In tribute to his Texas “Statue of Liberty,” Kasper constructed a scale-model rock lighthouse beside the house, which has been restored as the Old Kasper House Bed & Breakfast. Owners Mary Ann and Hubert Novak gave the house a Victorian motif. Nearby, the Novaks operate three other lodgings decorated in soft French country and colorful Czech motifs.

American country decor fills the motel-style Shiner Country Inn.

And the new Old Glory House is a two-bedroom lodging with patriotic theme, says innkeeper Judi Todd, who also operates, along with Bo Bohmann, the “Football Rah-Rah”-decorated Longhorn Saloon.

Judi’s sons, University of Texas alumni Mike and Matt Todd of Austin, own the feed store-turned-bed & brew, festooned with UT Longhorn memorabilia. Interestingly, Judi and Bo say some of their best customers hail from UT’s sports rival, Texas A&M University. “We had one nice young Aggie remark that he couldn’t hate Longhorns if they started a place like this,” explains Bo.

And their guests, while decidedly fun-loving, have turned out to be amazingly considerate. One guest even got performers at last year’s Bocktoberfest to sign an event poster, then left it at the B&B as a token of appreciation.

That’s another example of knowing you’re in Shiner—when people enjoy life with equal measures of playfulness and thoughtfulness.

Prost! Salud! Cheers! To Shiner...the town and the beer!