



TOPIC: MARKETING AND SALES

CREATING MEMORABLE BREWERY TOURS

🕒 6 min read

Amongst the 10,000+ breweries now in North America, the typical brewery tour experience often sounds like a broken record: *Beer has four ingredients: water, malt, hops, and yeast. Here's the mash tun where we mix grains and water to produce wort. Here's the kettle where we boil the beer and add the hops, which add the bitterness, flavor, and aroma to the beer.* While all of this information on a brewery tour is informative and educational, let's be honest: this kind of tour is overdone, boring and forgettable. Perhaps we've reached the end of its lifecycle.

Or can it morph into something else with more appeal, like when a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly? Consider the butterfly effect, the "idea that small, seemingly trivial events may ultimately result in something with much larger consequences."¹ For all those who have ever been a brewery tour participant – or for those who have hosted tours at their own brewery – it should be easy to distinguish the tours that felt like a trivial afterthought, something the brewery felt obligated to carry out, to the ones that may have been more meaningful and memorable.

The Sazerac House, a museum and distillery, in New Orleans, Louisiana amplifies the tour experience to another level; while not a brewery, the same tour concepts can be applied: throughout the three floor, complimentary tour, participants get an interactive immersion experience, from watching life-sized virtual bartenders make your drink-of-choice, to opening drawers filled with herbs such as star anise and fennel seed that get people excited about the ingredients involved in a cocktail. Every step of the way, you're reminded that these cocktails are quintessential New Orleans, "how the Sazerac is part of the customers, traditions and culture of New Orleans."²

After the free tour, guests must exit through the gift shop, where there are lots of different brands and bottles available for purchase, as well as bitters and recipe accompaniments that were shown to you throughout the tour (e.g. Sazerac Rye Whiskey, Buffalo Trace, Southern Comfort, Myers Rum, Peychaud's Bitters, among others.) Or guests can purchase any number of Sazerac branded souvenirs including bowties, hand towels and even dog toys.

When the tour guests exit and emerge out into the streets of New Orleans and visit their 1st, or 2nd (or 3rd or 4th) bar on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, what would you expect their first cocktail is going to be out of the long overwhelming list of cocktails to choose from?

The tour is an advertisement for your brand, the personality you want to embody; it not only strengthens your brand but also helps you to create a memorable guest experience and consequently, loyal return customers. An engaging tour is also a great spark for word-of-mouth, the most trusted form of marketing in consumers' eyes today. While the tour is just one aspect of your brewery, building the right experience can result in much larger consequences for your brand and your business success.

While many breweries won't be able to invest the amount of money into interactive tour exhibits such as those at the Sazerac House, small changes can often make big differences in your outcome, so here's a few tips on how to rethink your brewery tour from personal experience:

Tell an unforgettable story. While it may be necessary to have a part of your tour devoted to beer ingredients and equipment, don't forget to get more personal. Guests want the story – plus any drama that comes along with that story – to make them feel they're getting a backstage pass to the brewery. At the Black Sheep Brewery Tour in the small town of Masham, England, guests hear the story of how a fifth-generation family member broke away from his family of brewers to go out on his own; stories like this one are the reason why this brewery appears on lists like MSN's *25 Great Brewery Tours Around the World*.³

Design more than one kind of tour. What's the essence of your brand? Use that to build a tour that highlights that essence, such as Sierra Nevada Brewing's *Trip in the Woods* tour. The tour description lets guests know that "on this 1.5 mile loop, we'll admire the natural resources that surround us and explain the importance of protecting them."⁴ This tour showcases both Sierra's mission and efforts to promote sustainability while also giving guests a pleasurable nature walk around the North Carolina Mills River property. Not your typical brewery tour, but a unique experience that combines exercise and fresh air with beer sampling.

Focus on the senses to create an interactive experience. How does your tour invite guests to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch throughout the entire experience? Perhaps that's by inviting them to sample one of your signature IPAs, and then hold a dried hop in their hand that's one of the IPAs core ingredients; have your guests rub the hop between their hands to bring out its oils, and then slowly sniff and inhale to identify its aromas like citrus or herbal or floral. By focusing on how the senses are used in your tour – such as how the Sazerac House has drawers filled with aromatic smelling herbs for you to open and smell – you'll create new interactive opportunities for your guests.

Make it easy to book the tour. Handling tour bookings can easily become an administrative burden, but that's not the case when you set aside time to fully develop the process. Tour booking software such as FareHarbor or AnyRoad have great features that easily allow your guests to book the tours online, as well as pay online. While these companies receive a commission for the use of their platforms, they'll almost definitely pay for themselves in terms of reduced administrative costs and increased tour traffic.

Offer something complimentary or at a discount when the tour ends. Encourage your guests to stay awhile and purchase another beer or food – if your brewery has a restaurant component – on-site. Train your staff to take notice of who has those coupons, and then thank the guests for taking the tour and start up a conversation with them about their experience. Make them feel like a VIP customer. It's an opportunity to gain repeat, loyal customers.

The brewery tour experience, therefore, is not dead. It's alive and well – **IF** breweries focus on getting a little more creative and thinking about the larger cause. This will ensure guests keep coming back to your taproom, and to your beer, time and time again.

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References

¹ How Stuff Works, from article "What is the Butterfly Effect and How do we Misunderstand it?" Found in: <https://science.howstuffworks.com/math-concepts/butterfly-effect.htm>

² The Sazerac House, Cocktail Museum of New Orleans. Found in: <https://www.sazerachouse.com/visit/>

³MSN.com, 25 Great Brewery Tours Around the World. Found in: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/tripideas/25-great-brewery-tours-around-the-world/ss-AAY5EoP?li=BBnbkIE&fullscreen=true&cvid=6269e98b7b9d4cab90009b49519d64c3#image=7>

⁴Sierra Nevada website. Found in: <https://sierranevada.com/blog/brewery-tours-2022/>

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