

Stu Stuart - Belgian Beer Me! Beer Tours

By Carolyn Smagalski 2008 from *BellaOnline.com*



If you listen attentively, you might hear Stu Stuart faking a psst as he opens a Belgian beer online in the hush of the radio studio. Another psst, follows closely behind, and you think to yourself, Is it live, or is it Memorex...err, I mean...Stu?

Passion is born of images in our minds – images about Boy Scout camp, the first time we made someone laugh, beer in the woods, or the red label of Chimay... Passion - laughter - beer - travel - characteristics that describe the eclectic Stu Stuart (Pictured on the far right with Ale Street News Publisher Tony Forder & Carolyn "Beer Fox" Smagalski at Fergie's Pub during Philly Beer Week 2009).

Stuart has been a full-time, professional comedian since the early 90's. What started as amateur night turned into a professional career that spanned the distance from clubs in Seattle to The Comedy Works in Philadelphia, then northward as a performer for fourteen summers on Mackinac Island, a National Historic Landmark on Lake Huron between the upper and lower peninsula of Michigan. Before the ice freezes from Ignace to the island, Stu Stuart moves to Mendocino in Northern California, where he has established his home base of operations.

By most accounts, Stu lives the ideal life. When he is not performing, he teaches comedy and beer in San Francisco, Seattle and Portland, and coordinates Belgian Beer Trips to Belgium. He also homebrews. What else would a guy do with a degree in journalism?

As an avid traveler, Stu has traveled across the USA, into Canada, and throughout Europe and Asia. When he was 40, he treated himself to a ten-day tour of Belgium, focusing on beer appreciation. A friend asked, "...want to see the monks pray and chant?" and this experience became his first immersion into the true terroir of beer. He visited Chimay and Rochefort, and sat in the solemnity of the chapel, with the echo of Gregorian chant rising to the ceiling – a timeless connection between simplicity and his own growing passions for Belgian beer. The experience was so sentient...so moving and inspirational, that he had to share it with others.

He was already teaching classes in comedy at the Experimental College of ASUW (the Associated Students of the University of Washington), so he expanded his repertoire to educate people about Belgian Beer. He wanted to remove the intimidation associated with tripels and saisons, dubbels and lambics and faro. "Beer is my passion," says Stuart, "and I really wanted to share that passion." As his classes grew, his students repeatedly asked about travel to the original source of this beer – to Belgium, their Mecca, that land of Trappists and gueuze.

By this time, Stu's knowledge of Belgium had expanded. His problem was knowing there were 500 different beers from 100 different breweries in an area slightly larger than the state of Massachusetts. Some beer menus are the size of a phone book. With the advice of beerwriters Chris Pollard (aka Podge of the UK), Tim Webb (UK), and Chuck Cook (USA), Stu Stuart designed beer trips under the name of Belgian Beer Me! that would satisfy the most enthusiastic beer lover. He has discovered "where the breweries are, the best hotels, the best dinners," arranged motorcoach transportation (so his travelers do not have to drive), and designed tours for like-minded people who want the total Belgian beer experience.

From October 18-27, 2008, Stuart leads The Lonely Monks Trappist Beer Tour of Belgium, the ultimate tour that defines the distinctive appellation of the Trappist abbeys. On this tour, beer travelers will visit the exclusive seven Trappist abbeys in the world: Abbaye Notre-Dame de Saint-Remy - Rochefort; Abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont - Chimay; Abdij der Trappisten van Westmalle - Westmalle; Abbaye Notre-Dame d'Orval - Orval; Sint Sixtusabdij van Westvleteren - Westvleteren; Sint Benedictus Abdij - De Achelse Kluis - Achel; and Bierbrouwerij de Koningshoeven - LaTrappe (known as Koenigshoeven in the USA). In addition, two beer festivals will be underway during this trip, so beer lovers will experience the famed Marbehan in Wallonia and Herentalse Beer Festival in Flanders. A few seats are left for this tour, but Stuart does not expect the openings to remain available. If you are passionate about Trappist Beer, do not let this opportunity pass. Life is too short.

You may even consider presenting your husband, wife, partner or friend with one of three special, upcoming Belgian Beer Me! Tours:

The Essen Christmas Beer Festival Tour of Belgium - Dec. 6-15, 2008

The Duvels, Kwaks, Draaks and Great Zythos Beer Festival Tour - Feb. 28-March 9, 2009 (last day to sign-up for this tour is January 28, 2009)

The Ardennes Mountain Spring Tour - May 27-June 4, 2009

Stu Stuart's beer passion overflows with the history behind the beer, but he weaves a great story, too. His tales about the De Struisse ostrich farm or De Dolle Teve (Crazy Bitch) stand memorable. Above all, delve into his beer philosophy:

All beer should be drunk out of a beer glass.

Be particular about a proper head.

Beer is meant to be savored. Enjoy the variety.

Get over the price thing.

With these beer precepts in mind, you are armed with a foundation as firm as the malt in well-crafted beer. Contact Stu Stuart at Belgian Beer Me! for details on these extraordinary beer tours, and book the tour of a lifetime.