Where beer is a national phenomenon

by Roger Aitken

The Czech Republic today – as for many decades – is one of Europe’s top beer destinations – if not in the world. From Plzeň (Pilsen in English), a city in western Bohemia just over 50 miles (c.90km) west of Prague, is known worldwide for its Pilsner beer, created in 1842. It’s also a country where the wine culture should not be underestimated.

Created by Bavarian brewer Josef Groll on October 4, 1842 in this very city, which celebrated its role as ‘European Capital of Culture’ in 2015, the beer was the world’s first Pilsner ‘golden beer’ – Pilsner Urquell. It has been produced in the same manner ever since and with a capacity for 120,000 bottles rolling off the production line per hour.

But let’s not forget that brewing in Pilsen goes back to the 13th century and the brewing heritage in the Czech Republic ranges from big brewing concerns to smaller micro-breweries dotted around the entire country.

Pilsner Urquell, which produces this flagship beer as well as other brews like Gambrinus, is currently owned by SAB Miller. The brewery is the undisputed number one domestic brewery in the country and has inspired more than two-thirds of all the world’s beers labelled pils or pilsner. Don’t miss out on a visit to see how the legend is made with a beer tour.

It is followed by Staropramen in second place, Heinecken CR in third and the famous Ceske Budweiser in fourth spot which is exported to 65 countries. The latter, of course, is not to be confused with the US version of Budweiser – where a dispute between the Czech and American brewers dating back a century has meant the Czechs successfully saw off their US rivals in trade mark matters.

European City of Culture: Pilsen

Pilsen, where Arsenal goalkeeper and Czech international Petr Čech was born, entertained more than one million tourists and saw hundreds of participants – local and foreign partners and institutions – taking part.

A visit to the Pilsner Urquell brewery is a must on your itinerary. It’s where you will learn about the history and secret production of the eponymous lager and see authentic vats as well as the historical and contemporary brew houses.

Each year on October 4, the ‘Pilsner Fest’ takes place commemorating the famous anniversary when the first batch of Pilsner Urquell was unleashed on the world. For fans of the amber nectar it’s unmissable.

At the end of the museum visit next to the main building is a pub ondomestic brewery in the country and has inspired more than two-thirds of all the...