

Oktoberfest: Munich's beer-fueled frenzy



Rick Steves

Every fall, Munich throws the planet's biggest kegger — Oktoberfest. It's a sloppy soup of locals and tourists swaying beer steins and toasting to "Gemütlichkeit," the cozy and convivial atmosphere.

Oktoberfest dates to 1810, when the Bavarian king threw a grand public wedding reception for his son. It was such a hit that they decided to do it again the next year. And the next, and the next.

More than 200 years later, it's become one of Europe's best-known festivals — a beer-fueled frenzy of music, pretzels and amusement-park rides, with around 7 million visitors consuming around 7 million liters of beer every year.

From the mayor's ceremonial tapping of the first keg at the festival's opening until its end, the huge fairground outside Munich's city center is a slap-happy world of sausages, fancy hats and maidens with flowers in their hair. For visitors, there's no better place to see (and join) Germans at play.

Festivities kick off with the Breweries Parade, which brings a seemingly endless string of marching bands and troupes dressed in colorful, traditional costumes. Leading the parade is the festival queen — the "Münchner Kindl," a young woman on horseback, wearing the robe of a medieval monk.

Massive, elaborately decorated draft horses clog by, pulling wagons filled with gigantic kegs of draft beer. Each of the city's main breweries enters a beer-themed float to entertain the crowds as they make their way from downtown Munich out to the festi-



During Oktoberfest, Munich's Wies'n grounds host around 15 gigantic tents, all of which operate like pop-up beer halls. **RICK STEVES**

val grounds — a meadow known as the "Wies'n."

Men sport lederhosen — leather shorts with suspenders once worn by peasants working the fields — accessorized with long stockings and a hat with a feather in it. Women wear dirndls — single-piece dresses that include a skirt and low-cut blouse, covered with a bodice. These traditional Bavarian clothes are not mere party costumes — nor worn ironically. Locals treasure them, and break them out on special occasions.

Once the festival is in full swing, the atmosphere is infectious. While admission is free, you pay for food, rides and beer. Attendees can choose from around 15 main tents and a few smaller ones, all of which operate like pop-up

beer halls. Filled with row after row of wooden tables and benches, the main tents are vast — the largest holds roughly 11,000 people. Some tents offer traditional oompah music, others host rock bands, and some are family friendly, with kids' menus.

In all the tents, beer is sloshed from morning till night, and everyone is convivial. Between beverages, people stroll the happy central promenade, giant gingerbread cookies in hand, enjoying the loud-and-proud celebration of all things Bavarian.

Munich's local breweries each have their own tent. The famous ones (like Augustiner and Hofbräu) can have long waiting lines and are the most touristy. Last time I attended Oktoberfest, I went to the

Hacker-Pschorr tent and a barmaid with two painted German flags flanking her cleavage took my order. When I asked if I could get a half-liter ("eine Halbe"), she said, "Why don't you go home and come back when you're thirsty?"

A full-size liter beer (about a quart, "eine Mass" in German) costs about \$15, and the barmaids can carry up to 10 at once, as if the huge mugs were weightless. You can order a "Helles" (light), "Dunkles" (dark), "Weissbier" ("white" wheat-based beer), or ask for a "Radler" (half lemon soda, half beer).

While it's filled with plenty of tourists, Oktoberfest is still very much a local scene. Around three-quarters of the attendees are Bavarians. As

the day goes on, the vibe in the tents morphs from polite and family-friendly to more of a brawl. The festival is most crowded late and on weekends, but weekday afternoons and early evenings are a delight, when it's easier to find a spot inside a tent, and the grounds are filled with happy kids (Tuesdays are official family days).

Security at Oktoberfest is understandably tight these days. A fence surrounds the festival grounds, and no large bags are allowed in. Each tent has its own security, and there is a heavy police presence. In spite of all this, visiting still feels relaxed and fun. And Munich's downtown also feels manageable during Oktoberfest; since the bulk of tourists are out at the fairgrounds, it's a good

time to sightsee. (Although hotel rooms are more expensive than normal.)

First-timers might find all the chaos a bit daunting. But Oktoberfest is, by its very nature, open and friendly. Take a seat at any table that can fit an extra rear end, dive into the conversation with a clink of the glass ("Prost!"), and immerse yourself in the boisterous and belching Bavarian atmosphere.

Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This column revisits some of Rick's favorite places over the past two decades. Visit his website at ricksteves.com, email him at rick@ricksteves.com or follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

For actor, filming in Korea like family trip

By Jae-Ha Kim
Tribune Content Agency

When "Cobra Kai" actor Alicia Hannah-Kim was asked to help secure a team of western actors to appear in the K-drama "Tempest," she went to work to assemble a cast that includes well-known stars like John Cho, Spencer Garrett, Michael Gaston, Brooke Smith, Christopher Gorham and Jacob Bertrand.

"I think a lot of people think that K-dramas are all romantic love stories, but there are a lot of different genres," Kim said in a recent interview from Los Angeles. "Tempest" is an international spy thriller. It's a very sexy show with a lot of different elements."

Originally joining as a producer, Kim also has a role in the series that streams on Hulu in the U.S.

This interview with Kim has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What was it like when you returned to Korea as a producer?

A: When I arrived at Incheon International Airport, I was feeling like, "OK, this is not the U.S. This is not England." Korea is very distinct. For me, it's fascinating to see that I blend in.

Q: You were in the majority instead of the minority.

A: It's very healing to me to go to Korea and feel like everyone is my family member. Because obviously, in Australia, I grew up predominantly with white people there. I don't think I thought about it that deeply as a child. I felt othered, but at the same time, my parents were so



Alicia Hannah-Kim said working in Korea on the "Tempest" was a dream come true. **TIMOTHY FERNANDEZ**

fluent in English that I felt like I fit in.

Q: What was it like working in Korea with the western actors that you had a big part in getting cast in this K-drama?

A: It felt like a family trip. We all stayed in the same hotel, the Lotte Hotel. This was in August one year ago.

Q: Was everything filmed on location then?

A: We were sort of all around Seoul. We also filmed in Hannam-dong and on location in the Lotte Hotel. We filmed in a studio in Paju. The studios there are so modern and clean. Paju is great. It's not that far from Seoul, and it has this wonderful sort of countryside. So it was great that the cast got to experience going out of Seoul to see a little bit more of Korea.

Q: When you weren't working, what were some of the things that you did?

A: Brooke Smith and Romy Rosemont wanted to go to a jjimjilbang (traditional Korean spa). Jacob Bertrand wanted to meet his favorite Korean actor, Hwang Jung-min, so we were able to facilitate that. He went and watched a performance of "Macbeth," (which starred Hwang at the National Theater of Korea) in Korean. I really have to applaud him for doing that.

Q: Did you find it gratifying that you helped the

"Tempest" cast and crew communicate?

A: Yes, but it wasn't just me. Translation and interpreting is a huge issue for international productions. For us, we had a team of translators that were available to us and many members of local staff. Oddly, we had a lot of people who were trilingual and spoke French, English and Korean, which was interesting.

Q: Some of the series is set in the U.S. Was any of it shot here?

A: The U.S. parts are interior, so it was all filmed on set. That's the wild thing. Our cast traveled all the way to Seoul and we all got into these minivans and then went to sets that were like "The West Wing." (Laughs) The production value is chef's kiss. Kudos to the production. They worked really hard.

Q: In real life, you don't look like the character you portrayed in "Cobra Kai." When's the last time someone recognized you as Sensei Kim Da-eun?

A: I went to see V (from the pop group BTS) throw out the first pitch at Dodger Stadium (in August). I was standing there and I heard some people yell out, "Sensei!" I turned around and said, "Yes, is there anything you need?" (Laughs) They were so nice and we had fun.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Passengers downgraded, but full allowable refund missing

By Christopher Elliott | King Features Syndicate

My husband and I were downgraded from premium economy to economy on an Iberia flight from Chicago to Madrid.

We booked with Avios miles and paid \$543 in taxes. Under EC 261, the European airline consumer protection regulation, we're entitled to 75% of the ticket value as compensation. This is roughly 29,452 Avios miles.

But Iberia only gave me 3,500 miles and ignored my husband's claim, saying he lacked an Iberia Plus account.

I filed multiple claims, cited EC 261 and even emailed executives using your contacts. No luck.

Did Iberia violate EC 261? How can we get the compensation we're owed?

— Christopher Long, Chicago

A: Getting an unexpected downgrade from premium economy to economy can be painful and frustrating. Spending eight hours in a tiny airline seat with almost no personal space is no way to start a vacation. And if you paid for a higher class of service, you deserve to get your money or miles back.

Iberia should have refunded 75% of the fare for your downgraded cabin under EC 261. Since you booked with miles, the compensation should reflect the fare's value in Avios points. The airline also failed to address your husband's claim properly. Requiring a loyalty account for compensation is not a valid reason to deny a passenger's rights.

You did everything right by citing EC 261 and escalating the situation to the Iberia executives listed on my consumer advo-

cacy site, elliott.org. Your husband should have filed a separate claim even without an Iberia Plus account and created one if it was required. Always keep a paper trail (as you did); it's critical for proving your case.

When an airline fails to follow regulations, there is a way to light a fire under it. You can file a complaint with the country's aviation regulator. In your case, this would have been Spain's Agencia Estatal de Seguridad Aerea (AESA), which is responsible for enforcing EC 261 in Spain.

You had an excellent paper trail with Iberia, and you cited the correct regulations. An AESA complaint might have nudged the airline into doing the right thing.

By the way, this is the first time I've seen an airline make a loyalty program membership a

prerequisite for EC 261 compensation. But it kind of makes sense. Iberia's policy is to return the miles to the ticketed traveler. How could Iberia have compensated him with Avios points if he doesn't have an account?

Iberia is following a playbook that I've seen many times during my career as a consumer advocate. An airline offers you take-it-or-leave-it compensation, and you have to decide: Take it or leave it?

I contacted Iberia on your behalf, and it refunded 75% of the miles you and your husband spent on the flight.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.