

By MARISSA MILLER DEC. 14, 2015



Matt Canning at the Hotel Vermont.

You could say Matt Canning was destined to become one of the nation's foremost sources for all things beer. Watching his father found the [Vermont Brewers Festival](#) and growing up in areas boasting passionate beer cultures like North Lake Tahoe, Calif.; Boulder, Colo.; and Burlington, Vt.; it was only a matter of time before he became the beer concierge at the [Hotel Vermont in downtown Burlington](#) — for some people, the definition of a dream job title.

Every other Wednesday in the summer, he leads a full-day tour starting at [Hill Farmstead in Greensboro, Vt.](#), widely considered one of the world's premier breweries. It's so remote, he says, that a lack of cellphone reception allows participants to savor the region while sampling beers.

The tours require a two-night minimum stay from Tuesday to Thursday at \$160 per person, which includes the tour and two nights. Transportation and food are included. When he is not doing tours, Mr. Canning conducts tastings and talks with guests about where they can find sought-after beers.

Here are edited excerpts from a conversation with Mr. Canning.

Q. What does an average day look like for you?

A. I communicate with guests pre-arrival, and act as a resource for those traveling for beer tourism. I create custom itineraries and make recommendations based on what day of the week you're coming, which direction you're coming from, and how long you're staying.

Tell me about your favorite beer.

My official answer is, "My next beer." Vermont is known for hop-forward ales, IPAs, double IPAs. What people look for in these beers are all these aromas and flavors from Pacific Northwest hops full of big, juicy tropical fruit flavors without the residual bitterness.

Are your brewery tours designed for a certain demographic?

We drive for the first two hours, so it's not like we hop in the brew bus and start drinking right away. If someone understands that — why we're going to the most rural locations — then you're absolutely qualified to come on this tour. If you're looking to catch a buzz, there's a whole scene in Burlington where you can go on a bike tour that visits three breweries within a two-and-a-half-mile stretch. Mine is focused on the travel aspect.

You'll be tasting a lot on these tours. Does intoxication prevent you from fully experiencing these beers?

Getting drunk isn't going to help you consider its nuances and complexities. When you drink beer the way I do with my guests, it's more in the style of wine culture, tasting primarily using stemware.

Do mass-produced beer brands have redeeming qualities? They're just light American lagers. That's still a great style. I can't tell you the last time I had a Coors Light, but I'll definitely drink a bottle of Budweiser.

How can a deeper understanding of beer enhance quality of life?

It gives me a commonality with great people and an outlet to learn. There's no way I would have gone to Elkhorn, Wis., if it weren't for a beer festival. There, a man from Costa Rica wore a Hill Farmstead sweater. He is absolutely in love with the Vermont beer scene, so I've got a trip to go see him in the books. And drinking really delicious beer doesn't hurt either.