

New Perks for Designated Drivers at Beer and Wine Events

By ALYSON KRUEGER OCT. 4, 2017



The lounge at the Great American Beer Festival.
Brewers Association

The [Great American Beer Festival](#), taking place Oct. 5 through 7 at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, will feature over 800 breweries serving 3,900 varieties of beer. But away from the drunken groups of millennials, dressed in Oktoberfest garb and playing cornhole in the backyard, will be a haven for those who want to remain sober.

The festival attracts over 60,000 participants — of which 300 are designated drivers or just don't drink. For that group, the festival has created a lounge to mingle, relax, and sample complimentary food and beverages made just for them. There will be Bavarian pretzels, baked goods and small-batch craft sodas made by [Tommyknocker Brewery](#) of Idaho Springs. Four massage therapists will be giving free chair

massages, and there will be movies like “Sherlock Holmes” and “The Terminator” playing for entertainment.

“It’s pregnant women, spouses of brewers, designated drivers, people who want to have a nonalcoholic experience, health conscious people, men and women,” said Jada Petersen, a high school coach from Frederick, Colo., who loves the designated driver lounge so much she has volunteered to help run it for the past eight years. “We have games set up, and I’ve seen card games break out. People tell jokes. I’ve seen people knit and chat. Last year they loved the adult coloring books.”

Every year beer and wine festivals across the country attract participants who don't drink alcohol but still want to be part of the social, spirited atmosphere. While the Great American Beer Festival has hosted a designated drivers lounge since 2001, other festivals are now following suit and offering creative activities, spaces, and food for their sober audiences. The idea is to make festivals as inclusive as possible while also attracting much needed designated drivers to participate.

Stephanie Waterman, a 56 year old from San Diego who works in sales, has been attending the [San Diego Bay Food and Wine Festival](#), held this year from Nov. 12 to the 19, for 14 years. As a recovering alcoholic, she doesn't drink but enjoys the cooking classes, the food samples, and hanging with her friends, whom she often drives home. She is especially excited for the Grand Tasting event this year because for the first time, there will be an open-air mocktail bar. It will be located in the middle of the action, next to the live music, and serve two signature "safe sangrias" made specifically for this event by a local mixologist.

"I think a lot of people will totally dig it," she said. "I think it will be hilarious and super fun to hang out with other-like minded people who aren't drinking and won't say, 'Why aren't you drinking today?'" She believes many of her nondrinker friends will appreciate venturing out into the rest of the festival holding something that looks like a drink. "They don't want to be singled out," she said.

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In July, the [Oregon Brewers Festival](#) 70,000 attendees to downtown Portland. For the 1,000 or so guests who didn't drink alcohol, the organizers created a 20-foot-by-20-foot "soda garden" that had shade, comfortable tables and chairs, and unlimited, free all-natural craft sodas with flavors like apple ginger made by a local company, [Crater Lake Soda](#). The goal was to show their appreciation to designated

drivers, said festival spokeswoman Chris Crabb. "These people are providing a huge service in ensuring a safe ride home for their friends and loved ones," she said. "All parties benefit by recognizing them."

For similar reasons Tim Stendahl, a co-founder of [Where the Wild Beers Are](#), a festival that celebrates wild, sour and farmhouse beers and hosts events in St. Paul, Minn., New York City, and Des Moines, Iowa, decided to waive the \$35 entrance fee for sober participants. At each festival he tries to add more classes and talks by brewmasters and other events everyone can enjoy. "People are excited we are doing that, but for us, it seems like a no-brainer," he said. "They add value for everyone." (Many festivals offer reduced or complimentary admission to designated drivers.)

Of course, some nondrinkers prefer to stay away from alcohol-centric events. Kelsey Simms, a recruiting manager in Centennial, Colo., attended the Denver festival for the past two years as a designated driver and thought it was a waste of time to hang out in a separate area on her own. "It's definitely not essential to attend the festival as a nondrinker," she said. "I would seriously suggest to nondrinkers to just drop off and pick up."

But as more designated drivers are seeing the new options available for them at beer and wine festivals, many of them are getting excited and envisioning what else they want in the future. “What if there was a nonalcoholic cocktail or wine pairing event?” Ms. Waterman said. “Now that would be a really cool thing.”