



Africa is a thirsty continent where beer conveys a special sense of place - Tusker lager on safari in Kenya, Zambezi lager on the banks of the mighty river in Zimbabwe, Mosi lager at the Victoria Falls, Windhoek lager at a water-hole in Etosha. When I recall all the beers I've tasted out of Africa, one satisfying sip takes me straight back to the scenes, sounds and smells of the exotic landscapes where I first enjoyed them.

Local is lekker. Over a flamingo sunset at the Victoria Falls, I quaffed an ice-cold Mosi, the Zambian lager that the barman says stands for a 'Man of Serious Intentions' (Mosi). "I thought it was named after all the mozzies," I quipped. After another dry, hot day in Africa those beers flow like Mosi-Oa-Tunya - the Smoke that Thunders - the traditional name of the Falls which gives the local lager its name.

I've followed a golden beer trail on my travels. Africa is beer-drinking country with breweries with colourful beer brands in practically every country from north to south, west to east. In King Henry V, William Shakespeare wrote: 'I would give all my fame for a pot of ale'. While traversing the dunes and deserts of the Kalahari, the Namib and the Sahara, I'd swap my kingdom for a cold beer (rather than a horse) any day.

Every beer is unique. The quality of locally sourced ingredients - the water, yeast, hops and barley - and the use of different brewing techniques all shape the character of the beer. The exotic labels and evocative setting also conjure up a distinct memory of beer in foreign climes. When I close my eyes, I can still taste Casablanca beer at the kasbah in Morocco or Saqqara beer in Egypt on the banks of the Nile. Funny thing - those beers never taste quite as good when you take a six-pack home with you.

Africans have been brewing sorghum beer and palm-wine for centuries.

British, Belgian, German and South African brewers brought commercial lager and sorghum beer to Africa, opening up the first industrial plants in the 1930s at places like Accra Breweries in Ghana or Tanganyika Brewery in Dar es Salaam. Today, SAB-Miller, one of the world's largest beer and beverage companies, operates brewery and bottling plants in 32 countries across Africa - in a global beer empire of 200 beer brands and 139 breweries. In late 2008, SAB opened its first brewery in the Sudan.

Some brands of African beer are highly rated by beer connoisseurs. In BJ's *Beer Drinkers Guide*, Tusker premium lager from Kenya is rated as, 'Good and appetising, remarkably fresh yet rather complex. A very good lager, worth seeking out and perfect for any occasion' - especially at a water-hole while watching the migration.

Of course, you can always find those ubiquitous global brands of beer everywhere in Africa. But why stick to the familiar? Take your tastebuds for a walk on the wild side. When in Angola, do as the Angolans do. Drink Empresa De Cervejas N'gola, a fine lager brewed from Tundavala spring water from the highlands (it says so on the label) which goes well with chicken peri peri when you're kayaking on the Kunene. When you next find yourself on the beach in Mozambique, take a nostalgia trip and enjoy legendary lagers like Laurentina or 2M



'Wine is but single broth - Ale is meat, drink and cloth.' Old proverb.

with LM prawns peri peri at the Polana Hotel.

Every beer tells a story. Take N'gola. The ceasefire between the MPLA and Unita in Angola in 1993 ushered in a new boom in the Angolan economy - and saw the iconic national beer back on the shelf after SAB had refurbished regional breweries in Lubango and Huambo which were abandoned during the long civil war in the south. Or take Mozambique's iconic Laurentina, a lager brewed at the first brewery in 1912, and 2M which any old Africa hand worth his salt knows you always order as Dos M!

Founded in Cape Town in 1895, SAB is the largest brewer in Africa today with flagship brands like Castle, Carling and Hansa exported all over the continent. Several new major brewery and bottling plants are in the pipeline as SAB-Miller expands deeper into Africa. Key markets and brands include Angola (N'gola), Botswana (St Louis light lager), Kenya (Kilimanjaro and Tusker), Mozambique (Laurentina, 2M), Tanzania (Nduvo malt lager and Eagle sorghum beer), Uganda (Nile Special and Club) - with emerging markets in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gabon and Ghana (Stone).

Africa isn't only lager and sorghum beer country. Guinness has exported beer to Africa for decades since opening its first operations in Nigeria in 1949 and today has breweries in Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius, Nigeria and Kenya - which apparently sell more extra-foreign stout and regular stout in Africa than at home in Ireland!

I have a friend who collects wine and beer labels and sticks them in a scrapbook. He insists they'll be of great value one day. So wherever I travel - in Angola, Egypt, Morocco or Tunisia, I steam off another colourful label or slide it off the frosty glass and keep it pressed in my note-book until I return to add to his travelling beer collection. Personally, I think the best part of a beer is drinking it in situ. I'm relieved he doesn't collect the empty bottle - that would take some explaining at customs.

