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GOOD FOR WHAT

“ALES” YOU *Eat, drink and be merry on the new Maple Ridge Ale Trail*

Whether you're a beer beginner or an ale aficionado or somewhere in between, there's an outing for you on the new Maple Ridge Ale Trail. This self-guided tour, part of the province-wide BC Ale Trail, launched back in September with a contest and a beer collaboration. Since then the tour has been tempting adventurous folks to take their taste buds exploring in Maple Ridge.

According to Kathryn Baird, tourism coordinator for the City of Maple Ridge, the tour encompasses much more than just beer.

"It gives you an itinerary that you can follow over the course of a few days, if you choose to, starting with some suggestions for where you can go for breakfast, go for a hike, go cycling, go do a tasting at a couple of breweries, and so on," she says. "It helps people discover Maple Ridge."

Four breweries signed on for the inaugural year. Maple Meadows Brewing Company (www.mmbrewing.ca) is a microbrewery that's small on space — just 10 people can fit in the tasting room — but big on flavours. They constantly experiment with new brews and offer 10 different choices on tap.

Silver Valley Brewing Co. (www.silvervalleybrewing.com) is the latest addition to Maple Ridge's craft beer scene. The owner and his wife started home-brewing in their carport and have turned their sudsy hobby into a thriving business that pairs flavourful craft beer with locally sourced food.

Ridge Brewing Company (www.ridgebrewing.com) fosters a sense of community in its family-friendly tasting room. Bring in your own snacks, or cross your fingers and hope that a food truck stops by while you're there.

Foamers' Folly Brewing Co. (www.foamersfolly.ca) is the lone Pitt Meadows brewery on the roster. Rob Davis, one of the owners, confesses that he didn't know much about beer for far too long.

"I thought beer was just one flavour," he admits. Eventually he learned it was "not just Molson and Budweiser" and grew to love trying new brews. Now, whenever he's in a liquor store, he looks for new flavours and labels he doesn't recognize.

He has great expectations for the Maple Ridge Ale Trail: "I really hope it's an access point to the world of beer for some people. I think there are a lot of people who are still where I used to be."

Featuring 20 taps in the tasting room, his brewery is constantly experimenting with palate-pleasing new brews, and welcoming whole families into the tasting room, which boasts a selection of board games instead of TVs.

Baird is pleased to have four such popular breweries on board. "It was a good start for the first year," she says. "Now we can start growing it."

The craft beer scene is booming all across the province and Baird has heard of at least one new brewery scheduled to open in Maple Ridge in 2020. But she emphasizes it's not just breweries that appeal to taste buds on the tour.

"We see that there's a lot of interest in the farm-to-table food experience," she says. Some of the tour's recommended stops include pubs, cafes and markets.

Family farm Hopcott Meats (www.hopcottmeats.ca) has a deli, grocery store, bistro and butcher shop known for its non-GMO, steroid-free, dry-aged beef. They use two wood-chip smokers to cure bacon, pepperoni and ham in-house.





Run by two sisters, Golden Ears Cheesecrafters (www.cheesecrafters.ca) is a farm store that stocks brie, cheddar, feta, gouda and many more cheesy delights. Guests can see cheese being made, eat a meal in the Country Kitchen, or feast on an elaborate dinner while a chef demonstrates how to prepare it.

Chameleon (chameleonmapleridge.com) is a stylish restaurant and lounge that focuses on West Coast cuisine with international influences. The menu showcases local ingredients and BC wines.

To help you work up an appetite for these and other culinary destinations, the Maple Ridge Ale Trail also features outdoor adventures ranging from mild to wild. Wander through the great outdoors in Kanaka Creek Regional Park (metrovancover.org), get an adrenaline rush on a WildPlay zipline (wildplay.com), learn about the past at Haney House Museum (mapleridgemuseum.org), or relax in Memorial Peace Park before attending a live show at the ACT Arts Centre (theactmapleridge.org).

Baird hopes to see more businesses take part in the Maple Ridge Ale Trail in the future, both breweries and “anything that people who like craft beer would also be interested in.”

She notes how much visitors enjoy the self-guided aspect of the tour. “They can do it on their own time. They can pick and choose which places they go to.”

Other ways to please Maple Ridge foodies are in the works, she adds. Plans are still preliminary but include a barbecue competition, maple festival, self-guided artisan-food trail and farm-to-table food-and-drink festival. It looks like your taste buds may be in for even more treats.

To learn more about the Maple Ridge Ale Trail, visit bcaletrail.ca/ale-trails/maple-ridge or download the free BC Ale Trail app. 

