

Choose from seven brews at Taedonggang Number 3. Below: Wheat beer at Rakwon Paradise Beer.



DRINK

## Politbrewo

Say what you will about North Korea, but they've got great ales. Cole Pennington sees the oddities of the Hermit Kingdom through the bottom of a mug.



There's nothing like a visit to North Korea to put you in the mood for a drink. But if you envision tippling in Pyongyang as a furtive or downright scary experience, you'd be wrong. The city plays host to a number of microbreweries and modern bars serving up delicious state-produced beer. The experience is eerie, of course, but the setting only spurs interesting bar conversations. After all, the day's activities, like flying Soviet-era jets or witnessing child guitar prodigies strumming flamenco rhythms in unison, are best processed over a frothy cold one with open-minded company.

North Korea's ability to mobilize the population to achieve a goal, when set to the task of producing beer, has resulted in a slew of tasty state-produced brews. The most well known is **Taedonggang Beer**, a crisp lager with a five percent ABV produced with brewing equipment imported from

England. Autarkic economic policy stemming from the country's *juche* (self-reliance) ideals means that most ingredients are procured domestically, rather than imported, resulting in beers that aren't quite as hoppy as their western counterparts; instead they veer towards the sweeter side, with a light, malty backbone.

What's even more surprising than flavorful brews in this closed state is how easy it is to drink them. Yes, you'll have to go through an agent to arrange your trip and follow a pre-approved itinerary, but intrepid beer enthusiasts can contact Bangkok and New York-based luxury outfitters **Remote Lands** ([remotelands.com](http://remotelands.com)) or Australia's **Seven Skies** ([sevenskies.com](http://sevenskies.com)), for a schedule that includes nightly stops at the local watering holes listed below.

**THE TAEDONGGANG NUMBER 3 BAR**  
Named after the river running →

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## Radar



Bartenders must wear state-approved uniforms.

through the capital, this bar serves up an assortment of brews crafted using imported English brewing hardware. Not to be confused with the national favorite Taendonggang Beer, the brews flowing from these taps are numbered one to seven, in true socialist fashion, and what differentiates each one is varying proportions of rice, wheat and barley. Bartenders clad in neatly pressed uniforms hastily pour pints from massive taps for crowds of local elite and visiting businessmen at this upscale bar. The brews ring in at €3 each, and you won't find them anywhere outside of this swanky spot. Bar snacks, ranging from French fries to an entire dried herring, will help you work your way through all seven varieties.

### RAKWON PARADISE MICROBREWERY

This lager-fueled shopping spree will make capitalists feel right at home. On the top floor of Paradise Department Store, customers can enjoy some liquid lubrication before perusing aisles of products and souvenirs. Pyongyang's most experimental brewer churns out styles that aren't commonly found in Asia, like a pungent, cloudy wheat beer and a piquant fruit beer—all to the tune of €1 a pint. The best part? All the brewing equipment is in plain

sight for beer geeks to ogle. Copper fermentation tanks sit behind the bar, and the rest of the plumbing is positioned like a laboratory behind a wall of glass running the length of the small room.

### KORYO HOTEL

Pyongyang's five star (read: three star by Western standards) hotel plays host to an austere bar just left of the lobby that keeps things simple by serving two brews produced on the premises: yellow and black ale. Although slightly metallic tasting, the straw-colored yellow ale is a fantastic complement to the beautiful blue skies and greenery that grace Pyongyang in the spring, while the harsh winters see patrons knocking back the belly-warming black varietal. Regardless of the season, the giant murals of national icons and intricate jade stonework surrounding the bar make for a dramatic backdrop—and isn't that what you came for? *Beers for two €4.*

**T+L Tip:** Ask your travel agent in advance to organize visits to these bars. Once in North Korea you will be assigned a "minder" who travels everywhere with you, and this person will lead you to the aforementioned locales. Addresses are not listed as finding your own way around is not possible.+