

# Suds and more at Bohemian Garden

*It maintains a unique status in the history of NYC beer establishments*

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The city's oldest beer garden is not in Manhattan or Brooklyn, but right here in Queens.

For over 100 years, the Bohemian Hall & Beer Garden at 29-19 24 Ave. in Astoria has been serving up traditional Czech and Slovak food and entertaining visitors from near and far.

Opened in 1910, the venue is run by the Bohemian Citizens' Benevolent Society of Astoria. It's a fraternal organization dedicated to education and preserving Czech and Slovak communities in the area.

Think back 100 years when there was no air conditioning or television to entertain the masses. To beat the heat and relax, residents throughout the city depended on beer gardens, where they could have a mug of suds, maybe listen to music and cool off under the trees in a park-like setting.

Today, the hall offers Sunday brunch, live music, ethnic festivals and Saturday night poker, and hosts the Astoria Market, which is filled with handmade, vintage and baked goods. The next market will be held on Sunday, Nov. 20 from 1 to 7 p.m.

"One of the best parts about living in Astoria is this place," said Dan Adsit, who lives within walking distance. "We sometimes come for brunch, we come to the market, and it's a great place to have a beer with friends after work."

Indeed the beer is a big reason so many people frequent the Bohemian Hall. The menu features seven Czech and Slovak beers, along with ales from Belgium, Germany and the United States.

"Not a lot of places in the city, especially in Astoria, serve these beers," said Izzy Frank, a Bayside resident, who meets co-workers for drinks every Friday. "I happen to be a big fan of Broucech beer, and this place serves it nice and cold."

The food offerings are just as diverse as the beer. Traditional Czech and Slovak dishes like roasted duck with red cabbage and dumplings and roasted ham with sauerkraut and dumplings are served alongside cheeseburgers, hot dogs and French fries.

"The menu is different than most bars and pubs we've come across," said Kelly Martin, a teacher from Astoria. "My husband and I recently moved here from Virginia, so we are trying to eat at different places and eat different foods. This is definitely different and that's a good thing."

In addition to the hall and beer garden, the society runs a Czech and Slovak school intended for children ages 5-13. The program's curriculum incorporates the Czech and Slovak national standards for elementary schools to teach all aspects of the two languages, including grammar, reading, writing and communication. There are culturally rich activities that provide students with opportunities to understand the fundamentals of each country's history, geography and ethnic lifestyle. The program uses genuine Czech and Slovak textbooks and materials to promote learning.

In the late 1800s, many Czech and Slovaks emigrated from what was then Austria-Hungary and made their way to America. Some found a home in Astoria, and in 1892, the society was formed, named after the medieval kingdom of Bohemia, which forms the western part of the modern-day Czech Republic. In 1910, the society raised funds for a home for the Czech people in the community. Thus was born the Bohemian Hall. It's such an important institution that Vaclav Havel, the former Czech president, held a conference there in 2000.

The Bohemian Hall & Beer Garden is open Monday to Thursday from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m., Friday from 5 p.m. to 3 a.m., Saturday from noon to 3 a.m. and Sunday from noon to 1 a.m. For more information, call (718) 274-4925.



Enjoying the Bohemian Hall & Beer Garden last summer.

PHOTO COURTESY BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT SOCIETY