

Carmel Valley couple travel the world together drinking beer

Friday they embark on a 12-stop, 12-month, worldwide beer voyage

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Other guys may be jealous of Chris Nelson — and for good reason. Chris gets to travel around the world year-round with his wife, Meredith Canham-Nelson, and drink beer. Lots and lots of beer.

"It's him and Hugh Hefner," joked Morgan Christopher, owner of Ol' Factory Cafe in Sand City, of Nelson's status as the luckiest guy around. Christopher was sitting with the Nelsons at the Ol' Factory Cafe in Sand City, sharing some recently discovered Belgian beer. The couple go to Christopher's cafe regularly to enjoy the rotating beer selection.

Soon, they will trek outside their Peninsula confines and embark on a 12-stop beer voyage over the course of the calendar year.

Chris Nelson is the creator of the Web site TheBeerGeek.com and a recent finalist in the competition for the Four Stars By Sheraton coveted position of Chief Beer Officer. This week, he and Meredith embark on the first trip of "The Year in Beer." The couple will visit a different beer festival or event each month over the course of the year.

Their first stop is a beer-drinking head-scratcher — The Great Alaska Beer and Barleywine Festival in Anchorage, Alaska, which begins Friday. Temperatures could dip below 20 degrees and daylight is minimal at this time of year.

"To prove we're serious about what we're going to do, we thought to ourselves: 'What's the craziest thing we can do?' " said Chris Nelson of the decision to kick things off in the icy state. "What could be crazier than drinking beer in Alaska in winter?"

The Nelsons have never attended that event. In total, five of their destinations will be first-time events for the couple. The rest, including stops in Boston for St. Patrick's Day, Oktoberfest in Germany and the Toronado Barleywine Festival in San Francisco, have been previously attended by the couple.

The year will culminate with a planned book detailing their experiences. The couple will also keep a running travelogue on the Web site.

The best part: they get to travel together and drink as a couple.

"We found something we like to do together," said Chris Nelson, while working on a pint of Green Flash IPA, his recent favorite at Ol' Factory. "It's just been great. I'm not sure everyone has that type of relationship with their spouse. It'd feel weird if I did it without her."

"We went on the same path," added Meredith, enjoying her Downtown Brown Ale. "We've matured together and our lives, interests and ideas have gone on the same path."

That path went from meeting while attending Carmel

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High School, then UC-Berkeley, where Chris Nelson majored in history while Meredith Nelson balanced her studies with a steady gig at an Oakland pub with a 28-tap, rotating micro-brew selection.

Her work inspired Meredith to want to learn more about the beer she was serving, and Chris was happy to help. The couple explored Bay Area breweries before venturing out of state to Oregon. After college, they continued their beer travels, going to Germany, the Czech Republic, England, Ireland, anyplace they could find a good "beer culture."

In all, they've visited a combined 718 breweries, with Chris up to 360 and Meredith close behind at 358. With so many different experiences, Chris thought their travels might make a good television travel show or book.

Then it hit him — 12 beer travel destinations in 12 months. The Year in Beer was under way.

"One of the things that was unique when I was doing the whole Chief Beer Officer thing was that we did this together, as a couple," said Chris Nelson. "For us it wasn't that different that we spend that much time together, but the judges thought so."

Added Meredith, "When we started shooting video for the Web site, we figured we could do this. It was like 'It's still a hobby, but let's bump it up a bit.'"

They joked that they are 'Kevin Smith-ing it, ' a reference to the movie director who maxed out his credit cards to produce his first feature film 'Clerks.' They still hope that their travels will make for good TV.

"At the least, we'll have a great year,"

said Chris Nelson. "We'll be in debt, but we'll have a great year."

And lucky guy Chris Nelson will get to share every moment with his wife and favorite beer-drinking buddy.

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A year in beer A month-by-month itinerary of Chris and Meredith Nelson's beer travel calendar:

- January: The Great Alaska Beer and Barleywine Festival in Anchorage, Alaska
- February: Beerapalooza/Toronado Barleywine Festival in San Francisco
- March: St. Patrick's Day in Boston
- April: Trip to Seattle
- May: Bergkirchweih Beer Festival in Erlangen, Germany
- June: Trip to Dublin, Ireland
- July: Oregon Brewers Festival in Portland, Oregon
- August: Great British Beer Festival in London, England
- September: Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany
- October: Great American Beer Festival in Denver
- November: Strong Ale Festival in San Diego
- December: Kerstbierfestival in Essen, Belgium

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