

# The Best of Downtown Albuquerque's Craft Breweries

## A Recommendation Report for Residents & Tourists

English 2219-103

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## Abstract

Finding the best brewery within Albuquerque can be more than daunting—it can be time-consuming and unpredictable, especially for a tourist making a brief visit to Albuquerque. Within a one-mile radius of the Albuquerque Convention Center, five breweries offer a large variety of beer. This report analyzes and determines the highest rated brewery within a 1.2-mile radius of the Convention Center based upon surveying the patrons of each brewery. The survey covers details such as seating options, noise level preference, customer service quality, food options, and entertainment. Our report concludes that, based on the criteria we determined was important to brewery patrons, Rio Bravo Brewing Company is the all-around highest ranked brewery within a 1.2-mile radius of the Convention Center, despite other breweries better fitting specific customer preferences. Specifically, Sidetrack Brewing Company offers the quietest venue, Tractor Brewing Company ties with Rio Bravo Brewing Company for an enjoyable high noise level venue, and Tractor Brewing offers the best entertainment options. Boese Brothers Brewing ties with Sidetrack Brewing Company for highest customer service ratings, and Rio Bravo Brewing Company is the most popular and well-loved venue by its loyal patrons.

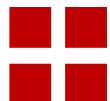


Rio Bravo Brewing Company Photo



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## Introduction

This report is intended as a guide for Albuquerque visitors, residents, newcomers and craft beer tourists and enthusiasts as to what downtown Albuquerque has to offer in the way of craft brewing. More specifically, the report will recommend the best all-around craft brewery taproom within approximately a one-mile radius of the Albuquerque Convention Center—a bustling tourist destination and center of the downtown city district.



**Rio Bravo Brewing Company Photo**

The craft brewery scene in Albuquerque has been exploding in the last couple decades, putting Albuquerque on the craft brewery map and making the city a destination for beer tourists. With at least 67 breweries throughout the state and an economic impact of \$333 million, Albuquerque is home to the majority of New Mexico’s thriving brewing industry (C. Krabbe). With “one of the winningest collections of IPAs in the world, and a rapidly growing roster of beer festivals, Albuquerque, New Mexico, is staking its claim as one of America’s best brew destinations” (Pachelli).

Ale and lager are the two basic types of beer, and within these broad categories are many subcategories, each of which is a distinct type of ale or lager. These subcategories—types of beer—have a certain set of parameters. At least eight subcategories of ales and lagers are very popular and brewed extensively at microbreweries, and within those subcategories is a dizzying array of varieties. For simplicity’s sake, this study only surveyed participants regarding the type of ale known as IPA. IPA is the quintessential craft beer and its popularity has been greatly instrumental in the explosive growth of the craft brewing industry. Other beers are also important, and not everyone enjoys the bitterness of IPA, but “they are still the primary growth driver of craft.” (Watson)



## Definition of Terms

*Craft Brewing:* Small-scale beer brewing with a focus on quality, taste, brewing technique and creativity.

*Taproom:* An establishment where alcoholic beverages, especially beer, are available on tap, but does not necessarily have brewing facilities on the premises.

*Microbrewery or Craft Brewery:* Although these terms can be used somewhat interchangeably for the purpose of this study, the Brewers Association defines *craft brewers* as “small, independent, and traditional.” If a craft brewery produces less than 15,000 barrels annually and sells more than 75% of its product off site it is categorized as a microbrewery. Typically, distribution is limited to local markets or, in the case of very small craft brewers, no distribution at all beyond local taprooms.

*IPA:* Stands for India Pale Ale, but is not from India, nor necessarily pale. The name stems from the popularity of the extra hoppy, very strong pale ale favored by British troops stationed in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Webber).



Dialogue Brewing Company Photo



## Methods

*The methods of inquiry consisted of:*

1. Defining scope of study
2. Limitations of the Study
3. Defining Criteria
4. Secondary Research
4. Primary research

### Defining Scope of Study

To establish the scope of this study we focused on the Downtown Brewery District of Albuquerque. To keep the parameters within a reasonable scope for the timeline of this study, we included only establishments within reasonable walking distance of the Albuquerque Convention Center. The Convention Center was chosen as the hub for the area of study because it is an easily identifiable landmark defining the eastern boundary of Downtown Albuquerque, and it is the destination of many visitors to Albuquerque.

### Limitations of the Study

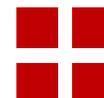
Given that there are at least 25 breweries in the Albuquerque area, the timeframe of this study did not permit a comprehensive study of all the local craft brewers (Beer Guide: Albuquerque, New Mexico). Initially, the scope of this study was limited to only those establishments within exactly one mile of the Albuquerque Convention Center, but in the course of research these parameters were expanded two-tenths of a mile, increasing the number of establishments from five to seven. Furthermore, an analysis of breweries could include an unwieldy number of factors, so the scope is limited to criteria deemed most important according to the results of our initial survey.

The scope of this study does not include any analysis of the quality of the brews themselves; we will leave that up to the expert beer-tasters and judges of brewing competitions.

Additionally, there are two more notable limitations on the scope of this study: season and day of the week.

1. In the interest of Albuquerque visitors staying in a downtown hotel and attending a function at the Convention Center, this study weighs heavily toward the weekday traveler inclined to walk to a taproom for local brews.
2. This study was conducted during late fall, and seasonality—as it turns out—is integral to the attractiveness of Albuquerque’s craft brewery scene.

In short, the scope of research conducted for this report does not account for the increased patronage of warm weather and weekends. We think it is fair to assume that weekends and warm weather increase patronage, but do not influence brew and service quality significantly, besides the inevitable slowing of service that can result from large customer volume.



## Defining Criteria

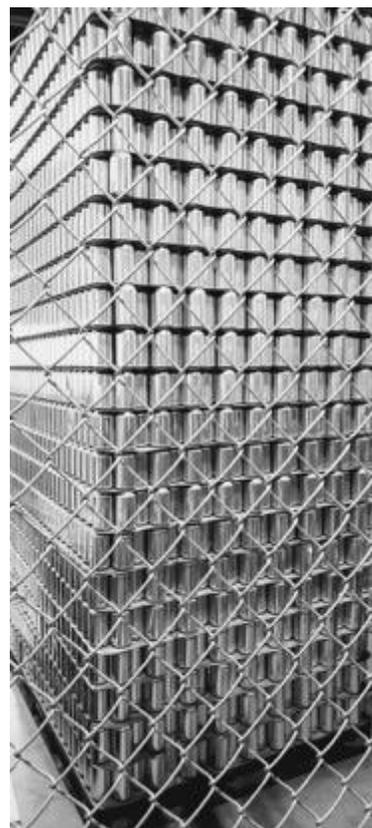
To define the criteria, we conducted a two-part survey: Survey One consisted of an online survey, via Survey Monkey, and Survey Two consisted of a similar survey, incorporating the significant findings of Survey One, and was conducted in-person at the designated establishments.

Survey One questioned a general public audience to establish the criteria beer drinkers value and prioritize when choosing a craft brewery taproom. The survey covered noise levels, customer service, happy hour, seating preferences, lighting preferences, location and IPA preferences. This survey was limited in scope to CNM classmates and respondents via social media outlets such as Facebook.

Survey Two was directed at the patrons of each brewery to determine their overall opinions of the location based on their experience that night. Based on criteria established in Survey One, the second survey included two new questions on food and entertainment options.

## Secondary Research

We explored as much background information as we could find on the internet about each brewery in the study. This research revealed a general lack of formal professional review of local craft breweries in Albuquerque, but there are several sites serving as guides to locals and tourists. Trip Savvy provides a list and brief description (O’Catherine) and Craft Beer & Brewing has an article geared toward the beer tourist that is a helpful guide (Pachelli). Additionally, the NM Dark Side Brew Crew website, “a collective of craft beer-loving writers” dedicated to sharing news and opinions about New Mexico’s craft brew scene, features a calendar of events (Dark Size Beer Crew) Each brewery has a website, though their professionalism varies widely. Several sites, such as TripAdvisor, Google and Yelp contain abundant customer reviews. Additionally, the Brewers Association website provided much useful information for enhancing our understanding of the subject.



## Primary Research

### Rio Bravo Brewing Company Photo

Part of our primary research process was visiting each one of the locations to make first-hand observations and evaluations. We visited a couple of locations twice in an effort to gain data, as is detailed in the summary of each brewery. During these visits we asked permission to survey the customers, and each establishment was friendly and accommodating. For the most part, the clientele was eager to participate. We looked around, took photos, explored outside areas, and of course, sampled the goods.



## Results

### Survey One

In our initial survey, the criteria we found most important to the brewery patrons were as follows: Overall customer service, seating options (including bar, booth, table, and patio), noise levels, a happy hour option, the proximity of the location, and the quality of the beverages and atmosphere. We found that the most important aspect is the overall customer service offered:

- 51% rated friendliness of the waitstaff as “very important” and 35% rated it as “extremely important”
- 75% of those surveyed said that the overall noise level is important
- 64% said that a happy hour option is important
- 30% of initial respondents rated food options as important

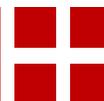


Marble Brewery Photo

### Survey Two

Based on the preliminary results, we revised our survey to focus questions on the patron’s current experience at each brewery. We added questions about food and entertainment options, as the results of Survey One revealed these as important (see appendix for full list of questions and responses from both surveys). Based on the results of Survey One, the categories are weighted as follows, with 1 being least important and 4 being most important:

- |                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Atmosphere             |                  |
| • Customer Service — 4 |                  |
| • Noise ————— 3        |                  |
| • Seating ————— 2      |                  |
| • Entertainment ——— 1  |                  |
|                        | Consumable       |
|                        | • Happy Hour — 3 |
|                        | • Food ——— 2     |
|                        | • IPA ————— 1    |



## Primary Research Findings

### *Red Door Brewing Company:*

We visited Red Door Brewing Company twice. One team member was there on a Sunday evening and it was so empty and quiet it appeared closed. Not only is there no red door, but the venue is an all-glass storefront and feels like being in a fishbowl. The interior is stark and industrial, with a few cozy touches, like a gameroom, a few sofas and wooden booth against a wood panel wall. The service was prompt, solicitous and friendly, and a flight of beers was beautifully presented in small goblets set into a sturdy paddle. The lighting is moderate to bright, making it ideal for sitting with



**Red Door Brewing Company Photo**  
within downtown.

a friend and working math problems together while enjoying delicious brews. When our research team went on a Wednesday evening a small group of patrons huddled in one area engaged in a loud “Trivia Night” activity. Neither visit would have been appropriate for asking customers to participate in our survey, so we were unable to collect any data. The bartender suggested we come again on a Friday or Saturday, but, seeing as we are looking to make a recommendation for a weekday traveler, we concluded that Red Door Brewing Company downtown is not an establishment we could recommend, which is unfortunate because it is one of the few venues that turned out to be a comfortable walk

### *Dialogue Brewing Company:*

We also visited Dialogue Brewing Company twice. On the Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving, there were only a handful of couples, none of whom looked likely to be eager to participate in a survey. A flight of beer in goblets was presented in an unconventional round tray, too delicately balanced to be easily transported when we moved from a bar seat to a cozy couch, but the beers were tasty—especially an outstanding stout. It has an artsy, hip industrial vibe with a variety of seating options. The bar is open to a full view of the brewery and a menu is projected on the wall instead of the ubiquitous chalkboard. We visited again on a Tuesday evening, and business was so slow they suddenly closed two hours before the posted closing time. Neither visit felt appropriate to survey patrons. Our impression is that Dialogue Brewing Company, as the name suggests, is a cozy spot perfect for a date or just talking to a friend. They have the most beautiful, artistic outdoor space of any of the taprooms we visited, including an outdoor bar and a stage which is probably nice in warm weather. Based on these two visits, we would not recommend



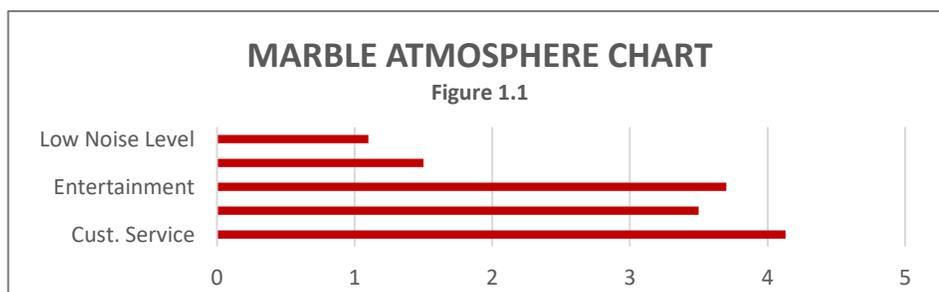
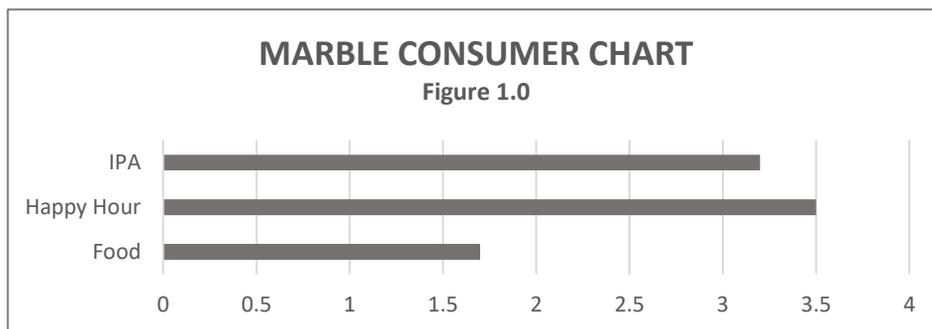
**Dialogue Brewing Company Photo**



Dialogue Brewing Company to a weekday traveler, and due to its remote location, despite its proximity to downtown, we would recommend a hired ride over walking.

### *Marble Brewery:*

Tuesday night before Thanksgiving we visited Marble Brewery. It is situated in an industrial part of town, which is the trend for the majority of Albuquerque breweries, and may feel like an unsafe walk from the Convention Center, so we recommend a hired ride. Across the street is a large parking lot for Marble patrons. You access the entrance through a spacious patio with a stage and abundant seating at long communal tables. There is also an upstairs deck area that is nice during warmer months. There were many happy customers scattered about, the lighting was low and warm, the bathrooms were clean and overall the atmosphere was pleasant. Figures 1.0 and 1.1 below show the overall scores that Marble Brewery received in each category. They received the second highest scores in both their IPA and happy hour options, but scored the lowest in customer service and food options, as well as next to last in seating and entertainment. However, the customers were clearly enjoying themselves. We were fortunate to run into a friend who granted us a lively impromptu tour of the brewery. Marble Brewery has grown rapidly to become one of the largest microbreweries in New Mexico, and is an excellent place for tourists to visit.

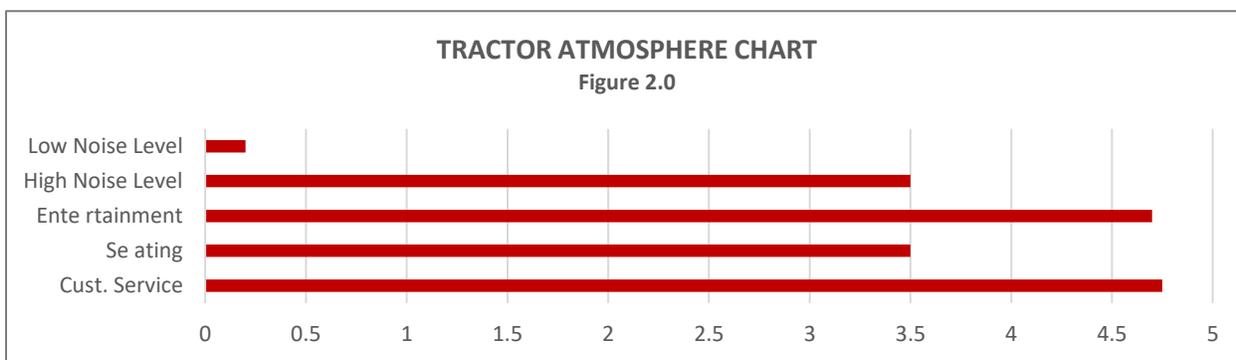


Marble Brewery Photos



**Tractor Brewing Company:**

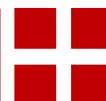
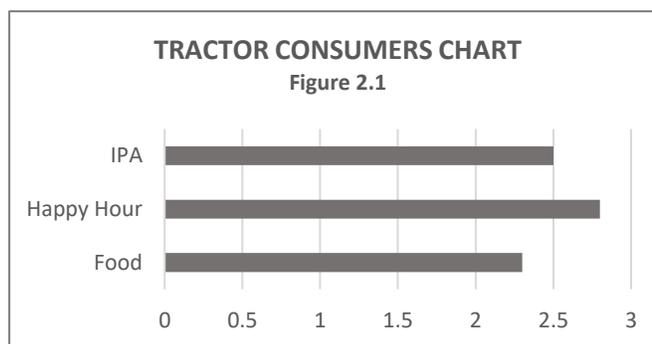
It was karaoke night so the first impression was that it was almost overwhelmingly loud. However, after spending some time in the environment, we grew accustomed to the noise level and ended up enjoying the experience. Along the lengthy entrance hall hang comic-style posters depicting different cult classic movies and tall display cases filled with tractors. Inside the taproom giant cardboard bird sculptures hang from the ceiling, and there is a corner full of old arcade games. Overall, the atmosphere was welcoming, with a pleasant sense of gritty earthiness, appropriate to its name. As figures 2.0 and 2.1 demonstrate, Tractor Brewing Company scored very high in entertainment options (tied with Rio Bravo Brewing Company in first place) and customer service (third overall). However, they did score fairly low across the board in nearly every other category and 71% of the patrons stated that the noise level was high, but it was clear that the customers were enjoying the lively atmosphere.



**Tractor Brewing Company Photo**

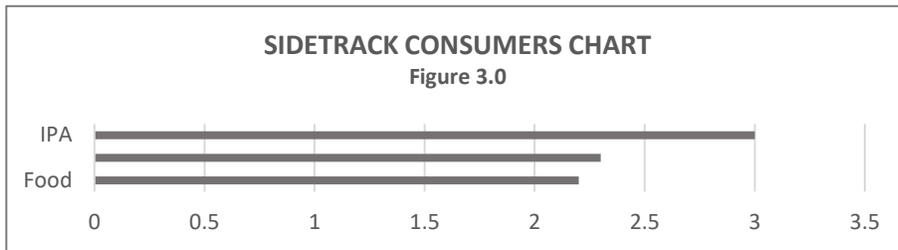


**Tractor Brewing Company Photo**

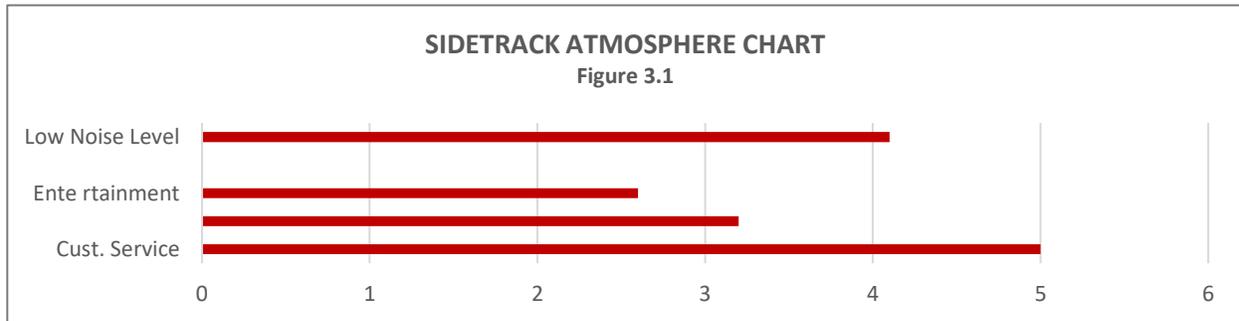


**Sidetrack Brewing Company:**

This venue offers a relaxed and informal environment with plenty of seating and a spacious, attractive courtyard. Although it is quite small and cozy, it feels modern and hip, perhaps catering towards a younger, trendier clientele. It is also apparently conducive to study and work—many patrons were working on their laptops or writing. They offer a feature called “Buy Your Friend a Drink” where you can buy someone a drink, get your name put on the wall, and the next time you come in, you get a free drink. In terms of survey results, as shown in the figures below, Sidetrack Brewing Company scored highest in overall customer service and was voted to be the quietest venue. However, it did fall short in terms of diverse seating options, entertainment, food, happy hour, and IPA, where they scored last or second to last in all. This venue may not offer the best options in terms of food and entertainment, but they do offer a quiet place to study or have a nice conversation, and they an easy walk from the Convention Center.



Sidetrack Brewing Company Photo



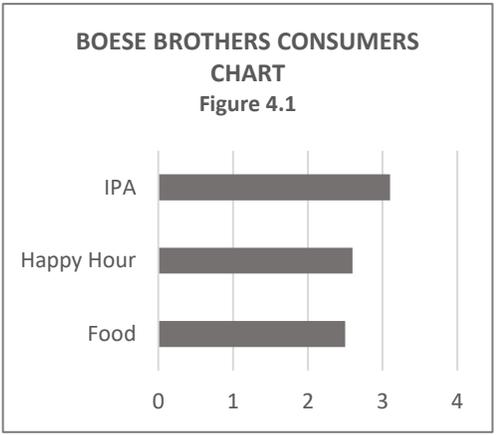
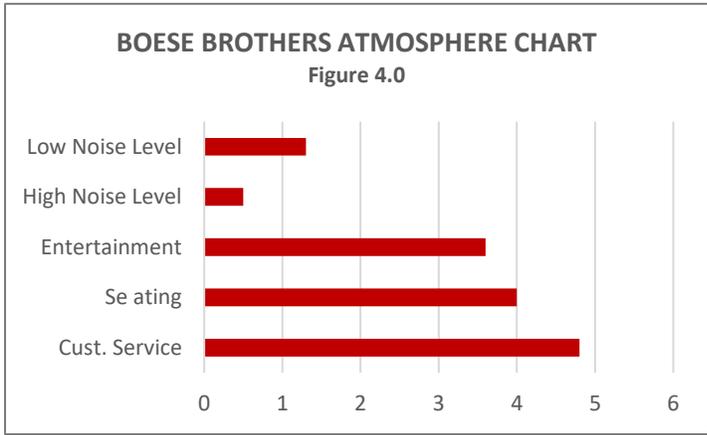
Sidetrack Brewing Company Photo



Boese Brothers Brewery Photo

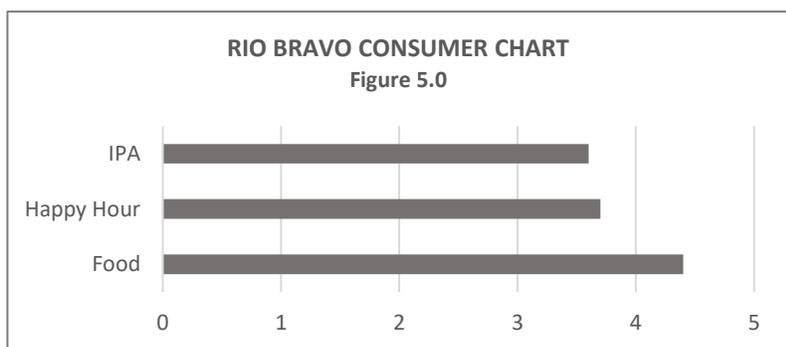
*Boese Brothers Brewery:*

Boese Brothers Brewery is cozy, warm, friendly, inviting and easily within walking distance of the Convention Center and the general downtown Albuquerque area. It is small, but has a lively atmosphere. The bar-oriented service is fast and friendly and not at all inconvenient for patrons preferring to sit at tables. The glass-encased storefront did not have the same cold fishbowl feel as Red Door Brewery, although the lighting is equivalently moderate. We tried their IPA and stout, both of which were quite tasty. The music was a mix of modern and classic alternative rock at a perfect volume for enjoying without interfering with conversation. The patio area occupies the space between two buildings, giving it a distinct urban air. In warm weather, it is likely a lively place to enjoy a beer. Our survey results showed that Boese Brothers Brewery offers the best options in terms of seating, and they come in second for customer service, entertainment, and food. Most patrons found the noise to be at a “perfect” moderate level, making it a good place to go if you like having some background noise, but still want to easily converse.

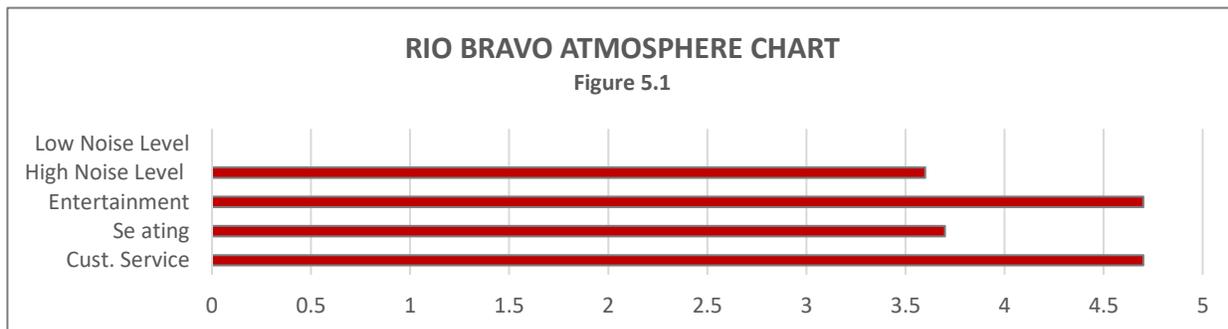


*Rio Bravo Brewing Company:*

Rio Bravo Brewing Company is a large bar-oriented venue, with a distinct sports bar atmosphere, including abundant televisions airing a football game. Additionally, live music in one corner was enjoyed by a cluster of patrons. They offer a substantial menu (both food and drink), helpful, friendly service and clean restrooms. Leading to the expansive outdoor area is wide corridor featuring several games and an outdoor minibar, open seasonally, with a small selection of beers on tap. The outdoor area features a large stage and abundant seating—ideal for live performances during the warmer months. Overall, the customers were pleased with their experience at Rio Bravo Brewing Company. As shown in the figures below, this brewery scored highest in entertainment, food, happy hour, and IPA, and they came in second for seating options.



Rio Bravo Brewing Company Photo



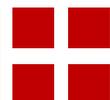
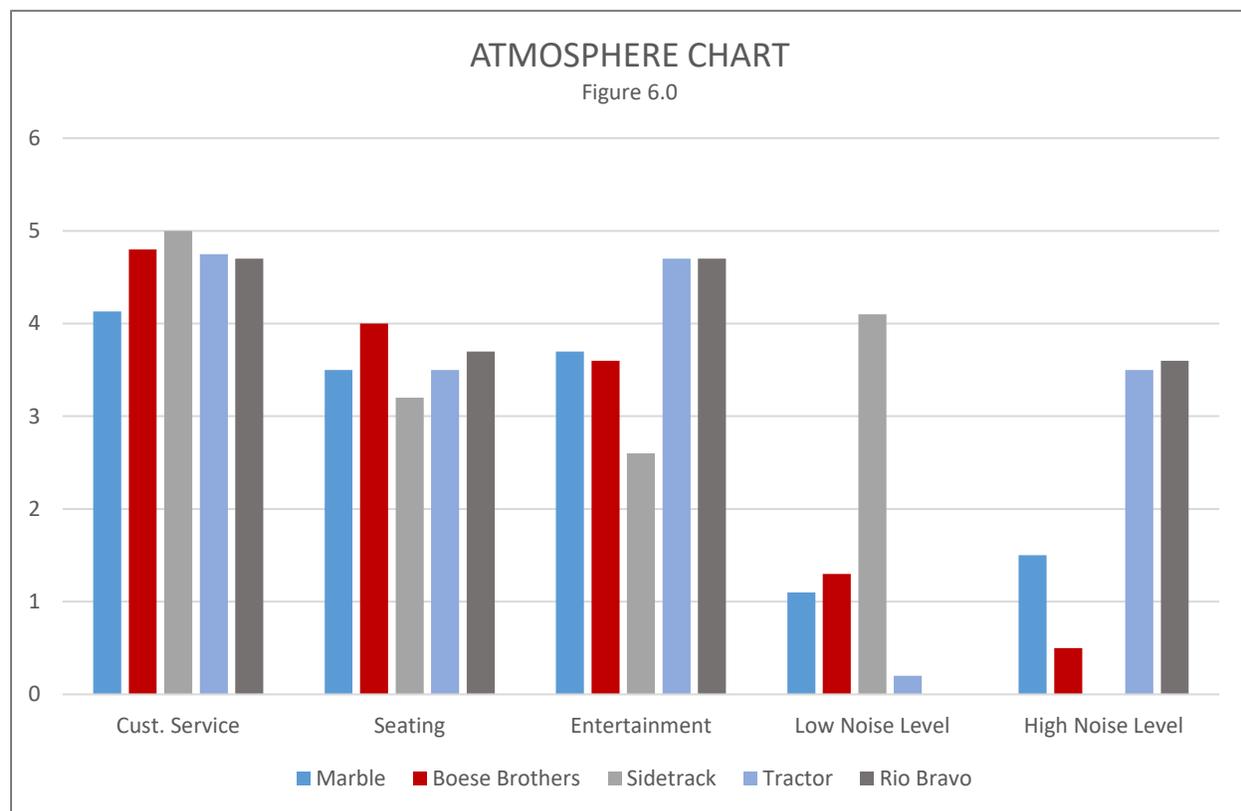
Rio Bravo Brewing Company Photo

## Conclusion

In conclusion our findings present which brewery within a 1.2-mile radius of the Albuquerque Convention Center offers the best experience for beer tourists, locals and other weekday visitors.

To establish criteria, we conducted an initial survey (Survey One) via Survey Monkey, with the majority of respondents being Central New Mexico Community College students and Facebook friends. We printed many copies of the second survey (Survey Two), incorporating the resulting important criteria, to pass out to the patrons at each brewery. As a group, we visited the breweries, tasted their beer, and distributed Survey Two among willing participants. Our recommendation is based on analysis of the results of Survey Two.

Results conclude that Rio Bravo Brewing Company received the majority of highest marks in each separate category making them the highest-rated brewery within a 1.2-mile radius of the Albuquerque Convention Center. They received the highest marks in customer ratings for high noise level appeal, IPA quality, food options and availability, and happy hour options and availability. Lastly, Rio Bravo Brewing Company tied with Tractor Brewing Company for entertainment (see Figure 6.0)



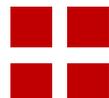
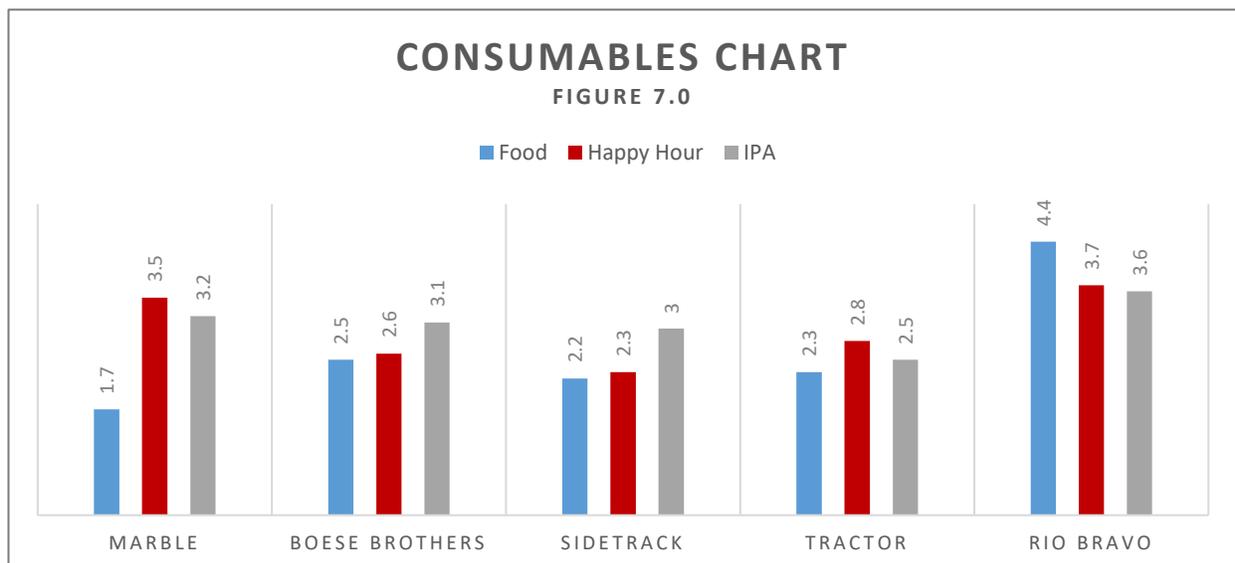
## Recommendation

The conclusion of this report ultimately recommends Rio Bravo Brewing Company, based solely on the feedback and survey numbers. However, through this research, we realized that a traveler may not be looking for the most popular brewery or a sports bar atmosphere, but may prefer a taproom with lower noise levels, lively entertainment, or a variety of seating options. Below, is a list of recommendations for alternative brewery criteria options.

**Option One:** For those looking for a smaller, quieter brewery our report recommends Sidetrack Brewing Company. Survey Two revealed that the clientele at Sidetrack Brewing Company prefer a quieter location and were content with the noise level there. Sidetrack Brewing Company, also scored first in customer service. Although each of the breweries in the study received high marks in customer service, Sidetrack Brewing Company was the only one to score a perfect 5. During our visit to Sidetrack Brewing Company we agreed that although the venue is small, it is comfortable and inviting. It is a great place to get work done while on the road, or a good place to have quiet conversation.

**Option Two:** For those looking for a lively brewery with a high noise level, we recommend Tractor Brewing Company. Tractor Brewing Company scored a close second in noise level to Rio Bravo Brewing Company and tied in entertainment. During our visit we observed the clientele at Tractor Brewing Company energetically singing and enjoying the atmosphere. Tractor Brewing Company is recommended for those looking to enjoy tasty craft brews in a spirited southwestern atmosphere while visiting Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Option Three:** Lastly, we recommend Boese Brothers Brewery due to its happy patrons, comfortable atmosphere, and short distance from the Convention Center.



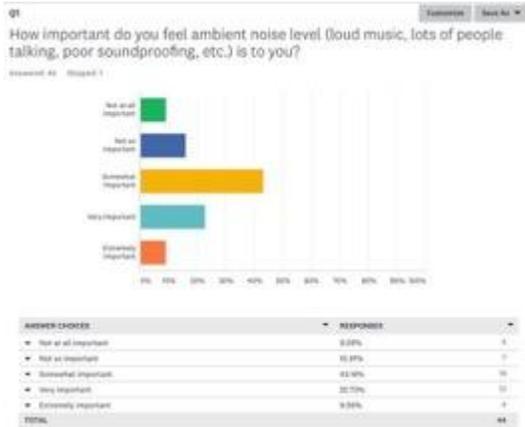
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**All photos courtesy of the authors**

# Appendix

## Survey One



## Appendix

### Survey Two

### How Do You Choose Your Brewery?

We are students at CNM conducting a survey for our class project. Our goal is to determine which local Albuquerque brewery (within a one-mile radius of the Convention Center) is the best. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Thank you for your participation.

**Please rate the following questions on a 1-5 scale, 1 being below average and 5 being above average**

1. Does this venue have good customer service? (i.e. the friendliness of the waitstaff, attentiveness, speed, etc.)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. Rate the following seating preferences for this particular venue.

Bar seating	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Outdoor seating	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Table seating	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Booth Seating	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

3. Please rate the food offered at this venue.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      n/a

4. Please rate the venues entertainment options. (i.e. live music, pool, various games, etc.)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      n/a

**The following questions are based on a rating system, 1 being not that important, 5 being extremely important.**

5. How important is it to you that the venue has a low ambient noise level? (This can include loud music, lots of people talking, outside noises, etc.)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Do you think this venue has a high or low noise level? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How important to you is happy hour?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. For the purpose of this survey we will only be tasting each location's most popular IPA. What do you look for most in your IPA?

Hops	1	2	3	4	5
Alcohol Percentage	1	2	3	4	5
Citrus/Fruity	1	2	3	4	5
Bitter	1	2	3	4	5
Earthy	1	2	3	4	5

8. Please rate this venues IPA, 1 being below average, 5 being above average

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. Do you choose your brewery based on proximity to you or are you willing to travel farther for the quality?

10. Is there anything else you look for when choosing a brewery?

**Thank you again for your participation!**

## Appendix

### Atmosphere Decision Matrix

Figure 8.0

Criterion	And Weight	Marble	Boese	Sidetrack	Tractor	Rio Bravo					
Criterion	Weight	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score
Customer Service	4	4.13	16.52	4.8	19.2	5	20	4.75	19	4.7	18.8
Seating	2	3.5	7	4	8	3.2	6.4	3.5	7	3.7	7.4
Entertainment	1	3.2	3.2	3.6	3.6	2.6	2.6	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7
Low Noise	3	1.1	3.3	1.3	3.9	4.1	12.3	0.2	0.6	0	0
<b>Total Score</b>			<b>30.02</b>		<b>34.7</b>		<b>41.3</b>		<b>31.3</b>		<b>30.9</b>

### Consumable Decision Matrix

Figure 9.0

Criterion	And Weight	Marble	Boese	Sidetrack	Tractor	Rio Bravo					
Criterion	Weight	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score
Food	2	1.7	3.4	2.5	5	2.2	4.4	2.3	4.6	4.4	8.8
Happy Hour	3	3.5	10.5	2.6	7.8	2.3	6.9	2.8	8.4	3.7	11.1
IPA	1	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1	3	3	2.5	2.5	3.6	3.6
<b>Total Score</b>			<b>17.1</b>		<b>15.9</b>		<b>14.3</b>		<b>15.5</b>		<b>23.5</b>