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Bavarian brewery Lang-Bräu closes after 172 years as German beer industry faces historic challenges

Rising costs and shifting drinking habits among younger generations threaten the survival of small breweries across Germany

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The historic Lang-Bräu brewery in northern Bavaria, Germany, is closing its doors after 172 years in business. The family-owned brewery, located less than half an hour from the former East German border, has survived two world wars and the fall of the Iron Curtain. Now, it faces closure due to mounting financial pressures and changing consumer habits among younger generations.

Lang-Bräu's owners made the decision last summer to cease operations. The brewery needed an investment of 12 million euros to modernize its equipment, a sum that proved unattainable for the small company. Richard Hope, director of the family business and now overseeing the shutdown process, explained that breweries can withstand many challenges, but when sales drop and costs keep rising, there is no room left for long-term planning.

Lang-Bräu's situation is not unique. Across Germany, hundreds of breweries are under similar pressure. Inflation and rising energy prices have driven up operating costs. At the same time, beer consumption in Germany has been falling steadily. According to official statistics, per capita beer consumption dropped from 126 liters in 2000 to just 88 liters in 2025. In the first half of this year, beer production fell by 6.3 percent compared to the previous year, reaching its lowest level in decades.

Holger Eichle, president of the German Brewers Association, described the situation as worrying. He noted that even breweries with centuries of history may be forced to close if conditions do not improve.

A major factor behind this crisis is a cultural shift among younger Germans. Generation Z—those born between 1997 and 2012—are drinking less alcohol than previous generations. For many young people today, beer is no longer a daily habit but an occasional or even luxury experience. When they do choose beer, they are more likely to opt for non-alcoholic versions.

Germany now produces more than 800 types of non-alcoholic beer. Production of these beers has nearly doubled over the past decade. However, this growth has not been enough to offset the overall decline in beer consumption. Non-alcoholic beers still account for only about 10 percent of total sales.

The trend away from alcohol is not limited to Germany. Similar patterns are seen across Europe and in the United States. Young people cite health concerns and a desire for lower-calorie options as reasons for drinking less alcohol. Social media influencers and fitness coaches often warn about the negative effects of alcohol on fat burning and muscle growth.

In response to these changes, many German breweries are diversifying their product lines. Some are producing lighter drinks such as Radler—a mix of beer and lemonade—or fruit-flavored sodas. Advertising campaigns now promote non-alcoholic beers on television and at train stations, something that would have been unthinkable in a country famous for Oktoberfest and its centuries-old beer purity law.

Large breweries like Krombacher have invested heavily in equipment that allows them to remove alcohol from beer after fermentation—a process that can cost around one million euros per system. Peter Lem, a spokesperson for Krombacher, said that while traditional alcoholic beers remain important, future growth will come from low- or no-alcohol products.

For small breweries like Lang-Bräu, however, adapting is much harder. They often lack the resources to invest in expensive new technology. Instead, they may stop fermentation early to produce non-alcoholic beer—a method that results in a sweeter taste and does not match traditional flavors. Thomas Becker, a professor at Munich University specializing in brewing science, noted that small producers face tough competition from large brands with greater production capacity and stronger distribution networks.

Between 2023 and 2024 alone, 52 breweries closed in Germany—the largest number in three decades. Many others are struggling to survive as market conditions continue to change rapidly.

Lang-Bräu never attempted to produce non-alcoholic beer before its closure. Richard Hope believes that even if they had tried, it would not have changed their fate given the scale of challenges facing small brewers today.

The closure of Lang-Bräu marks the end of an era for one of Bavaria’s oldest breweries and highlights broader difficulties facing Germany’s brewing industry as it confronts economic pressures and evolving tastes among younger consumers.