

“HIGH” TIDE

THC & CBD Drinks Bubbling Up on the OBX

Cocktail, beer, wine....Delta 9? The drink menu at your favorite watering hole may have a new section: drinks with Delta 9 THC derived from hemp, a plant in the cannabis family. Delta 9 THC is also present in another more known variant, marijuana, which contains a higher percentage and more intoxicating version of the same THC, and it is the element in both which causes feelings of relaxation and euphoria, with more intense effects felt at higher levels of concentration.

Ever since the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, products using THC derived from hemp known as Delta-9 THC, along with some other variants, are allowed to be added to consumables like gummies or drinks at a level set at .3% of the dry weight of a product during its production. This level of concentration is also required within the plants, to ensure the distinction between Delta-9 derived from hemp and that which is made from cannabis, still not legal in NC.

While shops selling these products have largely focused on smoking, vaping or edible versions like gummies and other candies, the beverage distribution industry has only recently become involved with Delta-9 THC products as an alternative to alcohol and addition to offerings at shops, restaurants and bars.

As these major distributors started picking up sales, more infused beverage companies came on the market, each with their own focus and purpose. There are some with very low concentrations for a very mild effect or stronger ones, within the range allowed by the 2018

Farm Bill. The flavors and style vary as much as any beverage aisle's offerings. Teas, seltzers, fruit juices, sodas and coffee are being brewed with the mild hemp extract. With wider distribution, Delta-9 infused beverage companies like Haze Beverage Co. in Raleigh are able to bring their products to a wider market.

We asked Adrian Larrea, Founder of Haze about the transition to a wider audience for Delta-9:

“When the 2018 Federal Farm Bill made hemp-derived THC legal, there was still a huge gap in social acceptance. We knew that if this was going to work—if we were going to truly create a new lane for people looking for an alternative to alcohol—we had to meet them where they already were: bars, restaurants, music venues, and beach towns like the Outer Banks. These are the places people go to live, to unwind, to connect. So, we made sure HAZE fit naturally into those moments. The flavors are clean, easy to drink, and made to be enjoyed anywhere—from a nice dinner to a packed club to a day on the boat. We're proud to be North Carolina made and owned, and even more proud to be redefining what social drinking can look like in our home state.”

Restaurants and bars are starting to add a few options to their menus, as you'll notice around town. Some of the traditional “head shops” and “vape stores” also offer the products, but specialty wine and bottle shops are where there is the most variety and range of options.

For example, offering some of the widest selection in town is the well-known restaurant and market,

~~~~~ By Jes Gray ~~~~~



One of North Carolina's first infused drink brands, Haze Beverage Co. of Raleigh

distributes its product line to several local businesses including Seaside Farm Market, Brew Thru, Waves Market, Outer Banks Olive, Sal's NY Pizza, Morris Farm Market, Roadside Bar & Grill, Corolla Side Bar, Corolla Wine & Cigar, Zillie's Island Pantry and Chip's Wine & Beer. Photo provided by Adrian Larrea.

Offering the widest selection of drinks on the beach, TRiO Restaurant & Market has an inviting yet cosmopolitan vibe. Owner, Kenneth Hyman mentioned on a typical day TRiO is now selling more THC infused drinks than beer. Photo by Dave Uhrin

TRiO. Always staying on top of what people want and finding the best versions of those products, after watching the popularity and acceptance rise, they started stocking the new choice. We asked Kenneth Hyman, managing partner of TRiO about the decision: "The trend for more health-conscious options that we've seen over the past few years seems to stem from the years of COVID isolation. We saw many people make a conscious effort to decrease their alcohol use and look for healthier alternatives. Non-alcoholic beers and drink mixers really took off coming out of COVID. Starting last year, we began to see an uptick in demand for the products. I wasn't comfortable that the public was knowledgeable enough about the use of the products, so we only carried a handful of options. While the recreational use is there, we are finding many customers are looking for ways to relax and even assist with sleep that don't include alcohol. As of the beginning of this year we could see that the use and knowledge of the-infused products was becoming much more mainstream. We now carry more than 50 different labels, mainly of the-infused beverages, but also of gummies. On a typical day we are now selling more of the products than beer, from a retail footprint that is probably 1/10th the size. In addition to mocktails, n/a cocktails and n/a beers, we do now offer the beverages in our restaurant as well."

I also spoke to Jharixa Pugh co-owner and manager at Huanchaco Lounge. She's combined "adaptogenics," green drinks, herbal tinctures, kava, a staple of her Peruvian culture, as well as Delta-9 THC drinks in her bottle shop and hang out spot on the Beach Road in Kill Devil Hills. She says a lot of people are coming in for their first trial of these drinks. "We start them out very minimal." She adds that her mocktails have added beneficial ingredients like Yerba mate, "a more organic and natural caffeine," lion's mane which she says is "great for the brain" and electrolytes which are, "good for a hot day".

A former bartender at Noosa Beach Grill she explains, "it's great to make cocktails with natural ingredients." They have build-your-own 4 or 6 packs as well, so you can try singles of a variety of items like their canned kava, lion's mane, or the popular Odyssey energy drink, as well as the Delta-9 THC infused drinks.

It's not just business for her either. She also sees a change in the community that she likes, "I love what it is doing for the community. Not everyone wants to drink (alcohol) anymore, it's great to have these options and I just want to give these options." She points out that their later hours, midnight most nights, allow for service industry folks another place to unwind after work than a bar. As for this article "I'm excited to get the word out," she exclaimed, so hopefully we have helped.



The rise of these products has somewhat outpaced regulations, though the NC House passed House Bill 328 which focuses on sales at and around schools. The Senate felt this was not “enough” and are working on regulation for those not following the rules described above who they feel aren’t facing consequences enough to stop. This bipartisan group along with State Attorney General Jeff Jackson with the support of Governor Josh Stein’s THC Taskforce have a bill designed to prohibit the sale to minors and other protective and regulatory measures concerning enforcement, inspections and testing.

You can read the bill here: <https://files.constantcontact.com/c25a1294701/2bb5aaa6-aa07-41d1-8d10-8139450f4747.pdf>

In a recent interview about his THC Taskforce with WRAL news anchor Lena Tillett, Governor Josh Stein spoke about the need for regulations to ensure protection for both adults and children from unscrupulous sellers. “What I want to do is make sure that we have a smart, sound policy response to what’s going on in the real world,” Stein said. “We’ve got kids able to buy intoxicating cannabis, THC. We’ve got adults buying it with having no idea what’s in that product.” Ultimately though he supports legal recreational use for adults, “If you are an adult and that’s the choice you want to make, you should be able to make that choice.”

Inevitably, the goal of the bill is to have this product under the regulatory authority of North Carolina’s Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE). State Attorney General Jeff Jackson attended the meeting on the bill and was quoted as saying that they have been in talks with the ALE concerning this potential legislation.

Should this legislation pass, however, these products won’t disappear. You probably won’t even notice a difference as the local bars and distributors are likely following these rules already. So, if you’re interested in trying the new way to chill at the beach or want help relaxing after a hard day without reaching for alcohol, check out these new options from one of the many reputable folks around town. Sellers like Kenneth at Trio and Jharixa at Huanchaco are glad to help you understand the variants and what all those numbers and words on the labels mean, a sea of information I only breached the surface of in this article. 🍷



Huanchaco Lounge, KDH’s new spot on the Beach Road, carries a wide variety of Delta-9 THC and CBD drinks. Additionally, patrons can enjoy “adaptogenics,” green drinks, herbal tinctures, kava, a staple of Peruvian owner Jharixa Pugh. Photo by Dave Uhrin.



Huanchaco Lounge, the atmosphere buzzes with a diverse crowd enjoying a wide range of beverages. Guests are seen sipping on beer flights, fine wines, and creative cocktails, alongside refreshing mocktails infused with THC, kava, and lion’s mane. The lounge offers something for everyone, whether you’re looking for a fun alcoholic drink or a self-care mocktail loaded with collagen, B12, and greens. Each drink is crafted to highlight unique Peruvian flavors, blending traditional ingredients with modern twists. The setting invites conversation and connection, making it a perfect spot for both relaxation and enjoyment in a vibrant social scene. Photo by Dave Uhrin.



Newly opened Huanchaco Lounge co-owner, Jharixa Pugh whipping up a THC infused cocktail. She and husband Seth proudly offer a fresh twist to the Outer Banks dining scene, blending vibrant Peruvian flavors with a laid-back coastal vibe. Photo by Dave Uhrin