

Here a pot, there a pot, everywhere . . .

Tour group establishes a new bar code, says **Willie Simpson.**

A LOCAL tourism operator is offering specialised micro-brewery tours that incorporate a trio of craft beer makers based in the Yarra Valley.

The unlikely named Scruffy Bunch Tours has been leading groups around Yarra Valley wineries for the past two years but recently moved into combined beer and wine tours, plus a regular exclusive microbrewery tour run on Saturdays.

Scruffy Bunch partners Greg Cuthbert and Don Pople have solid backgrounds in the wine industry. Pople is in his final year

of a master of viticulture degree at La Trobe University and Cuthbert (the decidedly scruffier one) comes from a family of wine importers. The pair say they started the beer tours in response to requests from their wine clients.

So far, their beer tours have included a 30th birthday bash, corporate groups and a mixture of international and local tourists, across a wide age range.

The tour kicks off at the Beer Deluxe bar in Federation Square at 9.30am. The first stop is the Three Ravens Brewery in Thornbury.

"They get the full experience of meeting the brewer Marcus Cox and tasting beers in the brewery, including samples from tanks at various stages of fermentation,"

Cuthbert says. "It's all about sniff and taste."

Then it's off to Coldstream Brewery for a similar session with brewer Rod Williams, before a two-course lunch accompanied by two pots of house beer.

"It is time-consuming but we have a lot of fun and I'm all for it," Williams says. "Our brewery is pretty simply laid out and easy to explain and it's great for them to see where the beer is made."

Next on the list are Buckley's Brewery in Healesville; then Hargreaves Hill Brewing

Company in Yarra Glen. Hargreaves Hill recently expanded

its range of beers to include a biscuity Celtic Ale, a potent Abbey Dubbel (7.5%) and a flavoured-pack Extra Special Bitter, which fairly bristles with citrus/minty characters, courtesy of generous dry-hopping.

Scruffy Bunch Tours are \$119 a head and include lunch and about 20 tastings of different craft beers. Inquiries: ScruffyBunch.com.au or contact Greg Cuthbert on 9859 4932.

