



## RUM'S THE WORD

**The key to appreciating rum, says Rebecca Gibb, is to uncover and sample the diverse range of styles produced by the islands of the Caribbean – the true home of the exotic spirit**

The Caribbean's islands might play as one when it comes to international cricket, but you can't lump them together when it comes to the rum world. In the same way that Scotland's whisky varies from the smoky, peaty character of Islay to the lighter styles typical of the Lowlands, the islands produce an astonishing assortment of rums, each with their own signature style reflecting its history and local tastes.

Whether you're a fan of light, aromatic styles or prefer dark, spicy rums, you'll find this Latin American style of rum throughout Central and South America. Cuba's political and social problems have caused other producers to leave the country and the Dominican Republic has welcomed Cuban rum-makers and their light style. The island is now home to some top quality dry, aromatic light rums that have been aged in oak. Look out for Barcelo and Brugal, who are making some distinctive extra-aged light rums.

Made from the sugar cane plant, rum was originally introduced to British sailors as part of their daily ration of alcohol after the capture of Jamaica. To ward off scurvy during long voyages, the spirit was mixed with lime cordial – Mr Rose of Edinburgh invented the Vitamin C-laced syrup especially. Today, hot and sunny climates across the world have seen rum production take off, including the Philippines, India and Australia, however, the spirit's true home remains the Caribbean.

Most rums are made from a black treacle-type substance known as molasses, which are rich in sugar and have to be diluted before they are fermented. The greater the dilution, the lighter the rum will be. Most light rum producers use what's called a column still for distillation

followed by a short period of ageing, which gives a virtually colourless rum with a very delicate flavour: perfect for mojitos and daiquiris. Cuba is best known for its light rums thanks to Don Facundo Bacardi Massó, who won a light rum-making competition in 1862. Bacardi's style set a precedent for Cuban rum producers (although the company has since left the island following Fidel Castro's nationalisation of the rum industry),

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The Latin American rum style is also found in Trinidad, more than 1,770km south of Cuba. The island is known for its lighter flavoured styles with a lick of vanilla and oily texture. The locals are partial to a bit of a kick and the biggest selling rum on the island is a whopping 75.5 per cent alcohol! Thankfully, the rums destined for the export market are less fiery. The major distiller, Angostura, famous for producing bitters, makes a more mellow style suited to the international market and its 1919 brand consistently receives rave reviews. >>>

## AGE MATTERS

Whoever says age doesn't matter is probably not a rum drinker. Many rums will spend time maturing in oak barrels, usually ex-bourbon whiskey barrels. Even colourless white rums tend to spend some time ageing in oak (they are filtered to remove any colour). The hot, humid Caribbean climate means that rums age three times faster than in cooler climates, such as Cognac in France. The spirit extracts tannins, colour and oaky flavours from the barrel at such a rapid rate that a five-year-old rum can have the complexity and depth of flavour as other spirits that have had 15 years of ageing.

If you're looking for rum with more weight and substance, head to Jamaica or Guyana. The pair make a variety of styles but are renowned for their full-bodied and highly aromatic traditional pot still rums. There are six distillers in Jamaica making a range of rums but its most famous brand, Appleton Estate, is a textbook example of the heady style: full of dried fruit and spices. Geographically speaking, Guyana is actually in South America as opposed to the Caribbean, however, it's one of the world's major suppliers of sugar, as well as the islands' main supplier of molasses, and has been making rum since 1650. The Guyanese were once associated with the manufacture of bulk rums, destined for blending with Jamaican rum and a dollop of caramel to make dark styles that attracted a blue-rinse brigade fan base. Today, however, the main rum producer, Demerara Distillers, produces every style of rum imaginable and is gaining a reputation for its sweet, powerfully flavoured variety with aromas of ripe fruit. Keep your eye out for El Dorado, which has been making some underrated yet distinctive rums. Based in Demerara, Guyana, the company has been distilling local sugar cane in small oak barrels for over 300 years. Preserving age-old rum-making traditions, it operates the world's only remaining wooden Coffey still.

Sharing similar characteristics – even experts find it incredibly difficult to tell them apart – St Lucian and Barbadian rums sit between the light Cuban style and the burly Guyanese. You'll find they are elegant compared to other islands' styles with fruity flavours of apricot and orange to banana and mango. The most famous distillery in Barbados is Mount Gay and the estate has been making rum since the 17th century, meanwhile, St Lucia has just one distillery left due to the demise of the sugar industry after the Second World War. It once supplied many Britons with their sugary fix but bananas have now replaced sugar as the cash crop on the island. Molasses have to be shipped in from Guyana but the St Lucian rums remain more Barbadian in style with their subtle, fruity character. A great example is the Chairman's Reserve, made by the not-so imaginatively named St Lucia Distillers. It's a golden rum with lots of characteristic juicy fruit, spice and honey.

There's a host of other rum-producing regions that are worth exploring from Antigua and Haiti, to Puerto Rico and Venezuela. If you want to delve deeper into the world of rum without spending a fortune, head down to The Rum Experience at London's Royal Horticultural Halls on 24 and 25 October (see Drinks News for more information). If you're based outside the capital, bars such as Trio in Leeds, Keko Moku in Manchester and Edinburgh's Blue Blazer run regular rum clubs. Alternatively, seek out your local cocktail bar, draw up a stool and get to know the bartender and the Caribbean. □



## SIX TIPS FOR A RUM OLD TIME



### ELEMENTS 8 PLATINUM, ST LUCIA

Incredibly smooth and round white rum with coconut and vanilla flavours. There's no alcoholic kick on the finish unlike some other white rums. The bottle is very striking and would be great as a gift for a rum lover.

**Harrods, Selfridges, Harvey Nichols; £36**



### APPLETON ESTATE V/X, JAMAICA

Typical of the aromatic Jamaican style, this is fragrant and full-bodied. There's bags of flavour – toffee, oak, cinnamon, dried fruit and apple strudel. A great starting point to explore what Appleton has to offer further up the price scale.

**Specialitydrinks.com, Oddbins, Sainsbury's; £16.99**



### MOUNT GAY EXTRA OLD, BARBADOS

This rum oozes class from the outset – just as any good rum from Barbados should. It has elegant aromas of toffee, raisins and plums with coconut spice on the finish. Medium bodied and smooth.

**Thedrinkshop.com; £28.75**



### EL DORADO CASK AGED 5-YEAR-OLD, GUYANA

A real mouthful packed with raisins, banana, orange and coconut that linger on the palate long after you've swallowed. A warming kick of alcohol on the finish. A great example of the rich, sweet Guyanese style.

**Waitrose; £17.99**



### SANTA TERESA AÑEJO GRAN RESERVA VENEZUELA

Silky smooth this rum is refreshing and light, so savour on its own or with a lighter ginger ale rather than swamping it with a heavy mixer. Great value.

**Waitrose; £14.99**



### LAMB'S SPICED RUM

Better known for its Navy Rum, Lamb's has jazzed things up. A blend of different Caribbean rums, this spiced variety has masses of cinnamon, allspice and kola nuts – adding zest to a ginger beer, coke or traditional lemonade.

**Booths; £14.99, Drinkshop.com; £16.95**