

WHISKY

For centuries, the Gaelic-speaking clans produced whisky, in Gaelic, 'uisge beatha' 'water of life', long before it became an internationally renowned drink. Now, whisky is one of the most important and characteristic Scottish exports. But to this day, there is still an element of mystery about the making of malt whisky from the simple ingredients of barley, water, yeast and, sometimes, peat smoke.

Whisky – malt and grain

There are two main types of whisky – malt and grain. Malt whisky, which connoisseurs claim has a more sophisticated flavour and bouquet is made with malted barley. Grain whisky also contains malted barley, with unmalted barley and maize. Both types are used in the whisky blending process. Many of today's leading brands both in Scotland and overseas are blended whiskies made with many different individual distillations – with de-luxe blends containing a higher proportion of malt whiskies. Whisky enthusiasts prefer to taste and familiarise themselves with Scotland's prestigious range of 'single malts' which are unblended distillations from individual distilleries.

Slàinte, or Cheers! Your good health . . .

Slàinte means health in Gaelic. Pronounced 'slàntiu' (with the accent in the first syllable and a soft sound at the end), you will hear even non-Gaelic speaking Scots quite often use it as a toast. You might even hear a Gael say 'air do shlàinte' – 'to your good health'. (If so, you can be sure you are in good company.)

Whisky etiquette

In Scotland, visitors will often find good-natured discussion on the 'best' way to drink whisky, that is, with or without water, or with various mixers. Naturally, there is no absolutely correct way – though many blenders and others within the trade would suggest that the addition of a little water, preferably from a Scottish spring, helps bring out the complex flavour. Flavoured mixers are not altogether approved of in some conservative whisky drinking circles! In fact, if your host offers you a malt whisky (recognisable by a single distillery name, e.g. Glenfiddich, Highland Park, Lagavulin, etc.), then it may be tactful to drink it with nothing other than water! However, there is no law to stop you drinking whisky with any flavour you like! A 'dram' or a 'nip' both mean a 'one-person portion' of whisky. Finally, the Scots themselves rarely call whisky 'Scotch', a name almost exclusively used by outsiders.

Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail

Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail is a signposted trail round some of the finest malt whisky distilleries along the beautiful valley of the River Spey, where more than half the distilleries in Scotland can be found. Eight distilleries and a cooperage are linked together in an easy to follow route, with the birch and pinewoods, hill, moor and rushing river as a beautiful backdrop.

The Trail takes in Benromach Distillery, Forres, the smallest working distillery in the Speyside area; Dallas Dhu, a preserved 'time capsule' of a Victorian Distillery also near Forres; Cardhu Distillery at Knockando, the only malt distillery pioneered by a woman; The Glenfiddich Distillery, Dufftown, still in the hands of its founding family; Glen Grant Distillery and Garden, Rothes; The Glenlivet Distillery, in its wild setting moorland setting; Glen Moray Distillery, Elgin, founded in 1807; Strathisla Distillery in Keith, the oldest working distillery in the Highlands; also the Speyside Cooperage in Craigellachie, where you can see the ancient craft of the cooper (barrel-maker). www.maltwhiskytrail.com

What you'll experience on a malt whisky distillery visit

There are at least 40 malt distilleries in Scotland which welcome visitors. Some open by appointment only offer tours. However, many others welcome visitors and are open all year, with dedicated visitor facilities such as a visitor centre showing an audio-visual presentation of the story and heritage of the particular single malt made there. Sometimes there is a museum or exhibition, which also places the whisky in its local context. Usually, there are tours of the whisky-making process and generally a sample (a 'dram') at the end of it. Also, a shop and café are quite usual. Sometimes the presentations are in other languages and you may also find a guide who speaks your language. Opening hours vary but many distilleries which welcome visitors do so practically all year round. In short, a distillery visit usually guarantees a rewarding, entertaining and a learning experience, plus refreshments and a range of quality goods for sale on site.

The Whisky Coast

Whisky connoisseurs will tell you that you can taste the salt tang of the western seaboard if you try the malt whiskies from this part of Scotland. Certainly, you'll find malt whiskies of very distinctive character. As from March 2007, the sixteen distilleries of the west coast come together under the banner of The Whisky Coast and offer the ultimate coastal whisky tour. From Islay to Campbeltown, and from Mull to the Isle of Skye, a west coast whisky trail is being created, which will take visitors on a journey along some of the most wild and beautiful coastal scenery to be found anywhere in the world.

www.whiskycoast.co.uk

Islay – the malt whisky island

Visit Islay and it feels like a working island – distilling is an important activity here. While some say distilleries in the north of the island, such as Bunnahabhain, Bowmore, Caol Ila and Bruichladdich produce malt whiskies of well-balanced, characterful and light tastes, everyone agrees that distilleries at the other end of the island – for example, Lagavulin, Ardbeg and Laphroaig – produce the most distinctively flavoured whiskies in Scotland. These are sometimes called 'phenolic' but are usually recognised by their salty, seaweedy almost medicinal tang.

Whisky Festivals

If you are keen to discover more about Scotland's malt whiskies, then join in the celebrations at the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival – a great opportunity to see inside distilleries not usually open to the public and meet with the experts who put together all the subtle flavours of the Speyside malts. There are master-classes, tours and unique tastings, as well as fine food experiences and demonstrations, plus world class concerts and even guided walks and tours through the landscapes of Speyside.

www.spiritofspeyside.com

You can also take part in the Highland Whisky Festival. Four Highland distilleries – Balblair, Dalmore, Glenmorangie, Glen Ord – celebrate the local heritage of distilling. Exclusive events for the weekend include whisky master-classes, specialist tours and a headline whisky dinner.

www.highlandwhiskyfestival.info

Whisky Ambassadors

A select network of 'Whisky Embassies' operates in Scotland to promote the appreciation and understanding of malt whiskies. The group mainly comprises hotels with staff educated and knowledgeable on the subject of whisky and who can offer an environment favourable to whisky appreciation.

In addition to having suitably trained staff, 'Embassies' are encouraged to offer additional experiences for whisky appreciation such as whisky evenings, nosings and tastings. www.scotlandwhisky.com

DISTILLERIES OPEN TO VISITORS

South of Scotland

Bladnoch Distillery
www.bladnoch.co.uk
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Isle of Arran Distillery
www.arranwhisky.com
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Edinburgh and Lothians

Glenkinchie Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre
www.scotch-whisky-experience.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley

Auchentoshan Distillery
www.auchentoshan.com
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

West Highlands and Islands, Loch Lomond, Stirling and Trossachs

Ardbeg Distillery Visitor Centre
www.ardbeg.com
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glengoyne Distillery
www.glengoyne.com

Bowmore Distillery
www.bowmore.com
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Isle of Jura Distillery
www.isleofjura.com

Bruichladdich Distillery
www.bruichladdich.com

Lagavulin Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 Award Pending

Bunnahabhain Distillery
www.bunnahabhain.com
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Laphroaig Distillery
www.laphroaig.com

Caol Ila Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 Award Pending

Oban Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Tobermory Distillery
www.burnstewartdistillers.com

Perthshire, Angus and Dundee and the Kingdom of Fife

Blair Athol Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

The Famous Grouse Experience
www.thefamousgrouse.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Dewars World of Whisky
www.dewarswow.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Tullibardine Distillery
www.tullibardine.com
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Edradour Distillery
www.edradour.co.uk
 ★★★ Visitor Attraction

Aberdeen and Grampian

The Aberdeen and Grampian region is home to Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail. Take time out in Malt Whisky Country and discover the best that Scotland has to offer. Visit the eight distilleries and other attractions on the only malt whisky trail in the world.
www.maltwhiskytrail.com

Aberlour Distillery
www.aberlour.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Benromach Distillery &
 Malt Whisky Centre
www.benromach.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Cardhu Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Cragganmore Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 Award Pending

Dallas Dhu Historic Distillery
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Fettercairn Distillery
www.whyteandmackay.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glen Garioch Distillery
www.glengarioch.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glen Grant Distillery
www.chivas.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glen Moray Distillery
www.glenmoray.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glendronach Distillery
www.theglendronach.com

Glenfarcles Distillery
www.glenfarcles.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glenfiddich Distillery
www.glenfiddich.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glenlivet Distillery
www.theglenlivet.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Macallan Distillery
www.themacallan.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Royal Lochnagar Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Strathisla Distillery
www.chivas.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

The Highlands of Scotland

Ben Nevis Distillery
www.bennevisdistillery.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Clynelish Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Dalmore Distillery
www.thedalmore.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Dalwhinnie Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glen Ord Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Glenmorangie Distillery
www.glenmorangie.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Pulteney Distillery
www.oldpulteney.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Talisker Distillery
www.discovering-distilleries.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Tomatin Distillery
www.tomatin.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

The Outer Islands

Highland Park Distillery
www.highlandpark.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Whisky tours of Scotland:

Check out the following links for companies who offer escorted tours with a Scotch whisky theme:

www.whisky-tours.com

www.scotlandwhisky.com/Whisky_tours

www.scotlinetours.co.uk/html/whisky.html

www.rabbies.com/flavours_of_scotland.asp

★★★★★ Tour

www.scotlandtourguide.co.uk/whiskytours.asp

Useful websites for more whisky information:

www.scotlandwhisky.com

www.scotch-whisky.org.uk

www.spiritofspeyside.com

www.smws.com

www.whiskycoast.co.uk

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Tel: 0845 22 55 121 or +44 (0)1506 832 121 (outside UK)
Email: info@visitscotland.com

www.visitscotland.com

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