



The Backbiter and Lady in Ban poitin cocktails at Zozimus in Dublin.

# LOCAL SPIRITS



Nothing brings strangers together quite like clinking glasses over toasts to good health. So, to that end, here are 12 of the world's most compelling liquors and the best bars for drinking them.

BY LANE LEE

In a new city, all by yourself? One sure way to find company fast: Sit at a bar, buy the person next to you a drink, raise a glass and toast! Clinking glasses, be it with someone you just met or a family member, is one of the most unifying rituals on the planet. And, luckily, it's practiced in nearly every culture around the world—except in Hungary, where you can toast, but clinking beer glasses is frowned upon.

*Prost. L'Chaim. Santé. Ganbei. Na Zdraví.* No matter the literal meaning, the translation is the

same: Goodwill to all within earshot.

And just as places have their unique toasts, they also have signature drinks. Experiencing a culture through food and drink is—let's face it—deliciously fun. So it's no surprise that drink-driven vacations (such as tasting your way through Mexico's tequila trail or Canada's Icewine region) are a top travel trend of 2018. To pique your thirst, we've created a tippling travel guide—from what to order to the best watering holes—in 15 countries. Sharpen those salutary skills and get ready to clink away.

# Cachaça

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL



Often mislabeled as Brazilian rum, cachaça is not rum at all—and any zealous fan will be quick to correct this. Most rum, save for agricole rhum, is made from molasses, but cachaça must be, by law, distilled from fresh sugarcane juice. And the taste is vastly different. Clear, unaged cachaça is grassy, fresh and elegant. Aged cachaça has a range of flavors, depending on what type of wood barrel it was aged in.

Unlike most other aged spirits that rest in oak, Brazil has more than 30 types of trees that barrels can be made from, such as jequitibá, amburana and balm, allowing endless expressions for the spirit. And there are many producers in the country—roughly 5,000 documented and 40,000 total. It's no wonder cachaça is Brazil's official national spirit! **HOW TO DRINK IT:** On the global stage, cachaça is most associated with the caipirinha cocktail of muddled lime, sugar and soda water. However, locals prefer *batidas* (ba-CHEE-da)—the word for shaken in Portuguese and also an idiom for a car accident. Basically a boozy smoothie, the drink's simplicity—a blend of fresh fruit, cachaça and ice—translates to sublime.

"Beyond the classic caipirinha or batida, a favorite way to consume cachaça in Brazil is the *tabelinha*. This refers to the interplay between a neat pour of cachaça and beer—the two flavors playing against each other as you pass between sips of the one then the other," says Pete Neven-glosky, cofounder of Avua cachaça, a premium artisanal brand available in the US.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Tim-tim*

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** To take part of this local beer + cachaça tradition in Rio Janeiro, Neven-glosky recommends **Galeto Sats**. While you're there, don't miss the *sobrecoca na cachaça*, a roasted chicken leg in a cachaça sauce. For more cachaça schooling, stop by Academia de cachaça located in the buzzy neighborhood of Leblon—there's over 100 different cachaças, a dizzying array of cocktails and a cool gift shop filled with liquid souvenirs for friends.



Galeto Sats

# PISCO

LIMA, Peru



Although relatively unknown to the rest of the world, Peru's national spirit is the oldest distillate in the Americas. Thanks to 16th-century Spanish missionary monks cultivating grapes for communion wine, locals began crafting a clear, brandy-like liquor. It was eventually named Pisco after the Peruvian port city from which it hailed. And like tequila or Champagne, Pisco is highly regulated. It must be made from 100 percent fermented grapes and, unlike Chilean pisco, no other elements—not even water—can be added.

If you're a gin or vodka drinker, you'll enjoy Pisco—it's mellow on the palate with a complex bouquet of aromas. Depending on what grape or blend it's distilled from, pisco behaves much like wine, with distinct flavor profiles. Do a side-by-side tasting with different Pisco varieties and brands to fully appreciate the brilliant nuances.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** As mai tais are synonymous with Hawaii, Pisco sours are Peru's preferred adult beverage. A frothy concoction of lime juice, simple syrup, egg whites, bitters and Peruvian Pisco, the drink was invented in the early 20s by American barkeep Victor Vaughn Morris at Morris' Bar in Lima.

Don't be shy about trying exotic fruit, vegetable and root-infused versions, as well, such as the Aguaymanto (goldenberry) sour or Chicha (purple corn) sour. Many of Lima's most popular bars and restaurants, like Huarinas Bar, ámaZ or Cala, offer many different Pisco sour flavors. If someone suggests a "cathedral" Pisco sour, be warned. Cathedral refers to a double-sized Pisco sour. One may have you waving a white flag for the rest of the evening.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Salud!*

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** For a deep dive into the spirit's history, head to the Museo del Pisco bar, with locales in Lima's historic district, Cusco and Arequipa. "Come in curious and thirsty and leave satiated, (slightly) inebriated but educated. The idea is try several pure Piscos, or hop behind the bar and make your own Pisco Sour," says author of *Pisco Patrimonio* and Museo del Pisco founder, Adam L. Weintraub.



# SOJU

SEOUL, South Korea

*Sul*. If you enjoying kicking back a few and sharing some laughs, this may be your new favorite word. *Sul* means alcohol. But wait, that's not all. *Sul* also refers to an alcoholic beverage that's made with artistry, honors the culture and is designed to be shared with friends. And Korea's soju is a good example of the full meaning of the word.

Soju (SO-jew), Korea's most well known spirit, is a clear, low-alcohol drink that was traditionally distilled from rice. The Korean War changed all that when the government banned rice distillation due to shortages until the 1990s. Now, soju is also made from sweet potatoes, wheat or tapioca.

Many of Korea's bestselling brands still use alternative starches. Typically served in a small shot glass, soju is most commonly consumed

with food during dinner.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** When you raise your glass, be sure to do so with your right hand. And be forewarned: When you drain your glass of soju, it cues your host to fill it right back up. If you don't want more to drink, don't refuse the refill, simply don't empty your glass!

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Geonbae!* (pronounced gun bae)

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** Located on the 11th floor of the JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul, The Griffin pairs epic city views with soju-based cocktails for a dazzling introduction to Korean rice wine. For a truly only-in-Seoul encounter, look for makeshift tents north of the city center in the Jongno district. Here they serve Korean street food and shots of soju. But you'll likely have to stand to enjoy—it's no frills.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Dining at Galeto Bar; DDM Moonlight cocktail at The Griffin; caipirinha drink at Galeto Bar; Doña Lucha at Museo del Pisco





The drinks are:  
 1 (the small glass)- Negroni del Marinaio (Sailor's Negroni): Campari, Vermouth del Professore, Old Sailor Coffee, Mezcal Bruxo no.1  
 2 (the tall one)- Eau de Saffron: Noilly Prat, Saffron, Umeshu, Pimm's, Maker's Mark, Gum Arabic



## RED BITTER LIQUERS

MILAN, Italy

As the sun sets on the Naviglio Grande neighborhood, you're relaxing at a quaint, canalside *caffè* with friends. A boisterous "Cin cin!" or "Salute!" is sounded. Clinking wine glasses—filled with ruby-colored drinks—ensues. This scene — especially in Northern Italy cities, such as Turin, Milan and Venice — unfolds religiously every day. And it usually stars one of Italy's bitter aperitivo liqueurs, like Campari or Aperol.

"From about 4 to 7 p.m., café bars—especially in the north—have the Italian equivalent of happy hour called *aperitivo* serving *cicchetti* such as olives, cheeses and prosciutto to go along with your spritz cocktail or sparkling wine," says Elisabetta Cressi, co-founder of Vino Direct, an Italian wine importer.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** Just as pasta is integral to the *secondi* of an Italian meal,

so too is the spritz to Italy's *aperitivo* hour. A low-alcohol drink of prosecco, red bitter liqueur and soda, the spritz is a delicious way to rev up the appetite before dinner. Opt for Aperol if you like sweeter drinks and Campari if you prefer bolder, bitter flavors. Other excellent options that feature aperitivo bitters include: Negroni Sbagliato, a Milano speciality that swaps out gin for prosecco, or the Americano, equal parts of sweet vermouth and Campari with a splash of soda.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** "Cin cin!" or "Salute!"

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** Situated on a canal in the Navigli Distric, Mag Café boasts old-world charm and talented mixologists. Or celebrate that fact that you're in Italy's fashion capital and go to Il Bar in the Bulgari Hotel Milano—a chic spot to ace the art of aperitivo among the well-heeled.

## MEZCAL/MESCAL

MEXICO CITY, Mexico

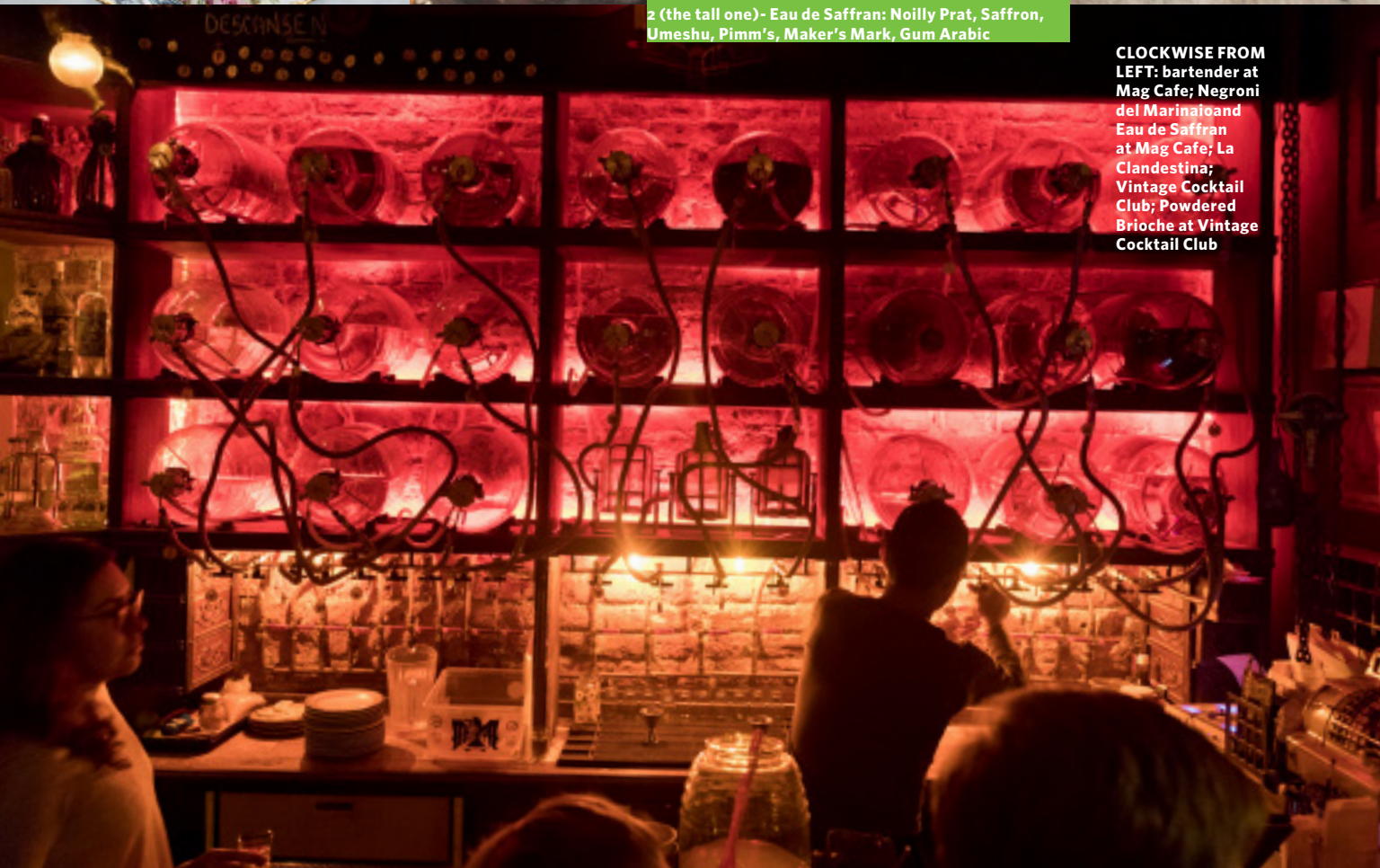


Once viewed as Mexico's "it'll-make-you-go-blind" booze, mezcal—tequila's smoky older cousin—is quickly snatching the lizmelight as the favorite agave spirit in bars across the globe. The process of making artisanal mezcal remains much as it has for centuries. Most *palenques* (mezcal distilleries) are family-owned and -operated using old-fashioned methods like donkey-powered mechanisms to crush the agave. Another distinctive trait is it can be made from more than 30 agave varieties. Tequila can only be made from one, the blue agave.

"The mezcal DO [where mezcal can legally be made] is about seven times the size of Scotland. Combine that with all with the different climates and types of agave we get to use and it's by far the most complex spirit in the world," says Danny Mena, cofounder of Mezcales de Leyenda, a premium brand of mezcal.

The thirst for this diversity is unstoppable. In Mexico City, there were almost zero mezcalerias, or mezcal bars, 15 years ago. Now there are roughly 50, according to Mena, with high-end restaurants offering mezcal by the glass. **HOW TO DRINK IT:** Traditionally, it's served in rustic clay cups, called *copitas*, or votive candle glasses called *vaso veladora*. The drinks are served with orange slices sprinkled with sea salt infused with gusano (larvae that lives off the agave plant) and dried chili peppers. Purists, however, believe quality mezcal should be served neat in stemmed glasses.

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** To experience a few high-end mezcalerias, head to the boho-chic neighborhood of Condesa. La Clandestina, with 23 different types of mezcal, and La Botica, the city's first mezcal bar, are both worth exploring.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: bartender at Mag Cafe; Negroni del Marinaio and Eau de Saffron at Mag Cafe; La Clandestina; Vintage Cocktail Club; Powdered Brioche at Vintage Cocktail Club

## Poitín

Dublin, IRELAND



"Like drinking liquid dynamite," is how John O'Donohue, the notable Irish poet, once described poitín (pronounced POT-cheen). And it's no surprise. The illicit substance, banned in Ireland from 1661 to 1997, usually clocked in at a nose hair-singeing 40 to 90 percent alcohol. Even the name spells disaster: *poit* means hangover! Despite the restrictions and social shunning, homebrewers continued to make it from whatever crop was plentiful, such as crab apples or potatoes. For centuries, the "devil's spittle" was relegated to the shadows and deemed criminal... until now.

Dave Mulligan, one of the pioneers of the renaissance and founder of the craft brand Bán Poitín, explains why its luck has finally changed: "With the category being championed by smaller producers, many of whom are growing their own barley for production, you get a chance to taste the real Ireland. Unadulterated pure poitín is something you won't find anywhere else in the world, something truly Irish and unique to this little island."

So, what is poitín today? According to EU law protecting its Irish heritage, poitín is a clear, non-aged spirit produced in Ireland that is traditionally brewed, fermented and distilled from potatoes, sugar beet molasses, cereals, grain or whey. And, sticking to its knock-your-socks-clean-off reputation, it must be at least 40 percent alcohol.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** If you ask for poitín in most pubs, don't be surprised if you're met with "that's illegal." But that's part of the fun—it still has that "smoking in the boys room" mystique. "It's in the dimly lit cocktails bars that you'll find enthusiastic bartenders sharing the secrets of our once outlawed spirit," Mulligan says. And when in Ireland, do as Irish do: Order up a *bán* ("white" in gaelic) and black. It's a shot of the Irish moonshine with a shot of the country's most famous stout.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Sláinte!* (slawn-cha)  
**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** According to the Mulligan, the finest Poitín cocktails are served up at Vintage Cocktail Club—Dublin's best speakeasy—by legendary bartender Gareth Lambe.



Vintage Cocktail Club

For the largest poitín selection, go to Zozimus and ask for Pat Thomas—he'll talk you through the different styles.

# Icewine

TORONTO, Canada



It's icewine. Not ice wine. Or icewine. Iced wine is the official name of Canada's prestigious dessert wine. Iced wine is produced in various parts of Canada, like British Columbia's Okanagan Valley wine region, but a majority comes from Canada's Heartland Province in a town called Niagara-on-the-Lake. With vineyards situated near Lake Ontario, the freezes in the winter are ideal for producing those delicious grapes.

"In order to be legally termed icewine, grapes must be left to freeze naturally on the vine and cannot be picked until at least -8 C (17.6 F), though some winemakers prefer to wait until temperatures fall to -10 C (14 F)," explains Erin Henderson, founder of Drink Toronto tour company. Sympathy goes out to the harvesters—it's typically done in the dead of night to ensure the grapes stay frozen! Most typical grapes used are Vidal Blanc, Riesling and Cabernet Franc. Fun fact: It takes 3,750 grapes to make one bottle (375ml).

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** Traditionally, it's served in a small glass or white wine glass and served extremely cold. "Iced wine is sweet, so try it last, as the flavors really linger on the palate," says Lorie O'Sullivan, sommelier at Ritz Carlton, Toronto. For a post-dinner experience, try it with pungent cheeses, like Gorgonzola or Parmesan. Iced wine also dances well with desserts that are not as sweet as the wine, like dark chocolate. "Iced wine is great in a cocktail, too, like an iced wine martini," says Jascha Baraness, beverage director at 360 The Restaurant at CN Tower.

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** Go high with a glass at the CN Tower, home to the Guinness World Record for the highest wine cellar (1,151 ft). Not only are the 360-degree cityscape views stunning, the Canadian Iced wine selection is extensive.

If you're up for a road trip, hire a driver or hop on a day tour with an outfitter like The Wine Sisters to Niagara-on-the-Lake, roughly an hour-and-a-half from Toronto with more than 30 wineries to visit. Don't miss a tasting at 10Below Peller Iced wine Lounge, made completely out of ice and open year-round, at Peller Estates. Every January, Ontario's Niagara Iced wine Festival turns the town into a sculpted ice tasting village.



10Below



# OUZO (licorice liquor)

ATHENS, Greece

"Invented in the 14th century by monks on Mount Athos, ouzo is the quintessential Greek experience," says Akis Schinas, of Sani & Ikos Resorts. Indeed, the grape-based spirit infused with anise is beloved in Greece. However, you'd be hard-pressed to find a Grecian nursing a glass of the black licorice-flavored aperitif alone and without food. It's meant to be paired with small bites and, more importantly, with company! These meals can last for hours as friends and family eat, drink, relax, laugh, talk and repeat the process again and again.

"There is a whole subset of restaurants called ouzeries dedicated to this," says Christina Xenos, chef and co-author of the book *Opa! The Healthy Greek Cookbook*. "When you grab a seat at a traditional ouzeri, you order ouzo and mezethes—appetizers like feta cheese and olives, small meatballs, phyllo pies filled with spinach and cheese, and stuffed grape leaves—to go with it. My favorite part about traveling through Greece, especially in the summer, is that there's always a second glass at the table dedicated to ouzo, so you just have to go with the flow and indulge."

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** "Taking a shot or drinking it neat is not advised. Ouzo should always be diluted with ice, and if you like, a splash of water, too. The water and ice allow the anise flavors to bloom and really creates a refreshing drink," advises Johnny Livanos, bar program director at the Greek-inspired Mediterranean restaurant Ousia in New York City. After adding the water or ice, the clear liquor magically turns cloudy opaque.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Yamas!* It's short for *Stin Yeia Mas* (to our health).

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** With walls that are lined with giant wooden barrels and colorful bottles, Brettos Bar, Athens' oldest bar and distillery, is a lively spot to try ouzo—even ouzo cocktails—and nibble on delicious mezzes.

# COGNAC

PARIS, France



As French writer Victor Hugo once described it, Cognac, with its rich amber tones and gorgeous spicy-sweet aromas, is truly the "nectar of the gods." As one of Napoleon's favorite drinks, Cognac was synonymous with prestige and power, much like it does for premium spirit collectors.

For a brandy to legally be called Cognac, it must be double distilled from white grapes grown in the Cognac region and aged at least two years in French oak barrels. The amount of time spent aging is what determines its labeling, which looks like secret code begging to be deciphered, such as X.O. (extra old) or V.S.O.P. (very superior old pale). Young Cognacs tend to give off more fruit. The more it ages, you'll pick up floral notes and then spicy elements.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** Cognac is traditionally—and stereotypically—enjoyed in a tulip glass or snifter served neat and paired with a cigar. However, Cognac, over the past 20 years or so, has become hip. Bartenders, in France and abroad, are dabbling with it in all kinds of drinks, from champagne cocktails to boozy adult milkshakes. "The cocktail culture boom has reached France, and today in Paris people are enjoying Cognac in cocktails like they did in Cognac's golden age of the 1800s," says Alexandre Gabriel, founder and master blender of Maison Ferrand, one of France's oldest winegrowing families.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Santé* (formal) or *Cin cin* (chin-chin, and less formal). **WHERE TO DRINK IT:** To sample an expertly made Cognac-based cocktail, go to Le Syndicat, one of Paris' best (and one of the few) craft cocktail bars that prides itself on a large selection of French spirits.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Iced wine at the CN Tower; Dining at CN Tower; Le Syndicat



# BAIJIU

Beijing, CHINA

Helloooo, baijiu—the world's best-selling spirit you've never heard of. Most are made from sorghum and fermented underground for several months in clay jars, baijiu accounts for more than a third of the world's total spirit consumption.

Baijiu is an acquired taste, to put it lightly. It smells like a strong Italian cheese, or an overripe piece of fruit. It is very distinct, which may be why baijiu is categorized by aroma: rice, light, strong and sauce. Rice being mellowist and sauce being most complex.

However, to taste it is to experience a spirit so unique that it feels otherworldly. "If one is timid about spirits, drink it in small sips to get to know it before engaging in the ceremonial shots," advises Yuan Liu, vice president at CNS Imports, an importer of Chinese spirits to the U.S. It's sound

advice as China's signature spirit is potent—from 20 to 70 percent alcohol.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** Speaking of shots, baijiu is consumed via a series of toasts, and usually in one gulp, from tiny glasses that hold roughly ½ ounce. No matter the setting, rest assured that any meal will be interrupted more than a few times with a clink of the glasses and a salutary toast. And social etiquette dictates that the whoever is younger or lower on the social hierarchy clinks their glass a little lower than whoever is toasting.

**HOW TO SAY "CHEERS":** *Ganbei!* (gan-bey)

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** Opened in late 2014, Capital Spirits is the world's first cocktail bar dedicated to baijiu. Interesting enough, it's run by American expats.

# Bourbon

Louisville, KENTUCKY



"If I cannot drink bourbon and smoke cigars in heaven, than I shall not go," quipped Mark Twain. Without that sweet,

amber-colored liquid that tastes of caramel, vanilla, spice and hints of woody smoke, the afterlife would be pretty grim. And most living in bourbon country, just outside Louisville, Kentucky, would agree.

If bourbon can be distilled anywhere in the U.S. by law, how did the Bluegrass state become the birthplace of American whiskey with roughly 36 bourbon distilleries?

Three reasons: "Corn grew so well in Kentucky, it was known as the corn cracker state! Due to plenty of corn and limestone-rich water, early settlers like the Scotch-Irish, began distilling it. And with Louisville being located on a river, it was easy to ship out bourbon to other U.S. cities," explains Fred Minnick, spirits expert and author of, *Bourbon: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of an American Whiskey*.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** There are no rules. Experts recommend trying it neat, perhaps with a few drops of water in it to release the flavors. Too strong to start? Order up a classic local bourbon cocktail, like a Mint Julep—the Kentucky Derby's official tipple of mint, syrup and bourbon—or a Louisville Cooler of orange juice, lime juice, powdered sugar and bourbon.

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** "If you want to learn about bourbon, with flights and accessible bartenders, go to Bourbons Bistro. If you want a scene that offers a good time and a good bourbon, go to The Silver Dollar," recommends Minnick, also a Louisville local. Both bars have extensive bourbon collections. If you have a whole day, hop on tour, like Mint Julep Tours, to explore the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. The distilleries are roughly an hour and change from Louisville, so after a few tastings, you'll be glad



Silver Dollar

# BRENNIVIN

REYKAVIK, Iceland



Black death. That's what locals affectionately call their signature drink, partly because the Icelandic slang word for drunk means *dead*.

But not to worry. Although brennivín is potent, it won't kill you. Considered a typical Nordic aquavit (liquor made from potato mash and infused with caraway seeds)—brennivín is distilled from potato mash and flavored with cumin, angelica, caraway seeds and other herbs. Contrary to its name—translated “burning wine”—it is pleasantly smooth. If you enjoy other licorice-flavored spirits, you'll probably appreciate it.

A country with an intricate drink culture, it is not. In fact, Iceland and alcohol have had a strained relationship for nearly a century. Like the States, the country declared Prohibition around the same time in 1915, banning brennivín for nearly 20 years. Even beer was illegal until 1989! As a result, the drink of choice during a night out is beer. However, brennivín is especially popular during Thorrablot, a midwinter festival.

**HOW TO SAY CHEERS:** *Skál!*

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** Typically, it's served ice cold and neat in a shot glass. In Reykjavik's trendy bars and upscale restaurants, you can try it in cocktails or sample other brennivín producers. Ask the bartender if they carry any hand-crafted, small-batch brennivín, like Söl and Hvönn or Viti.

**WHERE TO DRINK IT:** “Head over to Apotek for a cocktail from head bartender Jónas Heiðarr Guðnason. The ‘Vindas’ made with Icelandic carrots and brennivín is a favorite,” says Joe Spiegel, a U.S. importer of brennivín.



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