



# The Telegraph

calcutta, india



Today's Edition

| Saturday, March 27, 2010 |

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## Tequila sunrise

### GOOD SPIRITS

It's tequila time in India as premium brands make an entry and bartenders experiment with it like never before, says **Anindita Mitra**



Slam a shot, bite through the lemon, barely feel the hit before you go slamming down another one — that's pretty much been the unpretty picture associated with tequila. Yes, it makes you feel cool and go spinning out of control faster than a top on crack (and spend the next morning cursing colourfully). But put all that behind you. The shooting routine is best left to the newbies. It's time to grow up, *mi compadres*.

From mature, sipping tequilas that sit on the palate just like single malts to flavoured tequilas, long cocktails (or even tequila creams) — there's a whole lot of catching up to do. And it seems that the Indian sipperati is hell-bent on doing just that. Fast. And keeping pace with them are clubs, pubs and bartenders, who are experimenting big time with the liquor.

As tequila catches the fancy of tipplers, it's just a matter of time, says mixologist Shatbhi Basu, that premium tequilas take off too. As Amrit Kiran Singh, vice president & director, Asia Pacific, Brown-Forman Worldwide, says: "Tequila is the best-kept secret of the elite."

With brands like Patrón Porfidio, Corralejo or José Cuervo coming to India, we're beginning to acquire a taste for the teqs. And soon to make an entry will be brands like Herradura and the Mexican top-seller, El Jimador.

So, do away with the shot glasses (ok, maybe not entirely, for we all need our moments of madness) and learn to play the way big boys and girls do. It's tequila time, folks!

### Know yer' stuff



Infused tequila shooters top popularity charts at Underground

First things first: you need to know the finer distinctions before you earn your drinking rights. Tequila, for the uninitiated, is made from agave sugar that comes from the sap of blue agave plant grown in the Tequila region of Mexico. And by Mexican law, only the state of Jalisco (where Tequila city is located) and a handful of Mexican states can produce tequila.

There are two broad categories — pure agaves, where the tequila is made out of 100 per cent agave sugar and mixtos, which have a minimum 51 per cent agave sugar content.

Then, there's the fine line between un-aged and aged ones. While the gold tequilas and silver (blanco or plata) which form a great base for cocktails are the un-aged ones, reposado, añejo and now extra añejo, are the ones that are aged, usually in oak barrels. A perfectly aged tequila is often compared to a single malt or the French cognac and we, on the eastern shores, are soon to learn why.

A reposado (or rested tequila) is aged in wooden barrels for up to 11 months, an añejo is aged for above a year and extra añejo, a category created as late as 2006, is aged for above three years. These are extremely smooth and complex flavours.

Basu points out: "The flavours vary even among the agaves — according to the categories. And you need to educate the palate before you really get the subtle

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differences." Both Basu and Singh emphasise that premium tequilas offer a sipping experience that should not be missed.

Chill the spirit, add a bit of ice and sip like you would sip single malt. For a good añejo or extra añejo, Basu's prescription is: "One ice cube, a splash of water and the tequila."

### Brand magic



Shisha Reincarnated offers cool tequila cocktails and flavoured chasers  
Pix: Rashbehari Das

With India having begun its dalliance with tequilas, the brands are testing waters and keeping a sharp eye out on the prices. Singh says: "White spirits command a small percentage of the market in India. And the entire market share of tequila is about 30,000 cases a year. With a 160 per cent excise duty, the cheapest bottle of tequila costs around Rs 1,000."

So, what's doing the rounds then? Brown-Forman has Pepe Lopez (priced at around Rs 1,200), and has plans to import El Jimador and Herradura by end-2010. El Jimador is one of the fastest-selling and most popular tequilas in Mexico. Herradura, produced since 1870, is considered to be one of the finest. It offers a range of

all-natural 100 per cent blue agave tequilas, prepared the traditional way.

Viveka Rawal, director, S.V. Distributors, says that she is bringing in variants of Corralejo and Agavita. Agavita Blanco and Gold are priced between Rs 1,500 and Rs 1,700 for 700ml bottles while a 750 ml bottle of Corralejo Blanco starts at Rs 5,205 and goes up to Rs 7,321 for Corralejo Añejo.

Harish Moolchandani, managing director — India & sub-continent, Beam Global Spirits & Wine, that's already getting Sauza Gold and Sauza Blanco (under Rs 2,000 for a 750 ml bottle) to India, says: "We plan to bring in the premium tequilas in the second half of 2010, like Hornitos and/ or Tres Generaciones."

Abimalek M. David, vice president - international trade, Sultania Trade, says his company is importing big blended tequila (or mixto) brands like El Caballo Estrella (Rs 1,600 for a one-litre bottle), Sauza, José Cuervo (under Rs 2,000), Camino Real and Sierra, as also Porfidio, a tequila that David likens to a single malt. A bottle of Porfidio, single blue agave, triple distilled tequila, costs about Rs 3,584 after taxes.

So, is the city getting to slake its thirst on any of it? According to Arvind Bhatnagar, executive director of Ivory Kitchen, that owns Shisha Reincarnated: "Excise restrictions here make it difficult for a lot of clubs to stock up on some of the favoured global brands. But that is not to say that we're not keeping up with the times." In Shisha Reincarnated you'd find agaves like Corralejo Triple Distilled, Corralejo Reposado, Don Julio Reposado and Blanco and then of course, mixtos like José Cuervo, Sauza, Camino Real, La Chica and so on.

At Underground, Hotel Hindusthan International, and the Junction Bar in Taj Bengal, you'd find most of these same brands. And Sudipta Ranjan Basu, executive assistant manager - food and beverages, says that The Taj is eyeing the ultra-premium brand Patró (read hand-crafted bottle and all the bells and whistles) to include in their repertoire, as is Ivory Kitchen.

The prime line of Patrótequila Gran PatróBordeos Añejo is a connoisseur's collectible. Aged for 12 months, it's distilled once more and packed in hand-selected Bordeaux barrels, adding a heady flavour. In the international market, the price ranges from \$500 to \$600.

### Club calls

Calcutta is moving fast with the city's best night haunts going the tequila way.

Shisha Reincarnated offers cool tequila cocktails, though their in-house teq shooters with flavoured chasers make for smashing hits. Go for their iced tequila shot with a *chatka* chaser or even a sangrita chaser. And if you're partial to fruity flavours, you only have to look as far as The Junction at Taj Bengal, for their signature strawberry margarita that regulars swear by.

Underground, on the other hand, is going all out with infusions. While their in-house tequila cocktails such as the Cadillac and the Cobalt Margarita (the good ol' Margarita with a fancy Blue Curaçao twist) have many takers, the club scores with its host of infused tequila shooters. "We infuse whole bottles of tequila with a variety of flavours such as rose, cardamom, chillies, cloves and lemongrass," says Subhasish Ghosh, manager, Underground. We bet the chilli-infused shooter will really get you going.

And most chic nightclubs in India are going the same way. Take Blue Frog, one of Mumbai's most popular nightspots. It stocks up on some of the best brands in the industry

— we're talking Porfidio, Patrón and more. And the club serves up some very classy and exciting tequila mixes.

Try the Flat Liner, a cocktail shooter. Not for the faint-hearted, it's a heady mix of sambuca and tequila, with tabasco. The Frozen Agave is another signature Blue Frog tequila cocktail, consisting of ginger, mint and peach liqueur and of course, tequila. But to enjoy the real flavour of tequila, just order a Patrón the rocks.

From Corellejo to José Cuervo, to Camino and Sauza, Delhi's snazziest watering holes are stocking up on some of the world's coolest teq brands. And both Agni, The Park and F Bar and Lounge at The Ashok, are going the cocktail way. So while F Bar offers its in-house mix of tequila, crème de banana, lime and lemonade in the form of the Firebird, Agni serves up tequila with fruity syrups of your choice. F Bar also has flavoured tequila cocktails such as the kiwi margarita and the strawberry margarita.

#### Global flavours

The term 'flavoured tequila' is a misnomer. Tequila flavoured infusions are what sells as flavoured tequilas, mostly made from mixtos.

Basu says tequila being a smooth liquor, lends itself well to infusions and global brands are doing a lot of experiments with flavours. Mixologist Irfan Ahmed puts it into neat categories: "There are fruit infusions of coconut, mango, tangerine, kiwi, strawberry and more. Then there are spicy infusions for which jalapenos have traditionally played a role. There are coffee and chocolate infusions too." Another hit infusion is flavoured cream tequila and the most visible brand, says Ahmed, is Tequila Rose based on strawberry cream liqueur with a splash of tequila.

Sultania Trades is bringing in the very popular Voodoo Tiki brand to Indian markets, and 750ml bottles of the Blue Dragon (kiwi flavour) and Desert Rose (prickly pear) are priced at about Rs 3,125 after taxes.

But we certainly hope to see some more of flavoured tequilas coming in the near future. Till then let's dream of the flavour fantastic and down the good stuff — in sober sips, of course.

#### MIXERS 'N' SHAKERS

Long cocktails based on tequila are the hippest drinks of the season. And Irfan Ahmed gives us two unusual recipes that bring out the best of tequilas. Do try making these at home. It's as much fun as drinking them, we promise.

#### PIQUANT AGAVE JAM

**Glass:** Empty Jam jar

#### Ingredients

45ml premium tequila 5ml Galliano 10ml Grand Marnier 15ml freshly squeezed lime juice 1tbs each, blanched red and yellow bell peppers, coarsely chopped 1 pickled pearl onion 10ml brine solution 1 teacup finely crushed ice

#### Method

Put all ingredients together in a blender and blend at high speed. Carefully transfer the frozen mix into an empty jam jar. Garnish with jalapeno chilli, onion ring and chopped bell-peppers.

#### PEDRO MOJO

**Glass:** Collins or any tall cocktail glass

#### Ingredients

15ml premium tequila 10ml Blue Curaçao 5ml Crème de menthe 10ml lemon juice 10ml sugar syrup Freshly cut lemon chunks of a whole lemon or lime 4-5 fresh basil leaves 6-8 fresh mint leaves 2tsp castor sugar 60ml freshly pressed pineapple juice 10ml fresh lemon juice 6-8 cubes of ice and premium quality tonic water

#### Method

Gently muddle the lemon chunks, mint and basil leaves along with the castor sugar for 10-12 seconds. Add the remaining ingredients and muddle further for 6-7 seconds, allowing the ingredients to mix well. Transfer the muddled mix into a tall glass with ice cubes and stir in the tonic water till the top. Garnish with red lettuce and orange chunks.



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**Additional inputs by Tania Bhattacharya**



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