

SPIRITZ

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May 2025, Vol 16, No 10

AlcoBev India
sets billion-dollar goal

BOURBON BECOMING
a lifestyle statement



Modi Illva set to disrupt BII Scotch Market
Abhishek Modi, MD, Modi Illva

BIG
Announcement

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This collaboration brings together trade insights, digital innovation, and lifestyle engagement to reshape how the alcobev industry connects with its audiences.

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India rising as a new global hub for premium alcobev trade



The landmark decision to slash import duties on Scotch whisky and gin by up to 75 percent under the India-UK Free Trade Agreement is not just a win for British distillers—it also presents a significant breakthrough for Indian whisky makers. For domestic producers who rely on imported bulk Scotch malt to create popular blended whiskies, the duty cut is a potential game-changer. With lower input costs, Indian companies can now deliver high-quality Scotch-blended whiskies at more competitive prices, strengthening their market position and appealing to a wider consumer base. It's a win-win across the board: Scotch producers gain access to a larger, more price-sensitive market; Indian brands enjoy improved margins and scale; and consumers benefit from more affordable premium whisky offerings.

Sanjit Padhi CEO, International Spirits and Wines Association of India (ISWAI) has welcomed the UK-India Free Trade Agreement as a landmark development for the AlcoBev sector and said that this will accelerate the ongoing trend of premiumisation within the Alcobev sector, positively impacting the exchequer revenues of Indian states.

However, the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC), has expressed cautious optimism. CIABC Director General Anant S. Iyer raised concerns about the possible downsides of the tariff concession, urging the inclusion of a Minimum Import Price (MIP) to curb under-invoicing and prevent dumping of low-cost spirits.

Meanwhile, American companies are buoyant following recent duty cuts on Bourbon and bulk Bourbon spirit. For Indian whisky makers, this opens the door to blending with Bourbon at more competitive margins than Scotch, potentially fuelling innovation in local blends and boosting profitability.

Amid these shifts, India has emerged as a global focal point—driven by a rapidly expanding base of aspirational consumers and a growing appetite for premium spirits and wines. With the U.S. threatening steep tariffs on imports from the EU and beyond, global players are looking east. Japanese giant Suntory, for instance, is reportedly exploring a shift in export strategy toward India and other emerging markets. The

subcontinent's scale, evolving palate, and dynamic alcobev culture make it an increasingly attractive alternative.

The Indian alcobev market, once seen as protectionist and complicated, is fast transforming into the next battleground for global liquor brands. The coming months will be crucial, not just for trade policymakers but for industry stakeholders eager to ride India's spirited growth wave.

Sensing the growing buzz around Bourbon, we set out to explore how this category is poised to perform in the wake of recent duty cuts. Through insights from key companies and experts, we examine whether Indian consumers will benefit from price reductions or if the improved margins will primarily favour manufacturers and importers. A detailed table in the Category Insight section offers a clear picture of how MRPs for Bourbon brands could change, giving you a sharper understanding of the real impact on the market.

Dynamic industry leader and Managing Director of Modi Illva, Abhishek Modi is now poised to script a new chapter with his latest offering—Singhasan and take the company to a new height. Don't miss the opportunity to learn from one of the most influential voices in the Indian liquor industry.

Enjoy reading this power packed issue!

A handwritten signature in yellow ink, appearing to read 'Shalini'.



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34 **Headline Story**

Modi Illva set to disrupt BII Scotch Market

Riding on Rockford's legacy to conquer the Scotch throne



In an exclusive story, Abhishek Modi, Managing Director of Modi Illva India, shares how the company is carving its path in the highly competitive Indian alcobev industry. Far from a mere race, Abhishek describes the sector as a marathon demanding innovation, resilience, and vision. With bold aspirations to become the third-largest alcohol company in the country, Modi Illva is strategically accelerating its momentum with strategic product launch since its debut in alcobev market. The journey, as outlined by Modi, is one of purpose-driven growth and clear milestones ahead.

40 **Focus / Category Insight**

Bourbon becoming a lifestyle statement

Over the past five years, sales figures indicate that bourbon has been steadily gaining ground in the Indian market. This momentum is expected to grow further with the anticipated reduction in import duties, likely drawing in a new generation of bourbon enthusiasts. In light of this trend, SpiritZ's bourbon special issue highlights how bourbon is poised to secure a prominent place in India's evolving liquor landscape. Notably, the issue reveals that India's millennial and Gen Z consumers — curious, experimental, and globally exposed — are driving this shift. They are actively seeking out international spirits that deliver both authenticity and rich flavour.



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Flandy

IT'S TIME
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FUN



58 Conclave



AlcoBev India 2025 sets billion-dollar goal

On April 23, the Indian alcoholic beverage industry witnessed a pivotal moment with the AlcoBev India 2025 conclave, an event set to influence the sector's future trajectory. Jointly organised by CIABC and APEDA, the day-long gathering featured key industry leaders, policymakers, and experts in a rare, focused dialogue. Spiritiz Magazine brings readers a comprehensive coverage of this landmark event, highlighting the insights and strategies shaping the next phase of India's alcobev landscape.

68 Fan Extraordinaire



Angel Spreading Amrut Fever

For most whisky lovers, a favourite dram is a matter of preference. But for a rare few, it becomes a way of life. Dennis Steckel from Sweden is one such rare spirit. A whisky aficionado whose love for Amrut Single Malt runs so deep that it's inked into his very skin, and woven into the fabric of his everyday life. Founder of two exclusive whisky clubs, with a personal collection that reads like a love letter to Amrut's finest creations, Dennis shared its fascinating story to become a devoted ambassador of the Indian whisky.

72 Vino Diary



Tokaj, Bull's Blood, & Hungary's Finest

Spirits and Wine educator, Naveen Gupta reflects on how the world of wine often overlooks hidden gems in favour of more celebrated labels. Drawing from personal experience, he shares how Hungary—a country with a deep-rooted winemaking tradition once revered by monarchs—quietly holds some of the most intriguing and rewarding wine discoveries.

76 Launch Pad



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UP records ₹52k cr revenue

Uttar Pradesh has once again emerged as the country's top performer in excise revenue, registering a record-breaking collection of ₹52,297 crore in 2024-25 — a 15 percent increase over last year's ₹45,570 crore, Excise Minister Nitin Agarwal announced during a press interaction.

Releasing provisional data on April 3, the minister stated that the state has signed MoUs with 137 companies, targeting a collective investment of ₹39,708 crore in the excise domain, with ₹10,185 crore already realised through on-ground projects.

The minister credited the excise department as a key driver in UP's progress towards becoming a \$1 trillion economy, echoing Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision.

47 alcobev firms eye TG

In a significant boost to Telangana's liquor market, 47 alcobev companies are set to make their debut in the state, collectively proposing 386 new alcohol brands. According to the Excise Department a total of 92 companies have applied to launch 604 new liquor brands, with the remaining 218 proposals coming from 45 existing suppliers. Among the proposed brands, 331 are IMFL variants, while 273 are foreign liquor labels.

Meanwhile, the existing IMFL manufacturers are seeking price hike in the state after the Telangana government approved increased supply fees for beer companies. The manufacturers say, escalating production costs and stagnant supply rates are making operations increasingly difficult to sustain.



K'taka to hike liquor prices

The Karnataka government has proposed a fresh hike in liquor prices, days after raising taxes on other commodities. The proposal targets economical and mid-range liquor categories, while prices of premium labels will remain unchanged.

The official notification, issued by the state Excise Department proposes a price hike of Rs 10-15 per quarter bottle for economical category liquors such as brandy, whisky, gin, and rum. Beer, meanwhile, is proposed to see a 10 percent price hike across all segments.

The hike had been announced earlier by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in the state budget, and now enters the public consultation phase, with citizens given seven days to file objections.

Piccadilly unveils Indri Experience Centre

Piccadilly Agro Industries Ltd. has launched Indri Experience Centre, a state-of-the-art destination in Indri, Haryana, offering whisky lovers an immersive journey into the making of single malt.



Designed to blend heritage, innovation and luxury, the centre features guided distillery tours, exclusive tastings and interactive experiences that showcase the craftsmanship behind Indri's celebrated expressions. Visitors can explore traditional copper pot still distillation, cask selection and aging processes, gaining a deeper appreciation for Indri's authenticity and excellence.

The Indri Experience Centre marks a milestone in Piccadilly's vision to set new standards in whisky tourism.

UBL expands Amstel Grande to UP

United Breweries Ltd. (UBL) has launched its iconic premium beer, Amstel Grande, in Uttar Pradesh.

The beer is slow-brewed and matured for longer, allowing its flavours to fully develop, resulting in a rich, smooth taste. Crafted using the finest quality barley, unique Dutch yeast, and carefully selected hops, each sip of Amstel Grande is a testament to the brand's commitment to quality. With no added sugar and perfected through extensive global and local testing, it achieved top scores in consumer research.

It is available at all leading outlets in the state in 330 ml, 500 ml and 650 ml bottles, priced at ₹110, ₹160, and ₹210, respectively.





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HP to run unsold liquor shops

The Himachal Pradesh government has decided to run 240 liquor vends that remained unsold during open auctions through various state-run boards and corporations.

The vends across five districts were not allotted due to low bids, with contractors quoting prices 20 to 30 percent below the base price.

Industries Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan said, the decision aims to safeguard the interests of the public exchequer.

As part of the plan, the General Industries Corporation has been allotted 42 vends in Kullu worth ₹42 crore, while HPSIDC has been allotted 23 vends in Mandi.



Delhi HC rules in Diageo's favour

The Delhi High Court ordered the removal of the trademark 'Captain Blue' from the Trade Marks Registry, in a case filed by Diageo Scotland Ltd., producer of the renowned 'Captain Morgan' rum, reported Live Law.

In its plea, Diageo argued that the mark 'Captain Blue', filed by one Prachi Verma under Class 33 (alcoholic beverages), was deceptively similar to its own 'Captain' family of marks.

The Assistant Registrar of Trade Marks had previously rejected Diageo's opposition, stating the marks were distinct when compared as a whole. However, the court noted that Diageo is the prior user and registered proprietor of the 'Captain' mark.

Rajasthan hikes liquor prices

The Rajasthan Excise Department has revised the MRP for liquor for the fiscal year 2025-26, with new rates coming into effect immediately.

The updated rate list, covering IMFL, beer, etc., reflects a hike ranging from ₹15-500.

This move has sparked discontent among liquor vendors, who claimed that while liquor and beer prices have increased by nearly 10 percent, their own profits have not seen any corresponding rise. Instead, they allege, the additional revenue generated is being absorbed by the state government and liquor companies. Vendors also pointed out that the profit margins on IMFL and beer have been reduced this year.



Wine & beer-only vends at UP malls soon

The Uttar Pradesh government has allowed retail shops selling only wine and beer in shopping malls that house operational multiplexes and have a retail space of at least 500 sq ft. However, alcohol sale or consumption inside cinema halls will remain strictly prohibited.

The new licence category, FL-4D, reportedly enables individuals to open wine and beer outlets in malls at a significantly lower cost than the premium FL-4C licence, which is required for full liquor vends. The FL-4D licence comes with an annual fee of ₹6 lakh, compared to ₹25 lakh for FL-4C.

The policy, being implemented as a pilot project, is currently limited to Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad, Agra, and Lucknow.



Liquor makers urge Telangana to clear dues

Liquor companies operating in Telangana have urged the state government to clear outstanding dues

amounting to ₹3,100 crore, citing severe liquidity issues and rising working capital pressures. The industry has also appealed for a price revision to offset the increasing cost of production.

Industry associations and supplier companies have submitted formal representations to Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, seeking immediate intervention. They have requested the Telangana State Beverages Corporation Ltd. (TSBCL) to expedite payment of dues, citing delayed payments of hampering their ability to maintain consistent supplies across the state.



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Sula reports flat Q4

Sula Vineyards reported nearly flat revenue for the quarter ending March 31, 2025, with ₹132.6 crore, up slightly from ₹131.7 crore last year. Its “own brands” segment declined 2.9 percent year-on-year to ₹109.6 crore, reflecting a weak core product performance. However, wine tourism revenue rose sharply by 24.6 percent to ₹20.4 crore, offering a positive offset.

For FY25, revenue from own brands grew modestly by 2.2 percent to ₹546.2 crore from ₹534.2 crore in FY24.



TASMAC revenue rises 5.4%

The Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation Ltd. (TASMAC) reported a 5.4 percent rise in revenue for the financial year ended March 31, 2025, reaching ₹48,344 crore, up from ₹45,855 crore in the previous year. This growth surpasses the 3.9 percent increase recorded in 2023-24.

According to Home, Prohibition and Excise Department's policy note for 2025-26, VAT from liquor sales contributed ₹37,324 crore, while excise duty accounted for ₹11,020 crore.

TASMAC's revenue has grown by nearly ₹12,000 crore over the past three years, the policy note, presented by Electricity, Prohibition and Excise Minister V. Senthil Balaji in the Assembly, revealed.

Liquor to cost more in PY

Liquor prices in Puducherry are set to rise significantly as the government approved a major hike in excise duty, additional excise duty, special excise duty, and licence fees, aiming to generate over ₹300 crore in additional revenue.

The decision taken during an extended cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister N. Rangaswamy is part of a broader strategy to fund welfare schemes announced in the recent tax-free budget. The excise department will implement the revised duties across all categories of liquor outlets—wholesale, retail, and tourism—with the annual licence fee for liquor outlets also set to double.



ISWAI applauds progressive excise reforms

The International Spirits and Wines Association of India (ISWAI) has lauded state governments for implementing progressive excise policies that are transforming the alcohol retail landscape, increasing revenue, and improving consumer experience, stated media reports.

From Uttar Pradesh's composite retail formats to Andhra Pradesh's privatised model, Rajasthan's premium outlets in malls, Madhya Pradesh's single-bottle billing initiative, and the premium-only retail formats in Haryana, Telangana, Karnataka, and Odisha, these policies are ushering in a new era for India's alcohol retail ecosystem, said Sanjit Padhi, CEO of ISWAI.



Chandigarh faces liquor shortage

Chandigarh is experiencing a major liquor shortage, with less than half of its vends operational. Out of the total 96, only 45 outlets are functioning, while others remain shut due to issues like land disputes, pending documentation, and inability to meet financial requirements under the excise policy.

The shortage of popular beer and Indian Made Foreign Liquor brands has triggered a spike in retail prices. Beer that was earlier priced at ₹130 is now being sold for ₹150 to ₹200, while whiskies previously sold at ₹500 are now retailing for ₹550 to ₹600.



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The Macallan TIME: SPACE Mastery lands in Delhi

To commemorate its illustrious 200-year journey, The Macallan has launched the TIME: SPACE – Mastery, a rare and extraordinary single malt that pays tribute to the artistry of time travel through whisky mastery. The exclusive unveiling in New Delhi was hosted at two iconic venues, The Leela Palace and Home, a standalone luxury bar.

This expression showcases The Macallan's most intricate craftsmanship, combining 14 exceptional cask types to create an unparalleled depth in aroma, flavour, and texture.

With only 120 bottles available in India, TIME: SPACE – Mastery is poised to become a coveted collector's piece.



Soorahi debuts in Punjab

Uppal Brewers and Distillers (UBD) has launched its premium Indian whisky Soorahi in Punjab, expanding its footprint after a successful debut in Delhi earlier this year. The brand is available in five key cities of Punjab—Ludhiana, Mohali, Patiala, Jalandhar, and Amritsar—as part of its strategy to establish a strong pan-India presence.

CEO and Co-Founder Ankur Sachdeva agreed that Punjab is a vital market with dynamic and informed consumers and is the perfect region to strengthen the brand's presence.

With this expansion, UBD is building momentum to scale nationally and cement its standing in India's competitive premium whisky segment.

Women drinking more: NFHS

A recent survey by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) has revealed higher percentage of women consuming alcohol than ever before, with Arunachal Pradesh topping the chart at 24.2 percent.

The data collected between 2019 and 2021 paints a diverse picture influenced by regional culture, tribal traditions, urbanisation, and shifting gender roles. In some tribal-dominated areas, locally brewed beverages are deeply embedded in daily life and social customs, contributing to a more gender-inclusive approach to alcohol consumption. Meanwhile, younger, economically independent women in urban centres are also part of this evolving pattern, driven by changing lifestyles, global influences, and increasing stress levels.



Monika Alcobev files for IPO

Monika Alcobev, a prominent distributor in India's premium and luxury liquor segment, has filed draft papers with the Securities and Exchange Board of India

(SEBI) for its Initial Public Offering (IPO). The public issue comprises a fresh issue of up to 48 lakh equity shares and an offer for sale of up to 10 lakh equity shares, aggregating to a total of 58 lakh equity shares with a face value of ₹10 each.

Monika Alcobev intends to utilise the net proceeds from the fresh issue primarily for working capital requirements, amounting ₹100.41 crore. Additionally, ₹11.78 crore will be directed towards repayment of certain outstanding borrowings, with remaining funds allocated for general corporate purposes.



Gujarat eases liquor rules at GIFT City

The Gujarat government has eased liquor permit rules within the GIFT City campus in Gandhinagar in order to boost ease of doing business.

According to the amended clause, employees can directly submit Form A-1 to an authorised officer, appointed by the managing director of GIFT City, without requiring a 'recommending officer' such as the company's HR head or PRO. Once verified, a liquor access permit card will be issued and shared with both the authorised person and the Superintendent of Prohibition and Excise. These permit holding employees can also nominate up to five visitors at a time using Form A-2, provided they accompany the guests in designated wine and dine areas.





KALS



FOSTER'S





Los Pablos debuts in Goa

Simba Beer has unveiled a limited-edition Mexican lager, Los Pablos, crafted in partnership with Mumbai-based Rolling Mills Brewery.

The Chhattisgarh-headquartered brand will debut 1,500 cases of this special brew exclusively in Goa, shared Ishwaraj Singh Bhatia, the co-founder and COO of Simba Beer and ZigZag Vodka. Alongside, the company aims to sell around 4 million cases of its beers this year. Los Pablos was born out of the Simba Brew Off competition, an IP created last year where top microbreweries competed to craft an outstanding beer.



BAI seeks level playing

The Brewers' Association of India (BAI) has urged the Delhi government to ensure a level playing field for domestic beer manufacturers, highlighting a significant tax disparity that favours beers from Bhutan and Nepal.

In a letter addressed to the state government, the BAI stated that Indian brewers are subjected to a 150 percent excise duty and an additional 10 percent excise duty, whereas beer imported from Bhutan and Nepal is taxed at just 65 percent excise duty with no additional levy.

BAI also approached the Karnataka governments to halt any further tax hikes on beer, cautioning that such moves could lead to declining sales volumes and place over ₹5,000 crore in brewery investments at risk.

Mazal Rum wins Gold

Makabi-Mazal Rum & Spice has clinched the coveted Gold Medal at the European Spirits Challenge 2025, making it the only Indian rum to earn top honours at one of the world's most prestigious spirits competitions.



Held annually in London, the European Spirits Challenge is renowned for its uncompromising triple blind tasting method, judged by leading connoisseurs and industry veterans. Competing against a global lineup of elite brands, Mazal emerged as a standout as a bold and aromatic spirit that blends Goan molasses with a proprietary mix of Indian spices, including cardamom, cinnamon, clove, nutmeg, peppercorn, ginger, and a touch of cashew apple.

Morpheus hits hat-trick with 1 mn cases

Radico Khaitan has once again reached a major milestone as Morpheus Brandy has surpassed 1 million cases for the third consecutive year, solidifying its dominance in the premium brandy segment with a 60 percent market share. Named after the Greek God of Dreams, Morpheus continues to lead the category with its rich, layered profile and smooth, evolved character.

With exports to over 20 countries, Morpheus Brandy has made its mark globally. Its unique inverted goblet-inspired bottle design, premium packaging and meticulous craftsmanship have made it a favourite among connoisseurs.

Recognised with multiple Monde Selection Awards, Morpheus continues to innovate through limited edition Festive Packs, new SKUs and strategic media partnerships.



Appointment

Ayaesha Gooptu joins Fino Tequila

Fino Tequila, the premium spirits brand co-owned by former cricketer Yuvraj Singh, has named Ayaesha Gooptu as its India Country Head, signaling a strategic push to expand its footprint in the Indian alcobev market.



Gooptu brings nearly 20 years of experience across FMCG and alcohol beverage sectors. At Bacardi India, she played a key role in launching LEGACY Premium Whisky and oversaw the operations of Breezer. Prior to that, she held senior marketing roles at PepsiCo, managing major brands like Pepsi, Lays, and Tropicana.

In her new role, Gooptu will lead Fino's India operations, drive market strategy, and grow brand presence across key cities.



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Spiritz

NEWS PULSE-NATIONAL

Devi Singh wins Camikara 2025 challenge

The Indian bartending scene witnessed a game-changing moment as Devi Singh was crowned the Camikara Millionaire Bartender 2025, taking home a grand prize of 1 million at the grand finale hosted at Hyatt Regency, Gurugram. The event marked the culmination of the first-ever Millionaire Bartender Challenge in India, powered by Camikara Rum.

Launched as a tribute to India's vibrant mixology talent, the Camikara Challenge attracted hundreds of entries from across the country. After rigorous regional rounds in the North, South, East, and West, the top 20 finalists competed in Gurugram, demonstrating excellence in technique, creativity, and presentation using Camikara's premium Indian rum.

The finale featured eight shortlisted bartenders presenting their signature cocktails to a jury of global beverage experts including Vikram Achanta, Yangdup Lama, Ian Burrell, and Richard Hargroves. After an action-packed final round, Dhananjai Subramaniam and Macleagh Fernandes were named 1st and 2nd runners-up, winning ₹5 lakhs and ₹3 lakhs, respectively.

The event wasn't just about the prize, it was about recognition, opportunity, and celebration. With every finalist insured for impressive prize amount, Camikara underscored its commitment to supporting the wellbeing and growth of bartenders, reinforcing its role as a champion of India's evolving cocktail culture.



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Maker's Mark wheat whiskey



Suntory Global Spirits-owned Maker's Mark has introduced its first-ever non-bourbon expression, Star Hill Farm Whiskey. This debut marks

a historic moment for the brand, featuring a completely new mashbill and showcasing its first wheat whiskey.

The Star Hill Farm Whiskey is the result of a decade-long journey to explore nature's influence on flavour. With an ABV of 57.35 percent and a suggested retail price of USD 100, the annual release will be available in the United States and the United Kingdom starting mid-May, with an Australian launch planned for later in the year.

Absolut's flavoured RTD

Absolut Vodka & Sprite, the RTD cocktail from The Coca-Cola Company and Pernod Ricard, has introduced a watermelon-flavoured extension in the UK.

The 5 percent ABV canned cocktail is a blend of Sprite's crisp taste with Absolut Vodka's smoothness and a refreshing burst of watermelon—a flavour crafted to capture the essence of summer. The company states that watermelon was selected for its vibrant, juicy profile, complementing the existing range while adding a fresh twist.

It is available in sleek 250 ml cans at £2.30.



Patrón Tequila's new mini



Patrón Tequila has unveiled Patrón El Alto Mini (50ml), a sleek, pocket-sized version of its prestige tequila designed to elevate celebration on the move. Making its debut at top-tier music festivals, Patrón El Alto Mini is poised to become the go-to accessory for revellers.

Crafted for over four years, Patrón El Alto is a blend of Reposado, Añejo, and Extra Añejo tequilas, made exclusively from 100 percent weber blue agave grown in the highlands of Jalisco, Mexico.

Bowmore reveals ARC-54

Bowmore and Aston Martin have unveiled the second and final release in their iconic ARC Series: Bowmore ARC-54, an ultra-rare 54-year-old single malt whisky



housed in a hand-blown decanter inspired by the sleek aerodynamics of the Aston Martin Valkyrie hypercar.

Limited to just 130 decanters globally, ARC-54 is as visually striking as it is sensorially captivating. With an ABV of 44.3 percent, the whisky offers a spun gold appearance and a symphony of aromas—from vanilla and butterscotch to tropical fruits and toasted oak. Bowmore ARC-54 is available via select global stockists.

Wild Turkey launches 8 YO bourbon

The Wild Turkey Distilling Company has launched Wild Turkey 101 in the United States. Rooted in a historic recipe and aged for eight years, the new expression pays tribute to the original Wild Turkey 101, which was once famously bottled with the same age statement. It offers a refined take on a classic for both longtime fans and new bourbon enthusiasts alike.



Crafted from a smaller batch of hand-selected barrels, this bourbon highlights bold flavours of vanilla, charred oak, lemon zest, and black cherry, finishing with notes of brown sugar, dried fruit, and all spice. Packaged in a 750 ml bottle, it retails for \$45.

The Macallan's The Tree of Life Collection



The Macallan has launched The Tree of Life Collection, a new artistic series of single malts inspired by renowned Scottish artist and architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The collection includes two limited-edition expressions — The Tree of Life by The

Macallan and The Macallan Art is the Flower.

The Tree of Life by The Macallan is a rare 46-year-old single malt, limited to just 112 Lalique decanters globally. Bottled at 46.2 percent ABV, the expression is available via invitation only, with pricing on request.

The second release, The Macallan Art Is The Flower, celebrates Mackintosh's floral motifs and European influence. Bottled at 50.4 percent ABV, it is available at The Macallan Estate and select luxury retailers, including Harrods, The Whisky Shop, and Berry Bros. & Rudd.

GlenAllachie unveils Sinteis Series

The GlenAllachie has introduced the Sinteis Series, a limited-edition line inspired by the art of blending and the Scottish Gaelic word for 'synthesis.' The series is anchored by the concept: "Two distinct casks. One harmonious synthesis."



The debut release, Sinteis Part I, is a 2014 vintage matured in Chinquapin virgin oak and first-fill Pedro Ximénez Sherry puncheons. Selected by Master Distiller Billy Walker, who has over 53 years of whisky expertise, this single malt is bottled at natural cask strength with 57.8 percent ABV, unchill-filtered, and free of added colouring.

Priced at £74.99 in the UK, it's now available at the distillery and online, with global release to follow.



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Heineken reports 4.6% growth



Heineken N.V. reported 0.9 percent organic net growth in Q1 2025 despite a 2.1 percent decline in overall beer volume. Its flagship brand grew 4.6 percent, with India, Vietnam, and Ethiopia as key markets.

In India, Heineken saw mid-single-digit beer volume growth and low-teens growth in organic net revenue (beia), driven by premiumisation. The premium segment surged over 20 percent, led by Heineken Silver, Kingfisher Ultra, and Ultra Max.

Globally, premium beer volume rose 1.8 percent, with Heineken Silver growing in the thirties, especially in Vietnam and China. Heineken reaffirmed its 2025 profit growth target and €0.4 billion savings goal under its EverGreen strategy.

Pernod's sales grow by 5% in India

Pernod Ricard reported a resilient FY25 YTD, led by 5 percent net sales growth in India despite Q3 challenges from customs delays and a temporary production halt, both now resolved. Brands like Jameson, Ballantine's, Royal Salute, and Royal Stag showed strong momentum.

Globally, Q3 net sales declined by 3 percent organically to €2,278 million, while YTD sales dropped by 4 percent organically to €8,454 million, with a €145 million FX impact. Volume rose by 1 percent, but adverse market mix hit price/mix by 5 percent.

The Americas grew by 3 percent in Q3, while Europe and Asia-RoW declined by 7 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Global Travel Retail fell by 31 percent due to China's Cognac duty-free suspension.



Johnnie Walker launches lightest whisky bottle



Johnnie Walker has unveiled Blue Label Ultra, a limited edition, first-of-its-kind, boundary-breaking

innovation. Weighing just 180 grams, Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ultra is touted as the world's lightest (70 cl) Scotch whisky glass bottle. Using new, patented glass technology developed by Diageo's design team, this lighter and lower-carbon bottle embodies the future of luxury packaging, fusing sustainability with exceptional craftsmanship.

Each bottle is filled with a specially blended liquid by Emma Walker, the Master Blender at Johnnie Walker, featuring whisky from legendary distilleries such as Oban, Brora, and Royal Lochnagar, as well as select 'ghost whiskies' from now-closed distilleries.

It launched in the North American market on May 1, with an SRP of USD 1,250.

Appointments

Marzia Varvaglione is new CEEV president



Marzia Varvaglione, Head of Business Development and Marketing & Sales Director at Varvaglione 1921, has been elected the President of the Comité Européen des Entreprises Vins (CEEV).

Succeeding Mauricio González-Gordon, Marzia will serve a three-year term, leading the European wine sector through challenges like market fluctuations and climate change.

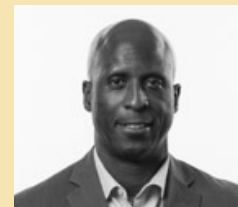
Marzia, representing the fourth generation of her family winery, has transformed Varvaglione 1921 into a global name, blending tradition with innovation. She also serves as President of AGIVI and a board member of UIV.

Laurence Brady is Loca Loka's US Head

Singapore-based premium spirits company Loca Loka has appointed industry veteran Laurence Brady as Regional Head for the United States. This strategic move aligns with the brand's rapid growth in the North American tequila market following its successful 2024 launch in the US and Southeast Asia.

Conceptualised in India, crafted in Mexico and marketed globally, Loca Loka has gained recognition for its flagship tequilas, Blanco and Reposado.

Laurence will report to Rajiv Ghumman, Global Business Head, Loca Loka.





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Roku Sakura Bloom Gin debuts in India



The House of Suntory has introduced Roku Sakura Bloom Edition, its first limited-edition gin

inspired by Japan's Sakura flower and the Hanami festival, to the Indian travel retail market.

This marks the debut release from Roku Gin's Festival Collection, a global series celebrating the peak of each season. The Sakura Bloom Edition captures the essence of spring and Japan's iconic cherry blossom season with a soft, floral taste and subtle salty notes from blossom leaves, enhanced by a harmonious blend of six botanicals.

This edition is now available at select Indian duty-free stores, beginning with Delhi Duty Free in May.

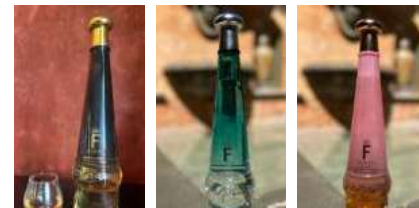
Suntory opens largest GTR shop-in-shop

Suntory Global Spirits has opened its largest-ever GTR shop-in-shop at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport's Arrival terminal, marking a strategic partnership with Osprey Duty Free. The 33 sqm boutique in Mumbai marks a pioneering multi-brand, cross-category concept from the spirits giant.

Designed to offer a seamless and enjoyable experience for arriving passengers, the shop-in-shop showcases the depth and diversity of Suntory's exceptional spirits portfolio, including Scotch, American, and Japanese whiskies like Bowmore, Maker's Mark, Hakushu, and Hibiki. Additionally, the boutique features dedicated sections for Haku Vodka and Roku Gin, expanding the appeal to white spirits enthusiasts as well.



Yuvraj Singh's Fino Tequila touches Indian shores



Fino Tequila, the premium spirit co-founded by Indian cricket legend Yuvraj Singh, has made its way into the Indian market, with its exclusive availability at Mumbai Duty Free.

A result of collaboration between Yuvraj and a group of global entrepreneurs, Fino (short for "Failure Is Not an Option") is made from 100 percent blue Weber agave grown in Jalisco's red soil, known for producing sweeter agave with a rich aroma.

Earlier this year, the artisanal brand made its debut in the United States, marking the first phase of its global expansion. In India, it offers three distinctive variants—Blanco (₹20,000), Rosado (₹25,000) and Añejo (₹30,000)—all available exclusively at duty-free retail.

Ajay Devgn forays into luxury spirits

Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn has officially entered the global luxury spirits segment with the launch of his debut premium whisky, The GlenJourneys Pioneer Edition—a 21-year-old Highland single malt scotch. Developed in partnership with Cartel Bros, the limited-edition release was unveiled on April 9 at a glittering event in Mumbai.

This exclusive single malt, limited to just 600 bottles, has been aged in hand-selected American oak barrels and finished in oak casks featuring intricate inlay detailing.

Bottled at a robust 48 percent ABV, The Pioneer Edition is available via global travel retail channels. In India, it is priced between ₹50,000 and ₹60,000.



Campari launches Exploration Series in GTR

Campari Group has introduced The Glen Grant Exploration No.1, the first release in its limited-edition single malt Scotch whisky collection, in GTR.

The Exploration Series draws inspiration from the adventurous legacy of James 'The Major' Grant, the pioneering force behind The Glen Grant distillery.

The whisky is first matured in bourbon barrels before finishing in hand-selected Caribbean rum casks. Bottled at 48 percent ABV and non-chill filtered, the result is a complex spirit that blends vibrant tropical notes with the distillery's refined style.

Available from March to August 2025, the release will be featured across 37 premium airport retail locations in eight key Asia-Pacific countries.



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William Grant's 1st Malt installation

William Grant & Sons has launched its first permanent Malt installation at the arrivals terminal of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport Mumbai, complementing its existing showcase at the departures terminal.

The dedicated space brings to life the iconic malts portfolio—Glenfiddich, The Balvenie, and Monkey Shoulder.

With Monkey Shoulder's growing popularity and the strength of Glenfiddich and The Balvenie, William Grant & Sons continues to build on its legacy in India, connecting with consumers through innovation, quality, and a deep-rooted Scottish heritage.



Glenmorangie opens India's largest showcase



Moët Hennessy India has launched the House of Glenmorangie Boutique at Osprey Duty Free located at the new international arrivals terminal of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport Mumbai. This activation marks Glenmorangie's largest portfolio showcase in India at a duty-free location.

Following a highly successful activation at London Heathrow, this is only the second such global showcase for Glenmorangie, making it a marquee milestone.

The boutique's travel-exclusive portfolio features multiple coveted offerings, including the new Glenmorangie The Original 12 Years Old, Quinta Ruban 14 YO, and Vindima 16 YO. For smoky single malt lovers, the showcase also includes a myriad of offerings from Ardbeg.

Appointment

BACL's new CCO



Avishek Bambii Das has joined Bengaluru Airport City Ltd. (BACL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bangalore International Airport Ltd., as its Chief Commercial Officer (CCO).

A business turnaround specialist with decades of experience across Diageo, Pernod Ricard, Bacardi, Adani, and RPG, Avishek is renowned for driving exponential growth and innovation in travel retail and premium spirits.

With this appointment, BACL aims for a new phase of strategic growth and global positioning.

Osborne's showcase at Jerez Airport

Spanish wine, spirits and gourmet food specialist Osborne in collaboration with leading travel retail and F&B operator Avolta has launched a branded space at Jerez Airport in Andalucía, Spain.



The permanent installation offers travellers a warm welcome into the world of Osborne, complete with the iconic Osborne bull silhouette. The space highlights Osborne's renowned sherry portfolio, featuring expressions based on the Jerez-Xérès-Sherry Designation of Origin, perfect for pairing with a wide variety of foods and enhancing everyday moments. Also showcased is Cinco Jotas, one of Spain's most prestigious brands of 100 percent acorn-fed Iberian ham, alongside the award-winning Carlos I brandies. Premium gins Nordés and Gin Gold are part of the offer too.

Royal Salute unveils 21 YO Rio Polo Edition

Pernod Ricard Global Travel Retail and Chivas Brothers have introduced the latest release in their Royal Salute Polo Collection: Royal Salute 21 Year Old Rio de Janeiro Polo Edition.

Inspired by Royal Salute's long standing connection to the sport of polo, the new release, crafted by Master Blender Sandy Hyslop marks the seventh expression in the collection and pays tribute to Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazilian polo.

The blend includes select whiskies from Braeval Distillery, Scotland's highest distillery, aged in first-fill casks to bring forward fresh, grassy, and floral notes.

Priced at USD 245, it is available at Avolta-operated outlets in Rio de Janeiro Galeão and São Paulo/Guarulhos International Airports.



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Kerala aims to boost liquor manufacturing

The Kerala government has announced a sweeping overhaul of its liquor policy, introducing significant changes aimed at increasing local production, enhancing regulatory transparency, and offering concessions to boost tourism and industrial engagement.

Under the revised policy, the state will allow a greater number of IMFL and beer manufacturing units, including distilleries, breweries, and spirits manufacturing in a bid to reduce dependency on other states for liquor production.

One of the key decisions includes legitimising the controversial liquor manufacturing centre in Elappully, Palakkad. The new guidelines allow qualified applicants such as the Elappully facility to apply for setting up distilleries and breweries. This development follows the second Pinarayi Vijayan-led government's efforts to clarify procedural ambiguities left unresolved during its first term.

Building upon previous year's provisions, the policy officially permits the establishment of units for the production of extra neutral alcohol. Furthermore, liquor service is now authorised within industrial parks, an extension of a similar facility already approved for IT parks under the 2022–23 policy.

In a move to support the hospitality sector, a one-day special permit system has been introduced to allow alcohol service on dry days. Three-star hotels

and above, as well as heritage and classic resorts, can now apply for permits to serve liquor on the first day of each month for events such as business meetings, international conferences, and other gatherings. The application, subject to a fee of ₹50,000, must be filed at least seven days in advance.

The updated policy has also granted the Kerala State Beverages Corporation permission to export liquor to Lakshadweep, though this will come with increased taxation on exported alcohol. Bottles sold by the Corporation will now require mandatory QR codes to ensure better tracking and transparency.

Responding to a long-standing request from The Kerala Toddy Industry Development Board, the policy now allows for the export of bottled palm wine (toddy). However, the government declined the proposal to reduce the legal distance between toddy shops and places of worship or schools from 400 to 150 metres.

Additional reforms include streamlined regulations for bar ownership. Bars will no longer require prior approval from the Excise Department to change their board or partnership structure but must notify the department within a month, failing which fines will be imposed.

Lastly, the policy clarifies and affirms the rules for liquor service in IT and industrial parks, allowing for the serving of alcohol in these locations. 📍





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The rise of Low, Casual & Digital in 2025



The global drinks industry is facing a mix of caution and optimism in 2025, according to a new report from IWSR. Despite persistent economic headwinds, including inflation and geopolitical tensions, the year ahead is forecast to be “subdued but opportunity-rich,” offering new growth avenues for brands that are willing to adapt.

IWSR’s latest research outlines five defining trends that will shape the beverage alcohol market this year.

1. New Moderation Strategies

Moderation in alcohol consumption is no longer a niche movement — it’s gone global and cross-generational. Consumers of all ages are embracing lighter drinking habits, temporary abstinence, and single-category consumption during social occasions. According to IWSR, the number of ‘light’ drinkers has now overtaken both ‘medium’ and ‘heavy’ drinkers in 15 key markets.

This trend is turbocharging the no- and low-alcohol segments. The no-alcohol category alone is forecast to grow at a CAGR of 7 percent through 2028, contributing over USD 4 billion in incremental revenue.

2. Growth Axis Shift

While mature markets like Europe and the US continue to feel the pinch of inflation, emerging economies are rapidly becoming the industry’s new growth engines. India, China, South Africa, Vietnam, and Mexico are leading the charge, driven by young, urban consumers with rising disposable incomes.

India, in particular, saw TBA (total beverage alcohol) volumes rise by 4 percent in the first half of 2024, with premium-plus spirits and Indian single malts in high demand. “Combine population growth with less regulation, and the result is significant value growth,” says Jason Holway, IWSR’s India expert.

3. Casual Consumption

Gone are the days when alcohol was reserved for formal occasions. The shift toward casual, spontaneous consumption is reshaping preferences, especially

among younger consumers. Brunches, barbecues, and after-work hangouts — all have now become key occasions for drinks like Prosecco, rosé wine, bitters, RTDs (ready-to-drinks), and spirit-based aperitifs.

In the US, sparkling wines and RTDs are becoming brunch staples, while Italy’s aperitivo culture continues to fuel Prosecco and bitters sales. Even in China, where economic challenges persist, casual drinking is on the rise.


RTDs are particularly benefiting from this shift, with Brazil (6 percent), Australia (4 percent), Germany (4 percent), the US and Canada (each 3 percent), all projected to post strong growth through 2028.

4. Beer Shines

While the appetite for premium products persists, the pace of premiumisation is slowing, especially in the spirits and wine categories. However, premium-plus beer and cider are bucking the trend, thanks to their affordability and perceived value. Premium beer volumes rose by 2 percent in the first half of 2024, in stark contrast to a 3 percent decline for premium-plus spirits and wine. Interestingly, ultra-premium “status spirits” (with retail prices of \$100 plus) continue to grow; now making up 5 percent of the global spirits market value.

5. Changing Shifts

Both how and where consumers buy alcohol is shifting. Particularly millennials are showing renewed enthusiasm for going out, boosting sales of Scotch whisky, liqueurs, and sparkling wine. Also, digital platforms are exerting growing influence even on in-store purchases.

IWSR data reveals that 63 percent of online alcohol buyers conduct thorough research before making a decision. Price comparisons, reviews, and product discovery through websites and apps are now crucial to the consumer journey. 



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Modi Illva set to disrupt BII Scotch Market

Riding on Rockford's legacy to conquer the Scotch throne

The Indian alcohol beverage industry is not just a race; it's a fiercely contested marathon of innovation, resilience, and strategic vision. Amidst this high-stakes landscape, **Modi Illva India**, under the dynamic leadership of **Managing Director, Abhishek Modi**, has emerged as a formidable contender. Over the past decade, the company has transformed into a ₹2,000 crore powerhouse, establishing a commanding presence in the premium spirits' segment. With bold ambitions to become the third-largest alcohol company in India within this space, Modi Illva is not just aiming high, it is strategically positioned and accelerating with purpose. First with Artic Vodka, then Rockford Reserve and now Singhasan, the company is all set to create new milestones.

■ **Shalini Kumar**

India is predominantly a whisky market, contributing around 68 percent year after year. And that perhaps explains why many companies start their premiumisation journey with the spirit. However, Modi Illva followed a different trajectory, beginning with Arctic Vodka in 2010, a brand from their joint venture partner, Illva Saronno, before deciding to test the waters in the whisky category. "We were clear from the start that we wanted to launch a premium whisky. The initial foray into vodka, while perhaps a different starting block, provided crucial momentum and established Modi Illva's commitment to quality within the Indian market," says Abhishek Modi. His statement reflects a long-term vision and commitment.

The real stride came in late 2011 with the introduction of Rockford Reserve. This premium

Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) whisky struck a chord with consumers, its appealing packaging and well-crafted blend finding an appropriate spot between established premium players and entry-level Scotch. "It was an instant success," Abhishek recalls. "People appreciated the packaging, the blend, and the

fact that the market was ready for something premium," he adds. Rockford Reserve quickly gained traction, followed by Rockford Classic in 2014.

Today, the 'House of Rockford' collectively moves 2.5 million cases annually, commanding nearly 20 percent market share in their operational states, just behind Pernod Ricard's Blenders Pride. Artic Vodka too found its footing and continues to grow, particularly its cranberry variant in states like Uttar Pradesh, where their vodka business has seen a remarkable 200 percent growth year-on-year. Abhishek notes a shifting consumer preference towards flavoured vodkas, indicating a dynamic market.

Growing Reach

The company's distribution network has expanded across 21 states and Union Territories,





One for the Throne

Singhasan is a strategic move to solidify the company's premium positioning and cater to the growing confidence in Indian spirits. With higher malt content than most whiskies in its category, it offers exceptional depth, richness, and a velvety finish. Furthermore, as it's wholly Indian, it avoids the heavy duties Scotch attracts, making it a high-quality yet value-driven offering.

with the portfolio thoughtfully extended. Artic Vodka now boasts a cranberry variant in a distinctive pink bottle, while Rockford Reserve and Classic are easily identifiable in green and brown respectively. Hoxton, a semi-premium whisky, was later introduced, strategically placed alongside Royal Stag. But the latest chapter in Modi Illva's premium story is the launch of Singhasan, a premium blended whisky priced to compete directly with the likes of 100 Pipers.

Singhasan is India's first premium 100 percent blended whisky crafted entirely from Indian malt and grain spirits, a bold statement in a market traditionally reliant on Scotch blends for its premium offerings. "It's been a great journey, profitable and rewarding," Abhishek states, the numbers backing his sentiment with a remarkable 55 percent CAGR since 2010, and a staggering 78 percent growth for the House of Rockford.

The decision to launch Singhasan directly addresses the question of why Indian consumers should remain solely dependent on Scotch blends. "The early reception since its full rollout in April has been very encouraging,

indicating a consumer appetite for experimentation and a pride in embracing Indian craftsmanship," Abhishek informs.

Consumer is King

Reflecting on the evolution of the Indian alcohol beverage industry since 2010-11, Abhishek highlights a significant transformation in the consumer mindset. Initially, Scotch-centric consumers were drawn to the 'imported' tag, but now the market has started witnessing a surge in the acceptance and pride surrounding Indian-made premium spirits. The successes of Indian single malts, spearheaded by brands like Amrut, and the emergence of premium Indian gins, have paved the way for brands like Singhasan. "Back then, in the premium space, it was just us and the multinationals. Now, many Indian companies operate in the luxury segment, competing directly with global brands. The consumer is open to trying Indian brands because they have seen that Indian companies can deliver globally competitive products," Abhishek explains.

Modi Illva is evolving in tandem with this shift, with plans to launch a full range of premium products. "That's what Singhasan represents," Abhishek asserts. "It's our first purely Indian blended premium

whisky, competing with Scotch. The positioning of Singhasan as India's first premium blended whisky crafted against Scotch, using only Indian malt and grain spirits, taps into the growing popularity of Indian single malts." He cites how Indian single malts now constitute 50 percent or more of the premium malt space in India. "So, if Indian single malts are already being accepted at the malt level, and if you have created a good product with strong packaging, a solid blend, and a well-thought-out marketing and distribution strategy, I don't see why the consumer would have any concern with blended whisky," he points out.

The recent entry of international giants like Pernod Ricard and Diageo into the Indian single malt category further validates the strength and future of Indian spirits, a narrative that Abhishek believes extends beyond domestic borders to a global stage, encompassing Indian malts, gins, and even the untapped potential of Indian rum. The primary target audience for Singhasan is the 25-35-year-old demographic – first time drinkers, young professionals – as well as current Scotch drinkers looking to trade up to a premium Indian brand they can be proud of. There is also another trigger in the



form of the mantra of 'drink better' post the pandemic.

Regulatory Challenges

However, the race hasn't been without hurdles. Abhishek points to the 'two biggest challenges': the labyrinthine pricing policies that vary wildly across states, sometimes preventing price adjustments, and the persistent bureaucracy and regulation that can stifle industry progress. As a board member of Confederation of Indian Alcohol Beverage Companies (CIABC), Abhishek is actively involved in advocating for change, emphasising a need for a more consumer-centric approach from policymakers. Despite these roadblocks, Modi Illva has learned to navigate the system. "Creating strong brands, high-quality liquid, and exciting new expressions for consumers," is how Abhishek puts it.

Abhishek acknowledges the 'yes and no' nature of government policy progression, comparing the Indian states to individual countries in Europe, with varying levels of openness. However, he sees a positive trend towards a more business-centric approach at the national level, with initiatives like 'Make in India' gaining traction. "Singhasan is a salute to that idea," he declares, questioning the necessity of relying solely on Scotch when quality Indian alternatives can be produced.

Marketing Moves

The company's marketing strategy adapts to the nuances of different city tiers. In Tier 1 cities, visibility in larger outlets is key, while Tier 2 and 3 cities rely more on promotions, tastings, and strategic outlet activations to build awareness and drive trials. Digital platforms play an increasingly

important role across all the tiers in educating consumers. The success of Indian single malts and gins has already laid the groundwork, making the consumer more receptive to premium Indian offerings like Singhasan. Having just launched in major markets across India, Singhasan will have strong presence in its operating markets across the country, building on encouraging test market responses.

Abhishek's goal is to capture at least 5 percent of the Bottled in India (BII) segment in next five years; a benchmark he believes will pave the way for organic growth. Reflecting on the performance of Rockford whisky and Artic Vodka, Abhishek confirms their exclusive availability in India, primarily due to consistently high domestic demand. Rockford currently holds a strong 20 percent market share in its segment, while Artic Vodka, despite a more state policy-dependent market, enjoys a 10 percent share in several states, performing even better in Delhi. Artic Vodka has seen a healthy CAGR of 15.8 to 16 percent since 2010, and Rockford has cultivated a loyal and 'sticky' customer base.

Abhishek shares anecdotes of enthusiastic customer feedback, including late-night calls expressing appreciation for Rockford's quality and a friend from the defence sector preferring

it over higher-priced international brands. He highlights that industry recognition instills confidence in Indian companies to venture into the premium segment, laying the foundation for the current rise of premium Indian spirits.

In the Long Run

Looking ahead, Modi Illva aspires to become the third-largest alcohol company in India within the premium segments. Their expansion plans include launching a range of premium and super-premium products to compete with imported brands, with Singhasan being the first step. They are also building a malt distillery, signalling their intention to enter the single malt category in the future, and are exploring opportunities in rum and gin. Furthermore, Modi Illva plans to leverage its existing distribution network to introduce an imported spirits' portfolio, with a potential launch in the coming year.

Abhishek stresses their focus on building capabilities, setting high internal quality standards, and establishing a strong foundation before launching super-premium expressions, including their own single malt, after their distillery is ready later this year. This measured approach prioritises quality, infrastructure, and long-term sustainability over rushing into the market. 📍



Shinji Fukuyo

brings the spirit of Japan

In a landmark visit that highlighted the growing synergy between Japan's storied whisky tradition and India's dynamic fine spirits landscape, Shinji Fukuyo — Chief Blender at Suntory — arrived in Delhi in late March to honour the legacy of Hibiki, the House of Suntory's iconic luxury Japanese whisky.

Fukuyo, the fifth Chief Blender in Suntory's century-long history, recently received the title of Master Blender of the Year at the International Spirits Challenge 2024, recognising his exceptional skill and dedication to whisky blending.

Introduced in 1989 to mark Suntory's 90th anniversary, Hibiki has become a symbol of harmony, blending malt whiskies from Yamazaki and Hakushu with grain whisky from Chita. These are aged in a mix of American white oak, Spanish oak, and rare Mizunara casks, resulting in a blend celebrated for its complexity and elegance.

At an exclusive masterclass in New Delhi, Fukuyo guided whisky connoisseurs and industry leaders through an immersive tasting experience, highlighting the Japanese philosophy of Wa (harmony), central to Hibiki's creation.

Expressing his appreciation at the masterclass, Shinji said, "It is always an honour to bring the artistry of Hibiki to whisky lovers in India, a market that truly appreciates the depth and craftsmanship of Japanese whisky. This event was an opportunity to showcase not only Hibiki's refined complexity

but also the dedication and meticulous craftsmanship that define Suntory. Looking ahead, we remain committed to expanding the reach of Suntory Whisky."



Rohan Jelkie, Head of On-Trade and Brand Advocacy and Programme Manager at Suntory Global Spirits, added, "Guided by Chief Blender Shinji Fukuyo's vision, each pour reflected refined elegance and innovation, deepening our connection with India's luxury spirits landscape."

Guests also learned about the symbolism of Hibiki's 24-faceted bottle — representing Japan's 24 seasons — its elegant washi paper label, and its regal Kokimurasaki (deep purple) hue, once reserved for Japanese nobility. These design elements reflect the Japanese aesthetic of Kacho Fugetsu, celebrating nature and the changing seasons.

During a Q&A session, Fukuyo noted the rising appreciation for luxury whisky among Indian consumers, emphasising how Hibiki's balanced profile resonates with their palate. He also shed light on the unique influence of Mizunara oak on the whisky's character.

The event reaffirmed the House of Suntory's commitment to building cultural and sensory bridges with India's discerning whisky audience. 📍



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Bourbon

becoming a lifestyle statement



The last five years, as indicated by the sales figures, have seen bourbon making significant inroads into the Indian market. This roadmap is set to improve further with the reduction in duties which may attract a new generation of bourbon drinkers. Taking stock of this scenario, **Sarang Kumar** opines that bourbon is all set to carve out a significant place in the Indian liquor scene.

Bourbon whiskey—the American spirit known for its bold character, smooth finish, and rich caramel notes—is fast making its mark in India's evolving alcohol beverage landscape.

Once a niche offering reserved for connoisseurs and collectors, bourbon is now finding favour with India's young, urban, and globally attuned consumers. In fact, India's millennial and Gen Z drinkers are driving this shift. Curious, experimental, and well-travelled, these consumers are eager to explore international spirits that offer both authenticity and flavour.

Bourbon fits the bill with its storied heritage, stringent production standards, and distinctive taste. Its smooth yet bold profile also makes it a natural fit for cocktails, another fast-rising trend among India's upscale bar-goers and home bartenders. Cocktail

culture is thriving in India's metro cities, and bourbon's ability to hold its own in classics like the Old Fashioned, Manhattan, or Whiskey Sour has only added to its appeal. Affluent professionals, frequent international travellers, and experience-seeking cocktail enthusiasts see bourbon not just as a drink, but as a lifestyle statement.

A Spirited Growth Story

The last five years have seen bourbon making significant inroads into the Indian market. From 2019 to 2024, the imported whisky category grew at a steady CAGR of 10-12 per cent. Bourbon, however, outpaced this average, with brands such as Jim Beam, Maker's Mark and Wild Turkey recording double-digit growth rates of 20-22 percent, particularly in the post-

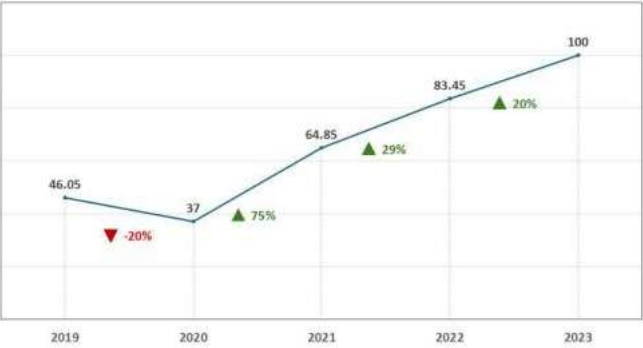


Illustration 1: Bourbon whiskey volume growth
Data Source: IWSR

pandemic period when premiumisation became a defining consumer trend.

What started as curiosity among a niche audience has now matured into a steady demand stream. Many consumers who previously gravitated towards Scotch are now broadening their palate to include American whiskeys, thanks to bourbon's distinct taste and mixability. The growth of American-style bars, the popularity of whiskey festivals, and the boom in home bartending during the coronavirus-triggered pandemic, all played a role in boosting bourbon's profile.

India's Bourbon Hotspots

Metros such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad continue to lead in bourbon consumption, driven by higher disposable incomes and increasing global exposure. Tier II cities like Pune, Jaipur, and Chandigarh are quickly catching up, buoyed by the spread of American cuisine, casual dining, and cocktail menus featuring bourbon as a hero spirit. Duty-free shops at airports remain a critical point of entry for many consumers, but the channel mix is broadening.



Premium liquor boutiques, modern trade retail, and online delivery platforms (where permitted) are making bourbon more accessible than ever.

A Game Changer Move

Perhaps the most significant development for bourbon in India is the recent reduction in customs duty—from 150 to 100 percent following the ongoing Indo-US trade negotiations. Though still high by global standards, this 50-point reduction has the potential to alter the playing field dramatically.

	Particulars	Costing INR		
		Old Custom Duty	New Duty	Custom
A	Import Price (INR)	150.00	150.00	
B	Custom Duty	225.00	150.00	
C	Total Cost of Goods (A+B)	375.00	300.00	
D	Importer's Margin & Expenses	375.00	300.00	
E	Wholesale Price (C+D)	750.00	600.00	
F	Excise Duty	725.00	650.00	
G	Distributors Buying Price (E+F)	1475.00	1250.00	
H	Distributor's Margin	147.50	125.00	
I	Retailer's Buying Price (G+H)	1622.50	1375.00	
J	Retailer Margin	100.00	100.00	
K	Retailer's Selling Price (I+J)	1722.50	1475.00	
L	VAT @25%	430.63	368.75	
	MRP	2153.13	1843.75	

Illustration 2: Impact of duty reduction on MRP

*Illustration is as per the Excise Laws of Delhi
- Importer's Margin has been assumed to be twice of COGS but varies as per the importer's strategy.

Lower duties mean more competitive retail prices. If importers and brands choose to pass on the benefit to consumers, bourbon could pose a serious challenge to the dominance of Scotch whisky, especially in the sub-₹ 5,000 segment. In a market as price-sensitive and competitive as India, even small changes in pricing can influence consumer preference and potentially reshape the category dynamics. Moreover, reduced duties are likely to encourage greater investment in the bourbon category, from marketing and brand-building to expanding distribution. This could also open the door to more small-batch, craft, and premium bourbon expressions entering the market.

The Road Ahead

While high state-level taxes and regulatory hurdles remain, the future looks promising for bourbon in India. The category aligns well with the tastes and aspirations of India's younger, more experimental drinkers. As awareness grows and pricing becomes more attractive, bourbon is poised to carve out a meaningful and possibly dominant—space in India's dynamic whisky landscape. 📍

Bourbon to be in the limelight soon!

It's not just the price reduction that will boost bourbon's popularity among whisky aficionados in India—it's also the growing appeal among a younger generation that is more open to experimental drinking and eager to explore new flavours irrespective of the price tag. As **Gaurav Sabharwal, Managing Director - India and South Asia, Forman India Private Limited**, puts it, bourbon is all set to attain a glorious peak, thanks to its distinctive flavour profile.



The one discerning fact that most alcohol producers would like to highlight is that the new-age Indian consumers are very discerning, have the ability to pay for premium and luxury brands, and believe in 'drinking better'. Collectively, this is driving premiumisation and growth in the market. Having said this, there is still low awareness and limited familiarity for bourbons in India, which has traditionally been a very Scotch-dominated market. But the tables may turn soon. The reduction in import duties on bourbon whiskey is good news and a step in the right direction.

It should lead to more brand launches and introductions in the bourbon category and investments behind category development initiatives which will be helpful in building stronger consumer demand for bourbon whiskey. Small wonder then that companies like Forman India Private Limited (Brown-Forman) are currently, and seriously, evaluating the implications of this positive step as pricing in India varies across states and is governed by each state's excise policies which are announced annually.

"This step definitely makes the bourbon category more attractive for existing as well as new companies," says Gaurav Sabharwal.

Portfolio Performance

It would be interesting to note how Brown-Forman's bourbon portfolio has performed in the Indian market. This would serve as an indicator of the potential that bourbon holds in India. Elaborates Gaurav: "Our American whiskey

portfolio in India is growing well with strong acceptance from new-age Indian consumers who are continuously looking to experiment, try new types of spirits and expand their repertoire. To give you an idea about our performance, Woodford Reserve and Jack Daniel's have more than doubled in volume in the last five years."

A significant majority of the company's business in India is driven by these two brands with Brown-Forman India holding leadership positions in the American whiskey category. There are certain factors that sets Woodford Reserve apart from other bourbons available in the market. The art of making fine bourbon first took place on the site of the Woodford Reserve Distillery, a national historic landmark, in 1812.

"Woodford Reserve comes from this place which Woodford Reserve now calls its homeplace. This is something which makes Woodford Reserve stand apart from many other bourbons in the market which are blends of bourbons from multiple distilleries," Gaurav informs.

From a product perspective, Woodford Reserve has a perfectly balanced taste which comprises more than 200 detectable flavour notes, from bold grain and wood to sweet aromatics, spice, fruit and floral notes. This truly makes Woodford Reserve a spectacle for the senses.

"Whilst we always knew it would be well-received by the discerning Indian consumers and mixologists with its rich and balanced flavourful profile and beautiful premium packaging, it has surpassed our expectations," Gaurav states. A Woodford Reserve

Defining Bourbon

Bourbon is a type of American whiskey that must be made in the U.S. and is characterised by a mash bill containing at least 51 per cent corn. It's then distilled and aged in new, charred white oak barrels. The final product must be bottled at a minimum of 80 proof (40 per cent alcohol by volume). Therefore, Woodford Reserve in Brown-Forman's portfolio, which meets these criteria, is a bourbon whiskey.

Interestingly, bourbons need not only come from any one specific state such as Kentucky. For instance, Jack Daniel's is a Tennessee whiskey because it is made in the state of Tennessee and follows the Lincoln County process.

Old Fashioned is a perfect way to enjoy this fine bourbon, he adds.

Making Bourbon Popular

Brown-Forman feels it is its responsibility as a market leader in American whiskey to develop the category by investing behind building awareness for brands such as Woodford Reserve and familiarity for the bourbon palate with Indian consumers.

It does so through several initiatives such as the recent successful Woodford Reserve Old Fashioned Month campaign, which was a step in this direction.

As part of this initiative, it partnered with the country's

leading 35 bars and mixologists in Gurugram, Mumbai and Bangalore. Lair from Gurugram and their head mixologist Amay Bisen won The Finest Old-Fashioned Bar and Bartender Award, respectively, and Amay will now be travelling to the Woodford distillery.

"Considering the small size of the American whiskey and bourbon category in India, we believe there is enough and more opportunity for all the companies to grow strongly in this country. Companies with bourbon whiskey

portfolio will benefit from developing and expanding the category rather than competing to take a pie of the small opportunity," Gaurav opines.

Meanwhile, the company is currently evaluating the implications of the positive step regarding price reduction in India, which varies across states and is governed by each state's excise policies.



New Opportunities

Just like other bourbon producers, Brown-Forman is very optimistic about new opportunities opening up for bourbon in India. "India is a key strategic market for Brown-Forman Corporation. The duty reduction opens more opportunities to invest in India and should positively influence our long-term strategy for the India market," Gaurav states. The company has always been at the forefront of evaluating fresh potential areas to introduce new brands and variants in India to meet the strong consumer desire for experiencing new premium whiskeys beyond Scotch; and anticipates bringing more innovations from its global Woodford Reserve and Jack Daniel's portfolio to India in the near future.

Building consumer awareness and driving education for American whiskey and bourbon are critical to grow the category. As such, Forman India is investing in these two areas with consumer marketing and advocacy initiatives. Participating in big consumer experiential platforms such as India Cocktail Week is one of the many ways in which it engages

with consumers. At the recently concluded 2024-25 edition of India Cocktail Week, the company gave the consumers an opportunity to experiment with its portfolio of whiskeys and make their own cocktail with a DIY (do it yourself) bar.

"We also engage with more than 400 bars annually through our product and brand training programme," Gaurav adds. Another initiative, as pointed out earlier, was the Woodford Reserve Old Fashioned Month which is now an annual feature in the company's activation calendar. With this platform, the company brings together India's leading mixologists, bars and consumers to build education and awareness – allowing mixologists to discover the versatility of Woodford – and offers consumers their own signature of world's leading whiskey cocktail – The Old Fashioned.

Roadmap for Bourbon


Interestingly, there has been more than two-fold increase over the last five years in the number of brands in the bourbon whiskey category. With growing



consumer desire to experiment and experience new types of spirits, companies like Forman India believe the bourbon category is at an inflexion point and positioned well for exponential growth. The recent duty reduction will be a key enabler to drive this future growth.

However, this growth will only happen if companies commit to India and strongly invest in developing the bourbon whiskey category. "We at Brown-Forman are committed to invest behind

our American whiskey portfolio with a long-term vision for India," Gaurav says.

India is a key strategic emerging market for Brown-Forman Corporation globally as India is expected to be the fastest growing market in standard and premium whiskey for next five years and will be a key growth market for the spirits' industry globally. 



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Bourbon aims for a lasting legacy

While the reduction in import duties will undoubtedly bring bourbon within reach of many whisky enthusiasts, it is also being popularised through various events and campaigns designed to elevate its status among alcoholic beverages. As **Diego Bianchi, General Manager (Emerging Markets and Barrel Select) at Sazerac Company** puts it, the time for bourbon in India has truly arrived, and the reduced tariff is simply another well-timed boost.



The recent cut in import duties on bourbon whiskey is no doubt a positive step forward in promoting bourbon brands in the Indian market. According to industry experts, this is just the beginning. It will pave the way for more premium bourbon brands to become available in India, helping to expand the category and educate consumers on what bourbon is and why it deserves a place on their shelves. India's whisky market, traditionally dominated by local spirits and Scotch, offers a unique opportunity for premium bourbons to establish a foothold.

"Educating the consumers about the unique attributes of bourbon overall and differentiating it from other premium spirits is critical," says Diego. Showcasing bourbon's versatility is equally important, as different mash bills result in varied flavour profiles. Weller, for instance, is a wheated bourbon, which makes it smoother and more approachable than those with a higher rye content.

India is also among the few markets where the consumption of spirits is not only growing but projected to continue across all categories, making it a key territory for American whiskeys. "As the world's largest whisky market, India plays a pivotal role in Sazerac's long-term growth strategy. In recent years, the country has seen a rising interest in premium American whiskey. The launch of Weller Bourbon earlier this year—one of the most awarded wheated whiskeys globally—underscores Sazerac's

commitment to bringing high-quality, premium spirits to Indian consumers,” says Diego.

Though the bourbon category is still in its infancy in India compared to other spirits, companies like Sazerac see strong growth potential driven by favourable economic trends, evolving policies, and shifting consumer preferences, alongside the reduction in tariffs. “We have received a strong positive response to our brands, with retail and on-premise distribution steadily increasing month over month as more consumers discover and fall in love with our products,” Diego confides.

Exclusivity Matters

For bourbon to thrive in India, it's crucial for producers to offer consumers something truly



Historic Origins

Since its origins in the Cognac region of western France, the Sazerac family name has commanded respect in the spirits industry. The original Sazerac de Forge et Fils was the spirit used in the first Sazerac Cocktail and by the mid-19th century, it naturally lent its name to the original Sazerac Coffee House. Between 1800 and 1850, Sazerac De Forge Et Fils Cognac arrived in New Orleans and quickly became a local favourite, spurring various iterations of the Sazerac House. Its historic locations and legendary patrons were instrumental in the development of a wholesale liquor business that eventually evolved into the global spirits company Sazerac is today.



unique, a philosophy that Sazerac fully embraces. The company owns the renowned Buffalo Trace Distillery in Kentucky, USA, known as the world's most awarded distillery and the oldest continuously operating one in America. Famed for blending tradition with innovation, Buffalo Trace continues to push the boundaries of bourbon-making through experimentation with mash bills, barrel techniques, and wood varieties.

This dedication to quality and innovation ensures a dynamic, globally relevant portfolio that resonates with whisky enthusiasts worldwide. Bourbon's global rise is being driven by the

premiumisation trend and the increasing popularity of cocktail culture. In India, where consumers have traditionally favoured other whisky categories, there's growing curiosity about diverse flavour profiles fuelled by greater exposure to international spirits. Bourbon's versatility as both a sipping whiskey and a cocktail ingredient enhances its appeal, positioning it as a standout choice. “This has resulted in a strong positive response from both consumers and mixologists alike,” Diego states.

Slow & Strategic

While a revised tariff structure will inevitably influence long-term

strategy for many bourbon brands in India, particularly in pricing, distribution, and marketing, Sazerac is one company which is not playing the tariff card as of now.

"It is not fundamental to our strategy. From the very beginning, our vision for India has been rooted in long-term ambition and strategic and sustained growth. Our aim is to introduce Indian consumers to the craftsmanship and heritage behind our premium bourbons, like Buffalo Trace and Weller, through carefully curated experiences and strategic partnerships, to build lasting loyalty and interest in our brands," Diego says.

Claiming Ground

India's whisky market presents both a challenge and an opportunity for premium bourbons like Weller. As such, Sazerac aims to raise awareness and elevate bourbon's premium appeal by introducing interesting expressions into the market.



Educating consumers about bourbon's unique distillation process and varied mash bills is central to this effort. Weller plans to tell compelling stories that celebrate its heritage, artisanal craftsmanship, and rich flavour profiles. "Through engaging and immersive campaigns, we will target whisky connoisseurs and premium spirit enthusiasts, showcasing the versatility of Weller in both classic and modern cocktail culture," Diego shares.

To amplify visibility and foster brand loyalty, Weller plans to collaborate with bars and mixologists to create bespoke experiences, while also leveraging strategic partnership with influencers and tastemakers to

position Weller as a sophisticated yet approachable option in India's growing premium spirits segment.

Sazerac, therefore, plans to gradually expand its footprint from major cities to other premium liquor markets across India. Its plans include hosting exclusive tasting events, offering masterclasses for bourbon lovers, and working with luxury hospitality partners. The company will also run digital campaigns highlighting the brand's heritage and smooth taste. By working with mixologists and influencers, Sazerac aims to reach a broader audience and ensure bourbon secures a spot among India's whisky favourites, a journey aided by the reduced tariffs. 📍



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DISCUS for full American Whiskey access

In a pivotal moment for U.S.-India trade relations, India has made a bold move by slashing the customs duty on American Bourbon from 150 percent to 50 percent. This landmark decision is set to open new avenues for collaboration and growth, particularly within the thriving Indian whisky market. Leading the charge is **Chris Swonger, President and CEO** of the **Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS)**, who views this reduction as a crucial step, albeit a partial one, towards broader trade expansion.

While American distillers welcome this breakthrough, Swonger emphasises the importance of extending similar reductions to other American whiskeys, such as Single Malt and Rye, to unlock the full potential of this bilateral trade opportunity. With ambitious plans underway, DISCUS aims to capitalise on this new development and deepen American Bourbon's presence in India, an endeavour that promises to strengthen the bond between American spirits and Indian consumers in the years to come.

■ Vikal Samdariya



India's historic decision to slash the custom duty on American Bourbon from 150 percent to 50 percent marks a major shift in the U.S.-India trade relations. How was this breakthrough received by bourbon and other whiskey producers across the United States?

India's announcement to reduce its tariff on Bourbon was welcomed by the U.S. distillers and viewed as an opportunity to increase exports to the world's largest whiskey market. However, India continues to impose a 150 percent tariff on other types of American whiskeys, such as American single malt and American rye whiskeys, along with other U.S. spirits. We'd like to see those reduced as well.

The U.S. had earlier proposed a 26 percent reciprocal tariff on Indian exports, following India's constructive step on tariff reductions. With this decision now postponed for 90 days, do you see this as a window for meaningful engagement? How may this development influence the positive momentum, particularly given India's significance as a key global market for whisky?

There is a significant opportunity within the next 90 days, particularly in light of the joint statement signed by President Trump and Prime Minister Modi in February 2025, which commits both parties to negotiating a trade agreement. According to media reports, negotiations are currently underway, and both sides have agreed upon the terms of reference for the agreement.



You've been a strong proponent of a "zero-for-zero" tariff model with key U.S. trading partners. Would this vision include India? If so, how do you see such a framework benefitting both U.S. distilled spirits exports to India and Indian alcoholic beverages entering the U.S. market?

We believe there is an opportunity to secure a reduction of India's tariff on the U.S. spirits. Setting aside the additional 10 percent universal tariff on imports from India, the U.S. and the European Union agreed to eliminate nearly all of their tariffs on imported spirits on a most-favoured-nation basis (MFN) in 1997. This led to a nearly 450 percent increase in bilateral trade in spirits between the U.S. and the EU. In fact, the U.S. has fair and reciprocal zero-for-zero tariffs with 51 countries.



The latest DISCUS export data for 2024 indicates a decline in bourbon shipments to India and other key markets. What were the driving factors behind this drop, and what corrective or growth-focused measures are being considered to reinvigorate exports to India, especially in the light of duty reduction?

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a significant rise in imports of wines and spirits from around the world to India. However, in 2024, the market stabilised, leading to a decline in imports, primarily due to importers holding increased stocks in their warehouses. The year 2024 was challenging globally for the spirits sector, including India, which led to a decline in imports, not limited to bourbon.

With the reduction in tariffs on bourbon, there is a growing interest from importers and global spirits companies to expand their portfolios. This is driven by the growing popularity of cocktails, where bourbon is often used as the base spirit. As Indian consumers continue to seek better quality and experiment with different spirits, it will lead to increased consumer demand for bourbon.

Despite the successful entry of global bourbon giants like Brown-Forman, Jim Beam, and Sazerac into India, and growing interest from the middle class and Gen Z to explore new whisky experiences, what has held back broader participation from other American companies in tapping the full potential of the Indian alcobev market?

India has undergone significant evolution over the past four years, with the introduction of new bourbons and the launch of new labels by global spirits companies operating in the country. The previously



Boosting Bourbon Since 2009

Since 2009, DISCUS has been promoting American spirits in India with the support of USDA, aiming to educate Indian importers and the media about the distinctiveness and versatility of American whiskeys and other spirits. In 2023, DISCUS launched a year-round campaign in partnership with the USDA. As part of this campaign, the in-market consultant conduct training, seminars, and account visits in key Indian cities to educate hospitality industry members about American whiskeys, including their heritage, taste profiles, production processes, proper tasting techniques, and their use in cocktails.



timid participation in the market has transformed, as evidenced by the increasing number of distilleries and brands exploring opportunities to participate in market promotions in India sponsored by DISCUS through its partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

As a leading trade body, what role does DISCUS play in promoting American spirits globally? More specifically, how does it plan to strengthen bourbon's footprint in India through partnerships, market-building efforts, and deeper consumer engagement? Can we expect more brands coming to India in the near future?

DISCUS, through its partnership with the USDA, is working to promote American spirits in India. A big part of the programme is introducing new brands to the Indian market. Currently, a number of small U.S. craft distillers are participating in Indian promotional events, including Proof and Wood, Uncle Nearest, and Virginia Distillery Company.

DISCUS plans to participate in ProWine Mumbai (October 31-November 1) and travel with a delegation of U.S. distillers who are looking to break into the Indian market. 📍

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Bourbon may move beyond 'fun' drink

Hitherto seen as a 'fun' drink enjoyed typically with colas, bourbon may soon acquire a more serious demeanour akin to that of scotch whisky, thanks to a sizeable reduction in import duties. This could gather in its wake a larger fan following and as **Arun Kumar, Co-Founder, Aspri Spirits**, states, bourbon players will now be enthused to focus more on the category and work on new developments to elevate its presence and appeal.



A ficionados of alcoholic beverages would no doubt have had a reason to cheer when the Indian government announced a reduction in import duties on bourbon whiskey from 150 percent to 100 percent in February this year. The immediate question for many in the industry would have been that whether bourbon will become more price-competitive, thus opening the doors to a broader consumer base. And if so, it would certainly accelerate category growth, attract a new generation of premium spirits enthusiasts, and pave the way for a stronger influx of bourbon brands into the Indian market.

"The revised tariffs should bring in some benefits in the longer run for the segment," agrees Arun Kumar, Co-Founder of Aspri Spirits, the company that has developed one of the largest sales and distribution networks for imported alcohol beverages across India and ISC, and constantly adapts to the unique and dynamic needs of the Indian spirits industry.

For Aspri Spirits, bourbon has been a recent addition to its portfolio and the current focus is on expanding both the width and depth of the brands. "We are quite satisfied with the progress in both the domestic and duty-free channels thus far," Arun adds.

Cheers for Bourbon

Given that the revised tariff may attract a larger consumer base, those in the bourbon game, including Aspri Spirits, are expected to lay greater emphasis on the segment's development. "The share of our bourbon portfolio in the overall mix is relatively small as of now but we will work on enhancing its presence," Arun confirms.

India is predominantly a scotch whisky market, with the majority of sales still dominated by that category. However, some bourbon brands have been in the market long before and are already well-established. This sets the stage for newer players like Aspri Spirits to focus on increasing visibility and accessibility of bourbon across various channels.

While industry players acknowledge that lower tariffs will bring in some advantages with better pricing, it may still be premature to speculate on specific retail pricing because much will depend on how state excise policies evolve. There's also the question of perception. Traditionally, bourbon has carried a 'fun' image, popularised by its drinking with cola. Now, it may be time to reposition it as a more serious spirit akin to scotch, one that appeals to mature drinkers. Arun concurs, "The bourbons in the Indian context seem to have been targeted towards a younger demographic and usually seen to be consumed as a mixer."

Premium Push

Interestingly, within the category there are several premium bourbons that have rich taste profiles, suitable for sipping—much like scotch or single malts. Greater emphasis will now be needed on promoting these premium options to attract scotch or malt enthusiasts to bourbon.

When asked about the USPs of Aspri's bourbon brands, Evan Williams and Elijah Craig, Arun explains, "Both have a great pedigree and are in different price segments." Evan Williams is younger in profile and works well as a mixer or in cocktails and offers new consumers a fresh taste experience. Elijah Craig, on the other hand, is an exquisite bourbon meant to be savoured on the rocks. Its taste profile is comparable to a well-crafted single malt and has received consistent appreciation.

Given such a status, Aspri Spirits has been pursuing a steady strategy of ensuring the width and depth of distribution which is crucial for the success of any brand in India. "A lot of emphasis at the moment is being placed on tastings and



getting consumers to interact with the products through the on-premise channel with also a presence in select retail. The response has been very positive," says Arun.

Taste Transition

Changing tariffs, evolving consumer tastes, and a maturing market all signal the beginning of a new era for bourbon in India. Until now, consumption in the category was largely driven through mixers but now the bourbon players may shift their focus to premium sipping bourbons, mirroring the journey of premium whiskies, which evolved from blended to single malts.

"If this had been initiated earlier, it would have assisted in building the bourbon category both from a younger profile and at the same time the premium 'sipping bourbons' targeted towards a more curious and discerning consumer discovering a new taste profile in the world of whiskies," observes Arun. Having said that, with the right push, the new journey for bourbon in India should now turn out to be an exotic one! 📍





Global wine consumption hits 60-year low

Global wine consumption is estimated at 214 million hectolitres (mhl) in 2024, marking a 3.3 percent decline compared to 2023, according to the latest report from the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV). If confirmed, this would represent the lowest level of global consumption since 1961.

This decline is attributed to a complex intersection of economic and geopolitical factors that have triggered inflation and widespread uncertainty. Additionally, changing lifestyle preferences, evolving social habits, and generational shifts in consumer behaviour, particularly in mature markets, have contributed to this downturn.

Despite the decline, wine continues to enjoy unparalleled global reach, with consumption now recorded in 195 countries. The report also notes that several populous nations, which already exhibit significant consumption, still present considerable untapped growth potential.

On the production front, global wine output in 2024 is projected at 226 million hectolitres, representing the lowest level in over 60 years and a 5 percent decrease compared to the previous year. This contraction has largely been driven by extreme and unpredictable weather events in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, highlighting the growing impact of climate change on viticulture.

The global vineyard surface area has continued to decline, falling by 0.6 percent to 7.1 million hectares in 2024. Although the rate of contraction has slowed, the trend is primarily due to vineyard removals in major wine-growing regions. However, some countries

are defying this trend. India, in particular, has seen significant vineyard expansion, with an average annual growth rate of 4.5 percent since 2019.

Global trade volumes remained steady at 99.8 million hectolitres, demonstrating the sector's resilience amid broader challenges. The total export value saw a marginal decline of 0.3 percent, reaching €36 billion. Nevertheless, the average export price held at a historically high level of €3.60 per litre, nearly 30 percent above pre-pandemic levels, sustained by inflationary pressures and limited supply.

OIV Director General John Barker acknowledged the substantial challenges confronting the global wine sector but stressed the potential for meaningful adaptation. He urged stakeholders to collaborate on climate change solutions, invest in research to understand emerging consumer segments, and reinforce global trade partnerships.

"Working together to develop solutions to climate change and making wine a beacon of sustainability; investing in research on new audiences so that we can see wine through their eyes; reinforcing our commitment to multilateralism and global trade: these are the elements that will lead the wine sector forward," said Barker.

The OIV's data, which includes inputs from more than 180 producing and consuming nations, provides a detailed snapshot of the global wine industry in 2024. The findings paint a picture of a sector in transition—marked by climate challenges, shifting consumption patterns, and geopolitical complexity—yet still characterised by resilience, innovation, and emerging opportunities. 📍



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Alcobev INDIA 2025

sets billion-dollar goal

On April 23, India's economic narrative was punctuated by a landmark event that promises to reshape the country's alcoholic beverage industry: the Alcobev India 2025 conclave. Jointly organised by the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) and the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), this day-long conclave brought together an impressive array of industry stalwarts, government officials, and policy experts. Their shared mission was to propel India's alcoholic beverage exports from the current USD 370 million to an ambitious USD 1 billion, while aligning with the national "Make in India" initiative.

A Spirited Start

The event commenced with a warm welcome by CIABC Director General, Anant S. Iyer, who outlined the industry's evolving landscape and the crucial role of policy reforms in unlocking its full potential. Deepak Roy, Chairman of CIABC, delivered the thematic address, drawing from his decades-long experience to advocate passionately for global promotion of indigenous spirits such as Mahua and Feni.

"When 'Tequila' can be synonymous with Mexico, 'Sake' with Japan and 'Soju' with Korea, the same we can achieve internationally with 'Feni' or 'Mahua', which have a rich cultural legacy. We need to get out of the old mindset and promote Indian heritage spirits," he said.



Embracing Innovation

The conclave featured a series of insightful panel discussions, kicking off with a deep dive into the Evolution of Indian Brown & White Spirits. Moderated by Alok Gupta, Managing Director of Allied Blenders & Distillers (ABD), the session explored how Indian spirits have matured over the time, with contributions from industry veterans like Rakesh Vasishta, National Sales Head at Piccadilly Agro Industries Ltd, Sudhir Upadhyay of Radico Khaitan, and Rahul Mehra, Co-founder of Third Eye Distillery. Rahul, who put Indian gin on the global map with the award-winning Stranger & Sons, stressed the need for innovation to challenge long-standing foreign dominance in the sector.

Subsequent discussions explored Decoding Market Trends, with discussions centred around consumer behaviour, experiential marketing, and digital outreach. Moderated by Anant S. Iyer, the session underscored the need for robust market insights and creative consumer engagement strategies. Key voices included Bikram Basu of ABD Maestro, Ashutosh Rajput of Alcobrew Distilleries, and Pallav Soin of Modi Illva, who stressed the growing demand for premiumisation and the pivotal role of sustainable practices.

Elevating Experiences, Packaging

One of the standout sessions, Revolutionising On-Premise Experiences, showcased how India's bar culture is evolving. Led by Paramjit Singh Gill, CEO of Globus Spirits' Consumer Division, the panel featured Vikram Achanta of Tulleeho, Amulya Pandit of Euromonitor International, Ajay Kakkar of Radico Khaitan and Neeraj Sharma of Sula Vineyards. Discussions revolved around virtual tastings and



innovative on-premise strategies to elevate consumer experiences while keeping pace with global trends.

Sustainability was the focal point of Session IV on eco-friendly packaging moderated by Varun Lohia, Head - Supply Chain and Procurement at ABD. Panellists included Anand Channapur of Alisha Torrent Closures, Praveen Malviya of Piccadilly Agro Industries, Dr. Juhi Gupta of Tetra Pak, Aditya Patwardhan of Renault Paper Products, and Karninder Verma of AGI Greenpac, who shared pioneering innovations in sustainable labelling and packaging solutions, a critical growth lever in an increasingly environmentally conscious market.



Regulation & Global Ambitions

As India eyes global expansion, regulatory clarity emerged as a recurring theme throughout the conference. Session V and Session VI addressed the industry's most pressing regulatory challenges, from excise policy stability to tariff barriers and state-level tax reforms. Panellists included senior bureaucrats like Harshita Attaluri, IPS – CMD, Kerala State Beverages Corporation, Raju Vaziraney –Director of CIABC, and Rajnish Singh, Founder of Dhvaen Law Practice, along with excise commissioners from Uttarakhand, Harish Chand Semwal, Madhya Pradesh's Abhijeet Agrawal, and Telangana's, Chevuru Hari Kiran. They shared their perspectives on streamlining regulations to foster industry growth and strongly advocated for a cohesive national policy to enable the industry to flourish domestically and internationally.

Meanwhile, whisky maestro Dhavall Gandhi underscored the importance of maturation strategies and category expansion to build globally competitive Indian brands.



Supporting this vision, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI), Dr. Subrata

Gupta pointed out the need for value addition and reduced wastage in India's agricultural processing sectors, noting India's lag behind countries like Thailand and Brazil. Enhanced processing of fruits, vegetables, and even meat could, he argued, synergise effectively with increased beverage exports, delivering higher farmer incomes and valuable foreign exchange.



Policy Meets Possibility

Abhishek Dev, Chairman of APEDA, underscored India's significant untapped potential in international markets, citing the rising global appreciation for Indian gins, beers, wines, and rums. Highlighting a target of increasing alcoholic beverage exports to USD 1 billion by 2030, he urged the industry to venture beyond domestic markets to build global brands.





Indian Brands Going Global

The final session looked outward, exploring how Indian brands can expand their global footprint. Moderated by Siddharth Banerji, Managing Director of Kyndal Group, Session VII brought together international business leaders and government officials to discuss free trade agreements (FTAs), advertising challenges, and the opportunities awaiting Indian brands overseas. Success stories from Rajiv Samant of Sula Vineyards and Sanjeev Banga of Radico Khaitan served as beacons of what is possible when ambition meets execution. Ranjit Singh, Joint Secretary at MoFPI and Dr. Tarun Bajaj, Director, BEDF at APEDA emphasised the importance of compliance, cultural adaptation, and building brands that resonate globally while staying rooted in Indian heritage.



Bridging gap between Centre & States



In a significant step for India's alcohol regulatory ecosystem, AlcoBev India 2025 hosted a groundbreaking interaction that brought together senior officials from the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, APEDA, and Excise Commissioners from various states to discuss measures aimed at advancing the alcohol industry.

This first-of-its-kind initiative was widely welcomed by industry stakeholders, as it aimed to foster collaboration between central authorities and state regulators. The discussion addressed longstanding challenges such as licensing bottlenecks, price fixation mechanisms, label registrations, and retail-level operations.

The collective objective was clear: to improve ease of doing business, create a level playing field across all liquor categories, and amplify the presence of Indian alcohol brands in both domestic and global markets.

The dialogue saw participants identify core areas of concern while jointly exploring actionable, pragmatic solutions. This collaborative spirit



reflects a growing consensus on the need for a more streamlined and supportive regulatory environment. The interaction signals a positive shift toward greater cooperation and policy alignment, paving the way for the sustainable growth of the alcohol sector.

The dialogue saw the participation by Dr. Subrata Gupta, IAS Secretary, MoFPI; Ranjit Singh, Joint Secretary at MoFPI; Abhishek Dev, IAS, Chairman, APEDA; Dr. Tarun Bajaj, Director, BEDF at APEDA; Harish Chand Semwal, IAS – Excise Commissioner, Uttarakhand; Vinay Pratap Singh, IAS- Excise

Commissioner, Haryana; Dr Adarsh Singh, IAS -Excise Commissioner, Uttar Pradesh; Harshita Attaluri, IPS – CMD, Kerala State Beverages Corporation; Chevuru Hari Kiran, IAS- Excise Commissioner, Telangana and Abhijeet Agrawal, IAS – Excise Commissioner, Madhya Pradesh.



Celebration of Spirits & Style

AlcoBev India 2025

culminated on a celebratory note, with a cultural performance sponsored by Radico Khaitan, featuring a unique fashion show titled “The Spirit Awakens”, by celebrated designer Jyoti Sachdev Iyer. Seamlessly blending the worlds of haute couture and fine spirits, the showcase transformed Radico’s iconic offerings like Magic Moments Vodka, Rampur Double Cask, Morpheus brandy Royal Ranthambore Heritage Collection Whisky, Sangam and others into stunning sartorial creations. Each ensemble was a narrative in itself, echoing the layered richness of the spirits they represented, all underscored by a live saxophonist’s sultry, and soulful melodies.

Speaking on her inspiration, Jyoti remarked, “The Spirit Awakens was a tribute to craftsmanship and creativity, drawing inspiration from Radico’s exceptional spirits to weave a visual and emotional journey.” 📍



Retailer's cartel in Maharashtra stifling the Wine industry

Maharashtra, the heartland of India's wine production, is steadily losing ground to Goa due to its archaic liquor laws and cartelised retail structure. What is urgently needed is a transparent, fair, and professional system that can revitalise the industry. As **Rajiv Seth** aptly points out, key reforms such as issuing new retail licences to dismantle the cartel monopoly, creating dedicated wine retail spaces with trained staff, rationalising excise and customs duties, and streamlining bureaucratic processes will pave the way for a more competitive market. These changes would not only support small wineries and importers but also ensure that consumers have access to a broader range of high-quality products.



Maharashtra, home to 52 of India's 54 wineries, faces a mounting crisis in its wine industry due to entrenched retail cartels and outdated excise laws. The state's liquor licensing system, unchanged since 1974, has effectively blocked the issuance of new retail licences for over four decades. This artificial scarcity has allowed existing retailers to form cartels—ranging from five to 80 shops—that dominate the market and squeeze manufacturers, particularly small wineries and wine importers.

These cartels exploit their collective buying power to enforce unsustainable trade schemes such as “buy one case, get one free” or multiple free cases during new product launches. However, these promotions rarely benefit consumers. Instead, retailers absorb the discounts to boost margins, leaving wineries to shoulder the financial burden. For small and mid-sized producers, launching a new product often turns into a financial black hole.

The exploitation does not end there. Retailers further impose exorbitant fees for shelf space, brand visibility,



and promotional activities. Charges for point-of-purchase (POP) displays, tasting counters, and even listing fees are disguised as “liquid charges” or cash incentives. This pay-to-play model creates prohibitive barriers for boutique wineries and importers without deep pockets, suppressing innovation and competition. Large liquor companies, with greater financial clout and cosy ties to excise officials, dominate the market, while smaller players struggle to survive.

Crushing Wine Importers

Wine importers are subjected to even steeper challenges. A 150 percent customs duty on imported wines is followed by state excise duties that can climb to 275 percent, all payable before the product hits retail shelves. After this financial strain, importers must still deal with cartelised retailers demanding free cases, high commissions, or excessive fees for shelf space.

Imported wines, often premium French or Italian labels, require informed staff to explain their origins, grape varieties, and food pairings. Unfortunately, most liquor shops lack trained sommeliers, leaving these wines to gather dust under improper lighting or temperatures that degrade their quality. Unlike whisky or vodka, which relies on brand familiarity, wines require a narrative—detail about the winery's geography, the grape's characteristics, or the wine's ageing process. Without the guidance of informed salespeople, consumers remain unaware of these wines' stories and attributes, limiting demand and stalling the growth of India's wine culture.

Goa's Progressive Policies

In stark contrast, Goa has implemented progressive alcohol policies that encourage new entrants and innovation. The state's excise framework allows brand owners to lease bottling units by installing a wine or extra-neutral alcohol (ENA) tank, avoiding heavy capital investment. This system helps existing units earn job-work income while allowing brand owners to produce and sell on favourable terms.

Goa's liberal policies have positioned it as a hub for brand launches and innovation. Meanwhile, Maharashtra, with its bureaucratic bottlenecks and outdated laws, is losing excise revenue, VAT, and job opportunities to its neighbour.

Wine Retail Gaps

Wine requires a retail environment very different from that of spirits. Knowledgeable staff or sommeliers are essential to guide consumers through varieties, terroirs, and food pairings. Personalised service fosters brand loyalty and enhances the customer experience. For example, explaining the difference between a Sauvignon Blanc and a Cabernet Sauvignon or highlighting a winery's sustainable practices can convert a curious buyer into a repeat customer.

However, Maharashtra's retail setup consists mainly of small, unregulated shops meant for quick spirit sales. These outlets lack the space, infrastructure, or



staff expertise to cater to wine buyers. The absence of dedicated wine sections, temperature-controlled storage, or meaningful customer engagement prevents consumers from exploring new wines or making informed decisions.

Despite the high taxes on wine, the state fails to provide consumers with a commensurate retail experience. The focus remains on revenue collection rather than reforming policies to support industry growth and consumer education.

Economic & Cultural Losses

This inefficient and exploitative retail system not only stifles innovation but also inflicts economic losses. Many liquor brands have moved operations to Goa, citing Maharashtra's rigid licensing regime, exploitative retailers, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Goa's tourism-driven demand, lower taxes, and relaxed norms attract new investments, costing Maharashtra crores in lost revenue and employment opportunities.

The situation is worsened by a system seemingly designed to protect established manufacturers. Lengthy approval processes, opaque decision-making, and resistance to reform discourage new players from entering the market. As a result, Maharashtra's wine industry, despite its potential, remains constrained by structural inefficiencies.

Roadmap to Revival

To reclaim its leadership in the Indian wine industry, Maharashtra must undertake comprehensive reforms like cracking down on retail cartels and reforming excise policies. By dismantling monopolistic practices, fostering competition, and adopting Goa's progressive model, the state can unlock the potential of its wine industry, attract investment, and meet the evolving demands of younger consumers. A new state retail policy should prioritise transparency, consumer education, and innovation, ensuring that small wineries, importers, and new brands have a fair chance to thrive. Only then can Maharashtra offer consumers a vibrant, diverse, and world-class wine culture while boosting its economy and creating opportunities for its youth. 📍



Navjot crowned Diageo's World Class India Bartender

The finale was a dazzling showcase of India's finest bartending talent. Sixteen of the nation's most innovative mixologists stirred up cutting-edge creations, crafting cocktails that pushed the very limits of innovation. Judged by a distinguished panel of global brand ambassadors and industry stalwarts, participants were assessed on every detail — from flavour pairing and technical precision to storytelling and the artistry of presentation.

Navjot stood out with his intuitive understanding of flavours, compelling presentation, and the sheer passion he brought to each pour. Speaking about his win, he reflected, "Winning the World Class India Bartender of the Year 2025 title is a moment of immense pride for me as this platform gives a chance to the most dynamic and inspiring mixologists in India."

But the World Class Festival 2025 was far more than just a competition. The event spotlighted sustainable ingredients, indigenous flavours, and progressive approaches that hint at the exciting future of mixology in India.

Complementing the mixology marvels was a pulsating music line-up that turned the evening into a full-blown celebration. Performances from SAGE, Sheral b2b Bombie, Elsewhere In India, Nash b2b Nida, and Tech Panda x Kenzani created a vibrant and energetic atmosphere, capturing the spirit of innovation and festivity.

With the curtains falling on the World Class India Finale, all eyes now turn to Toronto, where Navjot will carry the hopes of India onto the global stage.

"We are proud to have created an initiative like World Class, which empowers mixologists to push the boundaries of their artistry, elevate their skills, and showcase them on the world stage. Navjot Singh's remarkable win this year is a testament to the immense talent and creativity thriving in India's bartending scene. We are excited to cheer him on as he represents India at the global finals in Toronto," said Anchal Kaushal, Vice President-Consumer Marketing, Diageo India. 📍

A spectacle of skill and innovation unfolded under the dazzling lights at Le Méridien Gurgaon on April 12, as Diageo's World Class India Finale 2025 concluded with an unforgettable celebration of mixology, creativity, and ingenuity. More than just a contest, the evening served as a resounding celebration of India's ever-evolving bartending culture, a rich and dynamic landscape shaped by precision, passion, and pioneering spirit.

Following months of rigorous competition, marked by technical mastery and artistic flair, Navjot Singh of Lair, New Delhi emerged victorious, securing the coveted title of World Class India Bartender of the Year 2025. This win not only signalled the end of an inspiring journey, but also set the stage for his next challenge, to represent India at the World Class Global Finals in Toronto, Canada from September 28 to October 2.

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For most whisky lovers, a favourite dram is a matter of preference. But for a rare few, it becomes a way of life. **Dennis Steckel** from Sweden is one such rare spirit — a whisky aficionado whose love for Amrut Single Malt runs so deep that it's inked into his very skin, and woven into the fabric of his everyday life. Founder of two exclusive whisky clubs, with a personal collection that reads like a love letter to Amrut's finest creations, Dennis isn't just a fan; he's a devoted ambassador of the Indian whisky that captured his heart from the very first sip. If you were to ask Dennis to describe Amrut whisky, he will say it embodies family, love and devotion.

His story is one of passion, perseverance, and a heartfelt mission to share the magic of Amrut Single Malt whiskies with the world, writes **Bishan Kumar**.



Dennis is a logistics professional with IKEA and a junior league football coach in Sweden. His first encounter with Amrut led to instant love. “At first, I was intrigued by the name Amrut and then when I had my first sip, the endearment to it hit me immediately,” he recalls, noting it quashed his scepticism about Indian whisky. Starting with Amrut’s core single malt, he quickly ventured into exploring different variants, often travelling great distances to procure bottles.

Dennis started looking throughout Europe for every Amrut expression he could find, often making trades for sought-after single malt scotches he owned. “Some people could not understand why I was giving away scotch whisky and wanted Indian whisky,” he says with a laugh. He now has a collection of over 250 bottles of Amrut, including some of the rarest releases like Greedy Angels 12 Year Old, and the first Blackadder independent bottling from 2008.

The Inner Circle

Dennis first co-founded an exclusive whisky club in Sweden, the Elme Uisge Academy and later set up the Amrut Fever Club in 2016, and soon there were 235 members in the club and another 500 in the messenger group. Both are closed groups that open once a year. Only select members of the messenger group are then invited to join the club.

Over 100 applicants are still patiently vying for acceptance into the club, which convenes only four times a year. Each session exudes sophistication, and members eagerly anticipate the opportunity to share in Dennis’s passion for Amrut.

Memorable Moments

At 51, Dennis lives in Älmhult, the birthplace of IKEA, with his wife Linda and their three children—Tea (22), Liam (20), and Disa (18). But his connection to Amrut is so profound that he has made it a point to visit the distillery in India.

His first trip in August 2016, just eight months after establishing the Amrut Fever Club, was exhilarating, marking his inaugural journey to India and meeting Amrut representatives for the first time.

“It was really exciting in every way as I had never been to India and had not met anybody from the distillery, except for Ashok Chokalingam whom I had met in Sweden while he was doing some masterclasses,” Dennis narrates.

Returning in 2018 with Linda, he was eager to showcase the brand that held such importance in his life. “It was very important for me to show Linda why I put in so much energy and time towards my big passion and how much Amrut valued me,” he says.

When they visited the distillery on July 25, at the end of the tour Dennis noticed two new buildings that had not been





there during his first visit. These were the seventh warehouse and a new distillery plant. It was the day the plant was to be inaugurated and Dennis did not want to lose the opportunity of clicking photographs of the event. "To my extreme surprise, the Managing Director Rakshit Jagdale approached me and said that it would not be possible to take photographs while cutting the ribbon. He was offering

A Personal Mission

Dennis Steckel's mission transcends mere whisky appreciation; he strives to introduce Amrut whisky to as many people as possible. His earnest passion has made him a respected figure in the European whisky community, earning him both admiration and envy from brands worldwide.

"I'm doing a lot of tasting in Sweden, I call them Amrut Masterclasses where I'm telling the story of Amrut and my journey but also taking them on a special taste journey. From what I know, I'm the only one doing this kind of special taste journey," he claimed.

me the chance to inaugurate the plant. It was one of my most emotional moments and I was thrilled, to say the least," he recalls.

There are many such Amrut-related incidents that Dennis often weaves into heartfelt stories to share with club members. One poignant memory involves the Amrut Greedy Angels 12 YO, a whisky he sought to enjoy with his father. "I heard a friend of mine got hold of one so I asked him to exchange the

bottle. When I told him I had a special release of a Macallan 1972 to exchange, we agreed on a deal. When he received the Greedy Angels he had it in his belongings for less than 24 hours before I drove to him so we could do the exchange," he recalled.

Trading a Macallan 1972 for a second bottle, he surprised his dad by intending to open the valuable €1,200 bottle that evening and that spontaneous choice turned into a cherished memory. 📍





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Tokaj, Bull's Blood, & Hungary's Finest

There are times when I've felt that the exalted status granted to some well-known wines was exaggerated. And then, there are moments of pure joy in uncovering wines from countries rarely mentioned in oenophile circles or the pages of wine critics. **Hungary** is one such gem — a land with a rich winemaking heritage and provenance, whose wines, once prized by monarchs for centuries, have remained modestly in the shadows, seldom proclaiming their legacy to the world.



■ Naveen Gupta

From a country that once seemed to take little pride in its local grapes, the pendulum has now swung towards Hungarian winemakers extensively using native varieties, while also embracing international ones.

Hungary is predominantly a country of indigenous grapes (223 varieties), with 70 percent of the grapes grown being white. The most prominent among these is the structured, racy and age-worthy Furmint, which produces concentrated, high-acid, premium white wines. It offers a flavour profile of apples

when young, developing into notes of nuts and honey with age. Exceedingly versatile in expression, it appears in still, sparkling and dessert wines. For the aromatic character it lacks, Furmint is often blended with another native grape, Hárslevelű, which is rich in sugar and aromas.

In addition to whites, Hungarian wines include full-bodied reds, sparkling wines, and the glorious dessert wines from Tokaj.

Some of the finer Hungarian sparkling wines are made closer to the capital, Budapest. Crafted using the traditional method (the same as Champagne), they strike a fine balance between minerality and fruit, with vibrant bubbles that add a celebratory charm.

Love for Bulls Blood

The full-bodied red wine that Hungary is internationally best known for is 'Bulls Blood', or Bikavér in Hungarian. Legend has it that during the 1552 Siege of Eger, Hungarian soldiers, vastly outnumbered while defending Eger Castle against the Ottoman Turks, were given copious amounts of red wine to regain courage and strength. The wine liberally stained their beards, and under its influence, they fought with renewed vigour. Seeing the red stains and their fearless resurgence, the enemy believed they had consumed bull's blood,



and retreated. This myth is the origin of the name for this bold, full-bodied red from Hungary.

Made primarily from Kadarka and Kékfrankos, with small additions of international grapes, its most famous expression comes from Eger in the north, though it is also produced in Szekszárd in the southern region of Pannon. It symbolises strength, courage, and a deep connection to the Hungarian culture.

Liquid Gold

I often use the term 'liquid gold' to describe some of the fine dessert wines from Tokaj, not just for their golden hue, but for their balance, texture and, not the least, their price. These wines range from the traditional lusciously sweet styles to modern ones with lower sugar content.

Hungary's dessert wines are exceptional due to a specific climatic phenomenon that occurs in only a few regions globally, but is most prolific in Tokaj. The unique conditions encourage the development of a fungus called *Botrytis cinerea*, which draws moisture from the grape berries, concentrating their sugars.

These botrytised berries, called Aszú, are then painstakingly hand-picked over multiple rounds to make wines known as Tokaji Aszú. This traditional method, with its many nuances, is among the most

expensive winemaking processes in the world and yields some of the globe's most treasured wines. Despite their sweetness, the wines are beautifully balanced by acidity, resulting in a refined structure with honey, apricot, citrus, and spice notes on the palate.

Another rare varietal, Tokaji Esszencia, is made only from the free-flowing juice of the Aszú berries and only once every few years. These wines are so high in sugar that fermentation can take years, and they possess the potential to mature over decades.

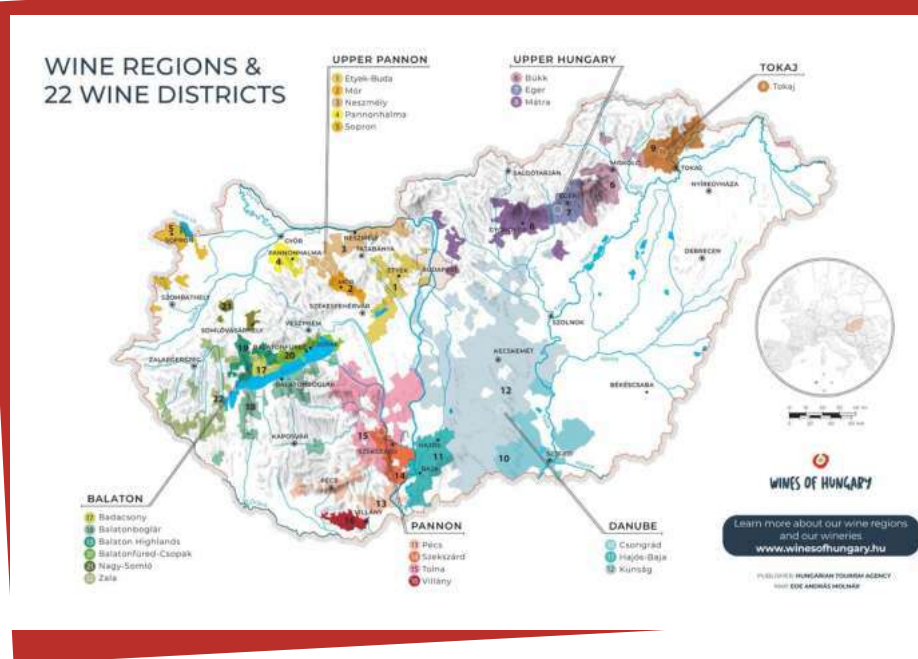
There are other sweet wine styles too. Szamorodni (meaning 'as it comes') contains both botrytised and non-botrytised grapes, resulting in a lower sweetness level than Tokaji Aszú. A more modern style called 'Late Harvest' is made using a completely different process without botrytised grapes and is lower still in sweetness.

My conversations with several winemakers revealed that most of them are ambitious and enthusiastic about putting Hungary on the map for dry wines. While rooted in tradition where needed, they are equally open to experimentation and modern winemaking techniques.

So, if you have not gone Hungarian till now, a perfect evening could open with the mineral-rich sparkling with some cheese, followed by a main course served alongside a generous pour of vintage Bull's Blood, and concluded with a dessert of Tokaji Aszú 6 Puttonyos.

It doesn't get any better than that! 📍

The author is based in Singapore and is a wines and spirits educator, judge and commentator. He holds the Wines & Spirits Education Trust, UK (WSET) Level 3 certification in Wines, Level 3 in Spirits, and Level 1 in Sake.





India's top 100 Alcohol Retailers ranked & honoured

In its inaugural edition, the India Drinks Retail Awards (IDRA) has honoured the 100 top alcohol drink retail outlets in the country and their owners. The evening brought together industry leaders and top-tier retailers who are shaping the future of India's alco bev landscape.

The gala night and awards ceremony was hosted on April 29, 2025, at Le Méridien, Gurgaon.

IDRA is a platform that has been set up to rank the top retailers in the most alcohol friendly states in the country. For the inaugural year, the IDRA rankings focused on 11 individual cities and Goa, chosen for having the most extensive and modern alcohol retail networks. These included, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Greater Mumbai, Pune, Jaipur, Gurugram, Noida, Lucknow, Kolkata, Guwahati, and Shillong.

Mansionz by Living Liquidz, founded by Mumbai entrepreneur Mokksh Sani, and Tonique, founded by Hyderabad businessman Anith Reddy, took home the top honours in the 2025 rankings.

Mansionz was ranked No. 1 in both Mumbai (jointly with World of Wines) and Bengaluru, while Tonique secured the top spot in Hyderabad and Pune. Other regional leaders included Vaz Enterprises (Goa), The Liquor Mart (Jaipur), The Liquor Warehouse (Gurugram), The Liquor Exchange (Noida), Vina Alkohol (Lucknow), Hedonne (Kolkata), The Party Store (Guwahati),

and The Barrel & Shillong Wine Company (joint No. 1 in Shillong).

In addition to the city rankings, two special awards celebrated outstanding contributions to the industry. Mokksh Sani was named 'Innovator of the Year' for pioneering new practices in alco bev retail, while Anith received the 'Industry Icon' lifetime achievement award for his role in shaping the modern Indian alcohol retail landscape.

Initially, 250 outlets were shortlisted from 400 nominations that were received from industry insiders and experts based in the targeted cities and Goa. The shortlist was further pruned to 100 outlets by the IDRA core team after visiting and evaluating each of these stores. The evaluation was based on a standard criterion drawn up with help from retail industry experts.

The factors used in the assessment include store design, layout & ambience, efficient merchandising, range of products on display, level of staff knowledge

in the area of spirits and wines, customer service, and quality of engagement. Key factors such as optimal lighting, air-conditioning, clear pricing on products, effective product categorisation and display, temperature control systems for delicate products like wines, beers, and cigars, hygiene and cleanliness, as well as additional services such as tasting rooms and gift wrapping, were also integral to the assessment. 📍



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Piccadilly unveils Indri Founder's Reserve 11YO

Piccadilly Agro Industries Ltd. has unveiled the Indri Founder's Reserve 11 Year Old Single Malt Whisky, a rare and remarkable tribute to the company's visionary founder, Pt. Kidar Nath Sharma, who turned a family business into the diversified Piccadilly Group.

Aged for 11 years in ex-Bordeaux red wine casks and bottled at a robust 50 percent ABV for India (and an even bolder 58.5 percent for international markets), this limited-edition whisky embodies the extremes of its birthplace in Haryana's subtropical north.

Only 1,100 bottles of this exclusive release have been released worldwide—550 for India and the remaining for select international markets—underscoring its rarity and premium positioning.

ABD launches Golden Mist French Brandy

Allied Blenders and Distillers (ABD) has launched a new brandy, Golden Mist, in Karnataka, marking its entry into the fast-growing prestige brandy category. It is aged in French oak casks and features a deep amber colour, a smooth texture, and a flavour profile described as balancing grape notes with hints of liquorice, honey, and spice.

Golden Mist will be sold in 750 ml, 375 ml, 180 ml and 90 ml packs at ₹970, ₹485, ₹235 and ₹120, respectively across Karnataka. In addition to standard glass packaging, the 180 ml brandy will be available in a "Hippy pack," designed in a gold finish.



IndoBevs launches Eden Whisky in India

IndoBevs, in collaboration with Australian distillery Glen Eden Distillers Ltd., has launched Eden Whisky in India.

Crafted exclusively for the evolving Indian palate, Eden Whisky is a true masterpiece, blending the finest malts to create a vibrant and well-balanced profile. It boasts rich notes of spicy grapefruit, fresh gooseberries and lime marmalade, complemented by enticing aromas of Doyenne pear and glazed apple, with whispers of vanilla.

According to Geetika Mahandru, President of IndoBevs, the company is also planning to launch Glen Eden Single Malt and Glen Eden Blended Scotch soon that is set to redefine the premium whisky landscape in India.

Himmaleh launches first pure himalayan Agricole rum

Himmaleh Spirits has launched Neoli Himalayan Rum, a trailblazing spirit that marks a new era for Indian rum. Touted as the world's first white pure single himalayan Agricole-style rum, Neoli is distilled in the scenic highlands of Kumaon, setting new standards for craftsmanship and terroir-driven spirits.

Neoli is uniquely crafted from fresh sugarcane juice, spontaneously fermented and distilled in a double retort pot still, an Indian first. The result is a vibrant, smooth white rum with a subtle vanilla aroma and a crisp sugarcane finish, bottled at 49 percent ABV.

It is currently available only in Goa and Uttarakhand at ₹3,000 and ₹2,700, respectively, and is posed for global rollout soon.



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WSCCI hosts inaugural session in Delhi

The newly established Wine & Spirits Circle-India (WSCCI), an exclusive group for discerning wine and spirits enthusiasts, recently held its inaugural session in New Delhi.

Themed 'Pinot Noirs of the World,' the event featured a tasting of six distinct wines from renowned Pinot Noir-producing regions: Central Otago (New Zealand), Yarra Valley (Australia), Chile, Willamette Valley (USA), and two wines from Burgundy (France), one of which was a prestigious Grand Cru. The evening, conducted in a masterclass format, began with a general presentation on wines, followed by an in-depth exploration of Pinot Noir as a grape variety, and concluded with tasting notes on each of the selected wines.

WSCCI is the brainchild of Singapore-based Naveen Gupta, who serves as the convenor. His vision is to create "a very select community seeking knowledge, with a strong like-minded social element." With an emphasis on quality, the wines for the event were sourced from overseas and stored meticulously at the correct temperature to preserve their integrity.

Naveen, a former Wealth Management banker turned Management Consultant, brings impressive credentials to the initiative. He holds WSET Level 3 certifications in wines and spirits, as well as Level 1 in sake. Additionally, he is an instructor at a leading hotel management school in Singapore and holds certifications in coffee and cocktails. His expertise has been recognised by the Embassy of Hungary in Singapore, which appointed him as their Wine Champion during the Hungarian Month celebrations last year.

A key highlight of the evening was the participation of Master of Wine (MW) Jackie Ang from Singapore. MWs are among the elite in the wine world, with only

425 individuals worldwide holding this esteemed qualification. Jackie, an associate of Naveen, boasts an impressive academic background, with a master's degree from Cambridge and a PhD from Oxford. Currently working as a Research Scientist in Singapore, he possesses a profound passion for wines. Logging in remotely, he engaged with attendees and delivered a concise yet insightful history of Pinot Noirs.

Among the attendees was Sharad Madhok, a former Group CFO turned entrepreneur, who described the evening as "a great knowledge session" that helped him better appreciate and differentiate various wines. He noted that "wines tasted much better when one understood their origins, soil types, history and geography."

The event was elevated by an exquisite food and charcuterie selection curated by the hosts of the evening, Surangana and Sandeep Jain, along with their talented daughter, Shreya. The spread was so impressive that it was said to rival that of any five-star hotel.

Sandeep, a passionate Pinot Noir enthusiast, remarked, "I wanted to know about Pinot Noir wines, as it has been my favourite grape." He found the presentation highly informative and expressed keen interest in "attending more such sessions" to further enrich his knowledge.

Following the success of its launch in Delhi, Naveen now plans to expand WSCCI's footprint to Mumbai and Bengaluru. Future events and masterclasses will explore themes such as 'Whiskies of the World' and 'Sparkling Wines of the World.'

With such an ambitious vision and a strong foundation, WSCCI is certainly a space to watch, with much more to unfold. 📍



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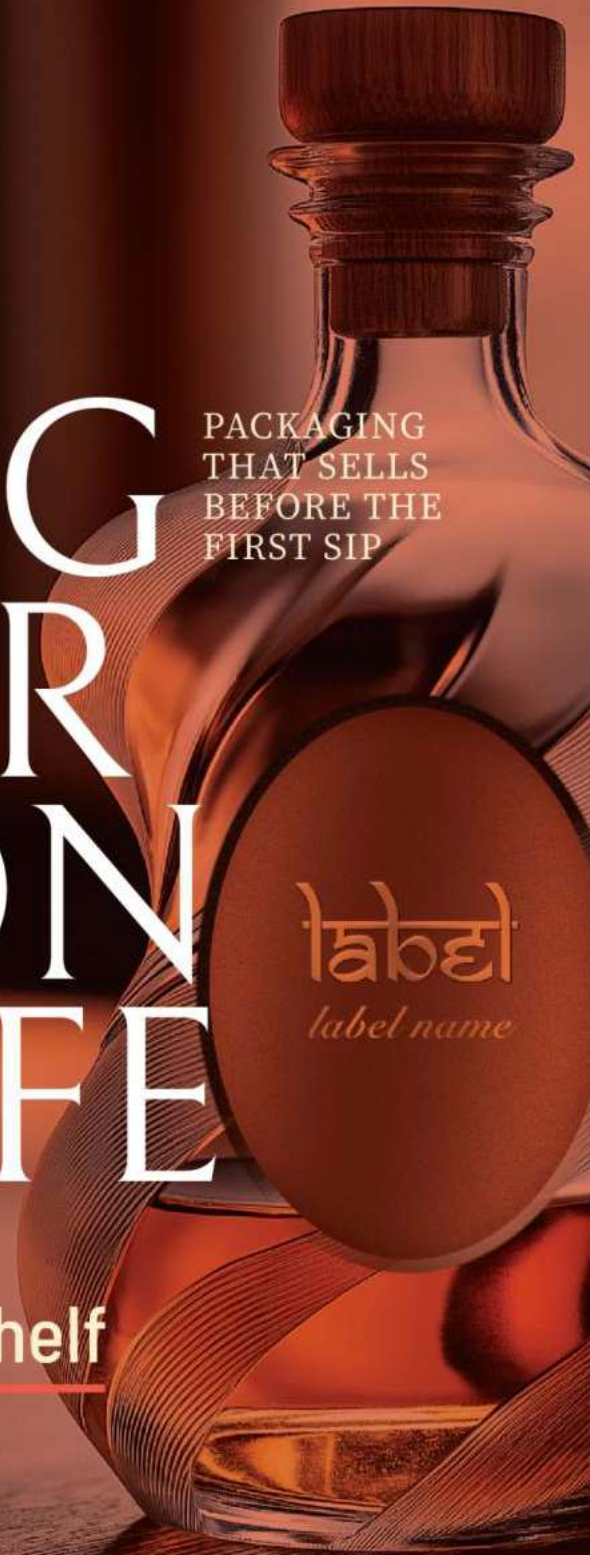
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Are restaurants ready for *Sustainable Dining?*

Walk into a modern Indian restaurant today, and chances are you'll see a familiar phrase printed proudly on the menu – 'Farm to Table'. It's a label that suggests freshness, traceability, and eco-consciousness. But in a rapidly evolving culinary landscape, is that enough?

India's top chefs are posing a pressing, future-facing question: What's next? The answer, it appears, is in a far more profound, systemic change—one that is disrupting the very economics, operations, and creative underpinnings of the hospitality sector.



Kritika Pushkarna

In the kitchens of India's fine dining establishments, a quiet but determined transformation is unfolding. Beyond the artfully plated dishes and elegant service, a deeper shift is reshaping the gastronomic landscape—one rooted in sustainability, not as a fleeting trend, but as a deeply held belief. From zero-waste cooking to eco-conscious bars, chefs across the country are forging a new path where conscience meets creativity.

Beyond the Buzzword

"Sustainability is no longer just about using fresh produce,"

says Chef Regi Mathew of Kappa Chakka Kandhari. "It's about mindset, logistics, relationships, and respect—for food, farmers, and tradition." For him, it means investing in how produce is grown and honouring culinary heritage.

Chef Sarfaraz Ahmed, Corporate Chef at Passion F&B India, views sustainability through a broader lens: "It's also about work culture, saving energy and water, relying on renewable resources; not just reducing food waste." His kitchen conserves water, uses free-range chicken, and prioritises pesticide-free vegetables.

At Avatara, Head Chef Sanket

Joshi runs a near-closed-loop kitchen. "Everything is utilised—peels, seeds, even skins," he says. "A butternut squash might become a purée, a mousse, and its peel might flavour a curry." This ethos, he notes, comes from his mother's kitchen, where waste was never a choice, but an opportunity.

Innovating with Less

Hyper-local, seasonal sourcing comes with challenges like short growing seasons, inconsistent supply, and the inexorable rhythms of nature. Yet these very constraints spark innovation. Chef Sanket recalls having to scrap a pickled

broccoli dish mid-menu due to lack of supply: "It's frustrating, but it forces us to redesign the dish entirely."

For Chef Regi, innovation means reinterpreting traditional dishes for today's diners. Meanwhile, Chef Sarfaraz takes a strategic approach—creating multiple course menus (14, 10, and 6) that reuse ingredients in different formats. "Leftovers from one dish become the hero in another course," he notes.

Cost of Going Green

But a crucial concern remains: can upscale dining truly afford to be sustainable? Chef Sanket believes local sourcing helps control costs—less spoilage, higher quality, no middlemen. "When we use all parts of an ingredient, it's max yield with minimal waste."

Chef Regi agrees, noting direct sourcing benefits both chefs and farmers. "I'd rather pay the farmer well than pay a premium to a distributor. It adds value to the plate."

However, Chef Sarfaraz points to customer expectations as the largest challenge. "People want organic, free-range and pesticide-free produce, until they see the price. We can't always recover costs, especially when competition is tight and patrons are budget-conscious." Yet he remains optimistic: "Demand drives supply. As more diners choose sustainable options, producers will scale up. We're already

seeing farms like FirstAgro in Bengaluru offering zero-pesticide produce, but scale and affordability remain the next frontier."

Back to the Roots

India's culinary heritage, in many ways, offers sustainable solutions. All three chefs stress the importance of looking inward for sustainable inspiration.

"Our mothers were sustainable cooks before the word even existed," says Chef Regi. "Kanji (fermented rice water) is one example of how Indian kitchens ensured nothing was wasted." He also cites thick-bottomed pots, slow cooking, and communal dining as naturally energy-efficient practices.

Chef Sarfaraz highlights the versatility of Indian ingredients. "We've always practiced nose-to-tail and stem-to-seed cooking. A single vegetable can become a curry, chutney, or a pickle. That ingenuity isn't new—we just forgot to celebrate it."

For Chef Sanket, sustainability is also an educational tool. "When diners eat at our restaurant, they're not just tasting food; they're learning about millets, lentils, and seaweed, sustainable ingredients they've never considered."

Green Spirits

Bars, too, are going green. Bartenders are foraging herbs, repurposing waste, and carbonating in-house to

reduce impact. "Orange peels can be turned into infusions, and spent herbs can flavour syrups," says Chef Sanket. Devi Singh, winner



of the Camikara Bartender Challenge 2025, agrees:

"Sustainability in cocktails means giving new life to what's usually discarded." His 'Discarded Highball' uses mint stems, pineapple skins, orange peels, and coffee grounds. "Instead of letting them go to waste, I turned them into a homemade soda by adding sugar and balancing it with malic and citric acid."

What's Next?

The future of fine dining seems to be where form meets philosophy. But can sustainable dining still be glamorous? Chef Sanket believes so. "The Michelin Green Star proves that elegance and eco-consciousness can go hand in hand." Chef Sarfaraz is more measured. "Fine dining will always have glamour. But it can't be only about greens, it has to strike a balance."

Chef Regi believes a shift is already taking place. "It's not about labels anymore; it's about values. If chefs remain rooted in heritage, source responsibly, and educate their guests, sustainability will become part of a restaurant's DNA, not a passing trend."

Some restaurants are leading the way with quiet confidence. Though obstacles persist, from cost pressures to supply chain gaps, a new gastronomic language is being scripted. 📍



Fairmont Mumbai opens its doors



Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, part of global hospitality leader Accor, in partnership with Shrem Airport Hotels, has officially opened the grand Fairmont Mumbai. This iconic new property marks Fairmont's second hotel in India, following Fairmont Jaipur.

The hotel is a dazzling tribute to 1920s Art Deco elegance, infused with contemporary design and world-class amenities. It features 446 luxuriously appointed rooms, including elegant suites, a wellness-focused floor, and 75,000 sq. ft. of event space, one of the largest in the city. Signature venues include the 21,000 sq. ft. Infinity Ballroom, the stylish Eon Ballroom, and The Vantage rooftop venue offering panoramic city views.

Udaipur welcomes its first Marriott



Marriott Hotels has announced the opening of Udaipur Marriott Hotel, marking the group's international debut in Udaipur, often considered the most romantically set city in Rajasthan. Nestled amid the Aravalli hills and overlooking Fateh Sagar Lake, the hotel beautifully combines the region's royal heritage with modern sophistication, offering a seamless experience in the "City of Lakes."

The 226 guestrooms and suites are inspired by Rajasthan's royal heritage, designed for comfort and convenience. The rooms feature plush bedding, high-speed Wi-Fi, workspaces, and spa-inspired bathrooms. Additionally, guests can unwind at the Quan Spa, offering Ayurvedic and modern therapies.

Novotel New Delhi City Centre opens



Novotel, a French hotel brand owned by Accor, has opened Novotel New Delhi City Centre, a haven of modern hospitality in the heart of India's vibrant capital.

Strategically located near key business hubs, shopping destinations and cultural landmarks, Novotel New Delhi City Centre offers exceptional connectivity and convenience. With 124 thoughtfully designed guest rooms, including an elegantly appointed Presidential Suite, the hotel caters to travellers seeking a seamless blend of comfort, functionality and eco-conscious design.

The hotel boasts over 10,000 sq. ft. of adaptable venues, including an expansive ballroom, ideal for weddings, conferences, and social gatherings. Its state-of-the-art features include wellness facilities, with the brand's signature fitness centre as well as an infinity pool.

Radisson crosses 200 hotels mark

Radisson Hotel Group has surpassed 200 hotels mark in India, following the signing of five new properties. The recent signings include Radisson Blu Resort & Spa, Pawna Lake; Radisson Blu Hotel, Lucknow CBD; Radisson Hotel Rajkot and two conversions – St. Marks Hotel, a member of Radisson Individuals in Bengaluru CBD, and Temple Tree Hotel Shirdi, also a member of Radisson Individuals in Shirdi.

Over the past 14 months, Radisson Hotel Group has signed over 51 hotels in key leisure and metro markets in India. Over the past three years, the group has entered 45 new Indian markets, while maintaining metro dominance across the country.



Raffles Udaipur wins 'Most Luxurious Spa Resort' award



Raffles Udaipur has been awarded the title of Most Luxurious Spa Resort at the Global Spa Awards 2025. Located on a private island on Uda Sagar Lake, the resort earned the recognition for its commitment to delivering refined wellness experiences inspired by the cultural heritage of Rajasthan and the brand's signature elegance.

The spa at Raffles Udaipur seamlessly blends ancient healing practices with contemporary therapies, providing guests with a serene and rejuvenating experience, guided by expert practitioners. This accolade highlights Raffles Udaipur's ongoing pursuit of excellence in luxury hospitality and wellness.

Copenhagen Sparkling Tea now available in India



Bebida Hospitality Pvt. Ltd. launched Copenhagen Sparkling Tea in India's premium retail segment on May 1. Crafted in Denmark using up to 13 organic tea varieties and a proprietary infusion technique, Copenhagen Sparkling Tea has been served at over 80 Michelin-starred restaurants worldwide.

In India, it first entered via Taj hotels and is now available across top properties including JW Marriott, Oberoi, The Leela, and leading restaurants from Mumbai to Kolkata.

The retail offering includes three award-winning blends—Lyserod, Lysegron, and BLA—at ₹3,500, with original packaging and global quality standards.

Asha's celebrity restaurant honoured by India

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has honoured Asha's Restaurant & Cocktail Bar on Newhall Street in Birmingham, UK for its exceptional efforts in promoting authentic Indian cuisine abroad.

The popular venue, frequented by visiting celebrities, was reportedly one of only five restaurants worldwide, and the sole recipient in the UK, to be awarded the Annapurna Certificate.

The ICCR reviewed nominations from 39 countries, making Asha's win a rare and significant achievement. This accolade comes on the heels of the restaurant being ranked seventh in the British Indian Good Food Guide's Indian restaurants in the UK last autumn, the only Birmingham eatery to make it to the top 20.



Cafe Amudham at Connaught Place

Cafe Amudham has launched its second outlet in Delhi, located at Janpath, Connaught Place, marking its eighth outlet across India since debuting in 2022.

Known for blending authentic South Indian flavours with a modern dining experience, the brand continues to grow steadily. The Janpath outlet features an open kitchen, ambient lighting, and curated South Indian music, creating an immersive atmosphere.

With ingredients sourced directly from the South, Cafe Amudham remains committed to culinary authenticity and storytelling. The expansion reinforces its vision of making South Indian cuisine an everyday urban experience across India.



Appointments

Radisson Blu Paschim Vihar appoints new GM



Radisson Blu Hotel, New Delhi Paschim Vihar has appointed Anuj Soin as its new General Manager. Bringing in over 18 years of rich experience across leading hospitality brands, including Taj Hotels, Marriott International, The Leela Gurugram, and the Radisson Hotel Group, Anuj is bound at elevating guest satisfaction and operational efficiency with his new role.

Having already spent six years within the Radisson ecosystem, Anuj is known for his people-centric leadership and sharp operational acumen.

His appointment comes at a strategic time as the hotel sharpens its positioning in West Delhi's evolving hospitality market, aiming to strengthen ties with both business and leisure travellers.

Hyatt Regency Jaipur appoints GM



Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar has announced the appointment of Naveen Yadav as its new General Manager. With over 16 years of experience in hospitality and tourism, Naveen brings in a strong track record in operations, sales strategy, and leadership.

Naveen began his career with Liberty Indian DMC/Paragon Conventions and later held key MICE and sales roles at CIM Gurugram, Westin Gurugram, and The Westin Sohna Resort & Spa.

He went on to lead cluster sales for seven Accor properties in Chennai and served as Market Director – National Sales (North & East India) at Marriott International. Prior to joining Hyatt, he was the Chief Business Officer at Bloom Hotels.

Vineet Mishra is Accor's VP-Operations



Accor has appointed Vineet Mishra as Vice President-Operations, India and South Asia. With over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Vineet will oversee Accor's operational strategies across its diverse portfolio.

Vineet's professional journey includes senior roles at The Oberoi Hotels and Marriott International, where he developed expertise in strategic operations, hotel management, and elevating guest experiences. Since joining Accor, Vineet has demonstrated strong leadership, most recently serving as Complex General Manager for Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity, and later as Cluster General Manager of the Triguna portfolio in 2022, where he managed seven hotels.

Vineet's expertise in fostering guest-centric experiences will reinforce the brand's position as a leading force in the region.

Jim Corbett Marriott appoints GM

Pawan Chahar has been appointed as the General Manager of Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa, where he will be responsible for spearheading the resort's launch, managing operations, guest engagement and relationships.

Chahar brings extensive experience in luxury hotels and residences, having held key roles at top hotels like The Oberoi New Delhi and The Ritz-Carlton, Bengaluru. He also holds certifications in Residential and Hotel Leadership.

Prior to joining Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa, he was the pre-opening leader at Three Sixty West - The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Mumbai; Marriott's first managed residence in South Asia.



(From tradition to innovation)

How Crafted Flavours are Shaping the Future of Global Whisky Style

Whisky - long enshrined as a symbol of tradition, heritage, and craftsmanship - is entering a new chapter. From the windswept Highlands of Scotland to the tropical landscapes of India, distillers are embracing a silent revolution: the infusion of crafted flavours. This movement isn't a rebellion against legacy; rather, it is a sophisticated evolution - a reimagining of how tradition and innovation can harmoniously coexist.

Every whisky-producing nation brings its own narrative. Scotland's smoky single malts, Ireland's velvety pot stills, America's bold bourbons, Canada's nuanced blends, India's assertive grain whiskies, and Germany's emerging craft spirits - each expression is steeped in regional character. Yet, with global palates becoming more adventurous and markets increasingly saturated, a pivotal question arises: How can whisky retain its soul while carving out a modern identity ?

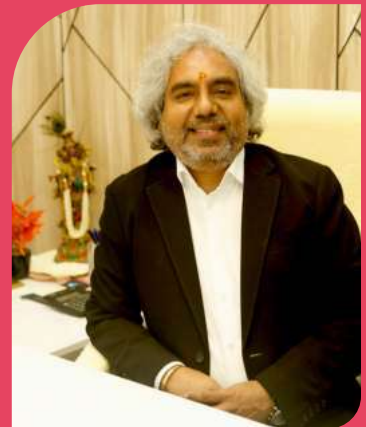
This is where the science and artistry of flavour craftsmanship come into play.

At the forefront of this innovation is Rare Blends Pvt. Ltd., partnering with master blenders and distillers to engineer bespoke flavour solutions that enhance authenticity while exploring new dimensions. From intensifying oak-aged richness, smoothing grainy undertones, to layering refined top notes of fruit, spice or florals - crafted flavours offer a precision toolset for elevating sensory depth without compromising heritage.

The essence lies in balance. A meticulously developed flavour should never overpower - it must accentuate the whisky's inherent character. A Canadian rye, for instance, can benefit from a hint of dark berry warmth to round its spice; an Indian expression may bloom with a subtle infusion of native spice, capturing regional essence. German distilleries, rapidly gaining recognition, are experimenting with botanically inspired notes to reflect terroir and tradition in equal measure.

In a marketplace where experimentation meets expectation, flavour innovation has become both strategic and sensory - an integral part of product storytelling. Established houses can leverage it to rejuvenate legacy lines, while new entrants find in it a vehicle to define their identity with elegance and consistency.

The global whisky landscape is no longer bound by static tradition. It is a canvas - and crafted flavours are the brushstrokes painting its future. Thoughtfully applied, they do not dilute the past; they distill it into something profoundly new, yet recognizably authentic.



— RARE —
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EVENT TRACK

Event	When	Where	Link	Host
ProWine Hong Kong	14-16 May 2025	Hong Kong	https://www.prowein-world.com/en/ProWine_Hong_Kong	
International Bulk Wine & Spirits Show	29-30 July 2025	San Francisco, USA	https://ibwsshow.com	
Anuga Select India	20-22 August 2025	Mumbai, India	https://anuga-india.com	
Vinexpo India 2025	19-20 September 2025	Mumbai, India	https://vinexpo-india.com	
TFWA World Exhibition & Conference	28 September-2 October 2025	Cannes, France	https://www.tfw.com/tfw-world-exhibition-conference	
SpiritZ Conclave & Achievers' Awards	October 2025 (Date TBD)	Gurugram, India	https://spiritzawards.com	
ProWine Mumbai	31 October-1 November 2025	Mumbai, India	https://www.prowine.in	
ProWine Shanghai	12-14 November 2025	Shanghai, China	https://www.prowein-world.com/en/ProWine_Shanghai	
Drinktec India	13-15 November 2025	Mumbai, India	https://drinktechnology-india.com	
International Whisky Festival	14-16 November 2025	Hague, Netherlands	https://www.whiskyfestival.nl	
Brews & Spirits Expo	27-29 November 2025	Bengaluru, India	https://brewsnspiritsexpo.com	

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SpiritZ, India's leading alcobev magazine, has joined hands with News9 Plus, the world's first news OTT platform by TV9 Network, and Livcheers, a consumer-centric portal.

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