

The allure of single malt Scotch whisky

Samuel Spurr

So what's all the fuss? Whisky produced from one distillery as opposed to a blend from a variety of distilleries? The Chivas Regals and Johnnie Walkers of Scotland are blends from a variety of whiskies to achieve a uniform taste each and every time. Single malt Scotch whisky, on the other hand, is made solely from malted barley, produced in a single distillery and not blended with any other whiskies.

Single malts therefore have more "individual" taste, as Brad Wright, from Australia's Single Malt Whisky Club, points out. "The attraction of single malts is three-fold – firstly, the complexities and varieties of flavours the single malts possess; secondly, the variation between the regions they come from and thirdly, the enjoyment of sharing something special with a good friend or two."

The Single Malt Whisky Club, a purchasing co-operative that ensures members can purchase a variety of single malt whiskies at great prices, loves a great "dram" (a commonly used term to describe a measure of Scotch) for these very reasons.



Dreamstime

The regions

Various regions of Scotland produce different tasting single malt whiskies, depending on the peat used in the malting process, the spring waters and the barley used to make the malt. This adds

to the adventure of tasting single malts.

There are several identifiable regions. Islay (pronounced "eye-lah") is an island west of the mainland. Lowland is the southernmost region of Scotland. Highland, as the name suggests, is the mountainous region of northern Scotland, while Speyside is on the eastern edge of the Highlands. Campbeltown and Islands are the remaining regions.

Mr Wright identifies the characteristics these regions can impart on single malts. "Islay malts are full-flavoured and have lots of smoky flavour, Speyside malts are known for their sweetness, while Lowland malts are much sweeter.

The Highland region is known for its light-bodied profile," he notes. "Differences in shape, size and proportion of copper stills used in the distilling process also account for different tastes, as does the type of wood barrels used in the ageing process."

The "glens"

As a general rule, most Scotches beginning with "glen" are usually single malts – think Glenfiddich, Glenlivet and Glenmorangie – but most don't have any "glen" in their name whatsoever.

Mr Wright's favourite at the moment is one such single malt without a "glen" at the beginning – the Laphroaig Quarter Cask. "I tend to favour the Islay malts as I like big, robust whisky," he says. "Aged in 60-litre barrels, the small barrel size allows a much greater surface area of wood to be in contact with the whisky, thus intensifying the flavour."

To appreciate single malts for yourself, start with something simple, ask plenty of questions and be true to what you enjoy. George Cowley captured this theme perfectly: "There is no such thing as a bad single malt."

Slainte – Cheers!