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**Tequila Tours**

Since 2006, groups of 25-30 tequila aficionados from the USA, Canada and Mexico toured the tequila industry. Most of us were members of the tequila forum at www.ianchadwick.com/forum and the tour was organized by the forum’s moderators. We visited many distilleries in and around Tequila and Arandas. It was one of the best travel experiences I’ve ever enjoyed and some of the best people I’ve met. Having a group of knowledgeable, well-informed and sophisticated tequila fans was also a pleasant surprise for many of the distillery owners we met. Photographs and stories of the trip are posted on the forum for anyone who wants to know more about visiting the land of the Blue Agave. A new tour is planned for spring 2014. If you’re interested in joining us in future, details are on my forum.

**Quality Taste Tips**

Close the bottle carefully, then hold it upside down. If you see bubbles (corchita - conch) appear on the surface or pearls on the side (perla - like the ‘legs’ in a good wine) when you turn it right side up, and the concha continue to float, they indicate a fine quality tequila. Otherwise it is likely tequila cortado - cut tequila - and probably mixto. Serve some in a clear glass, let it stand for a few seconds then drink. If the tequila leaves an oily layer at the top of the glass, the tequila has full body.

**Mezcal - I**

Most of the 100+ brands of mezcal are produced around the city of Oaxaca. It can officially be produced in the states of Guerrero, Durango, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas, although these are rarely exported. Mexican law passed in 1994 protects the name mezcal, just like tequila protects a specific product. Many small village producers use traditional methods and equipment, such as clay stills and bamboo pipes instead of copper. In part because much of it is still made in small lots by small village producers, mezcal retains more mystical-religious and cultural links than tequila.

While tequila can only be made from one variety of agave, mezcal can be made from several species, but the most commonly used variety is espadin. There is no mezcaline in mezcal! Like tequila is a distilled spirit.

Mescal piñas are roasted or grilled over hot rocks in fire is lit in the pit to burn for about 24 hours to heat the stones.
**Tequila Country - 1**

Tequila is produced mostly in the western Mexican state of Jalisco, near the capital, Guadalajara. The two main areas of production lie around the town of Tequila, about 34 miles (55 km) west of Guadalajara, and the town of Arandas in the highlands (Los Altos), 100 km to the east. Many visitors know the state for its Pacific coast resort town, Puerto Vallarta. Jalisco also has mining, manufacturing, arts, crafts, and jewellery industries.

The drink tequila took its name from the town in the late 19th century. Before that it was known as mezcal or mezcal wine.

The hills of the area are covered in agave farms sporting more than 100 million plants in spiky, grey-blue rows, 1,000-2,000 plants to an acre, covering more than 100,000 acres. Today about 30,000 people work in the industry, about 33,000 of them farmers and field hands. More than 50 million gallons (almost 200 million liters) of tequila are produced annually - about 40% of it exported.

The indigenous people in the Tequila area were called the Nahua. The town was founded under the Spanish commissioner Juan Calero de Escarcega, in April, 1530, the base of an extinct volcano. Tequila was made a municipality in 1824 and finally became a city in 1974. Today it has a population around 30,000.

**Glossary - 2**

| Mezcal | Mexican spirit, made from agave but baked in ground ovens. Mostly produced in Oaxaca state. |
| Mixto | Tequila made from only 51%-99% agave sugars (see 100% agave). |
| Mosto | Juice of the agave used for fermentation. |
| NOM | NORMA Oficial Mexicana: number to identify legitimate tequila producers. |
| NORMAS | Laws established by the Mexican government which explicitly define tequila and its production. |
| Oro | Gold tequila coloured by storage in barrels, or often by additives. Usually a mixto. |
| Perla | Pearl, or concha (conch or shell). A bubble that remains on the surface of the 100% agave tequila after serving or stirring it. |
| Piña | Pineapple. The sugar-rich heart of the agave formed by the stem and base of the leaves. |
| Potero | Pasture, or agave plantation. Also called huerta. |
| Quíote | Stem or shaft that develops the flower of the maguey. After cutting, it can be boiled or roasted, then eaten. |
| Reposado | Rested - stored for two to six months in wooden barrels to make the tequila smooth and mellow. |
| Tecomate | Roasting or cooking the piña to sap the sugars for fermentation. |
| Tequila cortado | Cut tequila. Tequila that does not produce the desired perla or concha after being shaken. |
| Tequilleros | The mastercrafters who oversee the production of tequila from the harvesting of the agave plant through to the fermenting and aging processes. |

**Susan’s Tequila Cream Pasta**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup 100% agave blanco tequila
- 3/4 cup half-and-half cream
- 3 tbsp minced garlic
- 3/4 cup pureed tomatoes
- Salt and freshly-ground pepper to taste
- Grated parmesan cheese
- Spaghetti for four

**Process:**
- Melt the butter in a frying pan.
- Add onion and cook until clear.
- Add pureed tomatoes, basil, salt, pepper, garlic.
- Cook at medium-low heat for 20 minutes, until thickened. Boil water for spaghetti.
- Add cream to sauce. Stir frequently.

**Optional:** Use fresh tomatoes, or add sun-dried tomatoes to sauce, or add a cup of cooked baby shrimp.
COOKING - 1

Tequila makes a wonderful ingredient in cooking. It adds a new flavour to many dishes. Since the fragrance of tequila is easily lost either by overcooking or by being overpower ed by spices, herbs, or garlic, you should add it last wherever possible, to retain as much of the fruity tequila essence as possible.

While some cooks may balk at using an expensive premium tequila in cooking, certainly 100% agave brands should always be used. Not only do they offer better agave flavour, but they don't contain the mixto additives (caramel, almond or wood essence) that might interact unfavourably with your dish. Blanco tequilas are more robust and can withstand moderate cooking and still retain much of their taste.

All of the books listed in the resource chapter have a variety of recipes using tequila that will please you. In my experience, tequila works best in dishes where it contributes to, rather than competes with, other ingredients. Included in this are fish, shrimp and pasta meals where subtle flavours are the nature of the dish. Fresh ingredients also contribute to the end result.

On the next page you’ll find Susan’s original recipe for Tequila Pasta. She’s tried several brands, but finds a 100% agave blanco is the best to use when cooking. Try it yourself and enjoy!

TEQUILA COUNTRY - 2

The National Tequila Fair is held annually in Tequila at the end of November to mid-December (Nov. 30-Dec. 12). There are parades, charreadas (Mexican rodeo events), cock fights, serenades with mariachis, fireworks displays. You may also want to drop by on May 13 for the festive “Day to Feast Tequila.”

Once all tequila had to be made by law in Jalisco state. Although that has been changed for more than 20 years, of more than 140 tequila distillers currently in business, only three are not located in Jalisco. Most are found near Tequila or the highland region, Los Altos - these produce over 50% of all tequila made in Mexico.

La Gonzalena - makers of Chaneo - operate the sole distillery in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas. Another distillery outside Jalisco is Tequilera Corralejo, which opened in 1996 in the neighbouring state of Guanajuato.

Blue agave for tequila use may also be legally grown in some areas of the states of Nayarit, Guanajuato and Michoacan. No other type of agave is permitted for use in tequila.
Tequila Myths - 1

Myth 1: The worm
There is no worm in Mexican-bottled tequila and it is not a Mexican tradition. There has never been a worm in tequila. There is a ‘worm’ - a gusano, really a butterfly caterpillar - in some bottles of mezcal, (but generally not in premium brands). You may also get a small bag of ‘worm salt’ - dried gusano, salt, and chile powder with some mezcal. But NO WORM in tequila!

Myth 2: Tequila is made from cactus
Tequila is made from distilled sap from the hearts (piñas) of the mature agave or maguey plant. This plant is a succulent (not a cactus) related to the lily and amaryllis. Of the 130 species of agave in Mexico, only the blue agave - agave tequilana weber azul - is allowed for use in tequila production, and only from specified growing areas. Tequila can only be made in Mexico.

Myth 3: Tequila and mezcal are the same
Tequila is a type of mezcal, but mezcales are not necessarily tequilas. They both derive from varieties of the agave plant. Despite many similarities, tequila and mezcal are as different today as Scotch whisky and rye. Most commercial mezcal is produced in Oaxaca state, while most tequila is produced in or near Jalisco. Production processes are also very different - obvious in their resulting tastes.

Tequila's History - 1

Tequila is North America's first distilled drink, and its first commercially produced alcohol. In pre-Hispanic times, natives fermented sap from the maguey plants into a beer-like drink called pulque.

Mezcal wine - tequila's grandparent - was first produced only a few decades after the Conquest. Don Pedro Sanches de Tagle, Marquis of Altamira, the 'father of tequila,' established the very first tequila factory in his Hacienda Guisilos, in 1600. In 1735, the production of all spirits, including mezcal wines and pulque, were banned by the government to favour and promote the importation of Spanish wines and liqueurs. Officially, production was halted, but actually went underground until 1792, when King Ferdinand IV ascended the throne and lifted the ban. Tequila did not achieve its prominence again until after 1821 when Mexico attained independence, and Spanish products were harder to get.

The first licensed manufacturer was Jose Antonio Cuervo who got the rights to cultivate a parcel of land from the King of Spain in 1758. In 1795, his son Jose Maria Cuervo got the first license to produce mezcal wine from the Crown and founded the first official Mexican distillery, Casa Cuervo. In 1812, Jose died. His son-in-law, Vicente Albino Rojas, changed its name to La

Tequila's History - 2

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of tequila-related websites online. Start at www.ianchadwick.com/tequila where this booklet was taken from. You'll find hundreds of links to other web sites, including all the major distillers, fan sites, industry and news sites, recipes, production, history, mezcal, pulque, tasting, buying, trivia, books, and more. Join the international community of tequila lovers on my forum. Add your comments, tasting notes or ask questions at www.blueagaveforum.com

For tasting information, current news, reviews and industry information, see www.tequilatastings.com www.tequilafloridiano.com. and www.tequila.net

The best mezcal information (and the worm myth explained) is the Del Maguay Mezcal site: www.mezcal.com.

The official Tequila Regulatory Council (CRT) site is at www.crt.org.mx (in Spanish and English), where these NOM lists are taken from.

Links & Resources - 5

Cocktails & Mixes - 2

Tequila Sour
► 1½ oz. tequila
► juice of ½ lemon
► ½ tsp. bar sugar
Shake with ice. Strain into chilled sour glass. Garnish with lemon slice and maraschino cherry.

Tequila Martini
► ¾ oz. tequila
► ½ oz. dry vermouth
Stir with ice. Strain into chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with an olive.

Low Rider
► 1½ oz. tequila
► ½ oz. triple sec
► 1 splash cranberry juice

Acapulco Blue
► ¾ oz. tequila
► ½ oz. blue curacao
► ½ oz. bar syrup
► 1 splash club soda
Rim whiskey sour glass with lime juice and salt. Place ½ orange slice in glass. Add crushed ice, tequila, blue curacao, bar syrup and club soda to fill. Stir lightly.

Añejo Pacifico
► 1½ oz. añejo tequila
► ½ oz. lime juice
► ½ oz. passion-fruit syrup

Chill mixture over rocks. Strain. Serve in cocktail glass. Garnish with lime wheel.

Always use 100% agave tequila!
Cocktails & Mixes - 1

Tequila Sunrise
- 2 oz Tequila
- 4 oz Orange juice
- 2 dashes (3/4 oz) Grenadine

Pour tequila and orange juice in a highball glass. Add ice and stir. Tilt the glass and pour the Grenadine down the side. The Grenadine should fall to the bottom of the glass, and then rise up slowly. Garnish with an orange slice. This drink is sometimes stirred gently.

Cactus Margarita
- 1 1/4 oz. tequila
- 1/2 oz. pineapple concentrate
- 5 oz. sweet & sour or margarita mix
- 1 oz. cream of coconut
- 12 oz. ice

Blend all ingredients until slushy. Note: tequila is not made from cactus!

Ixtapa
- 2 oz. coffee liqueur
- 1 oz. silver tequila

Tequila Myths - 2

Myth 4: Tequila is bottled home brew
Production is tightly controlled by the Mexican government and the Tequila Regulatory Council (CRT). Statements made on the bottle about age, style and content have legal requirements. There is also a non-profit council called the Chamber of Tequila Producers that regulates the industry. Most manufacturers take considerable pride in their production.

Myth 5: The best tequilas cost the most
Price isn't always a good way to judge the value of things. A lot of the cost may go to fancy packaging, designer bottles, large advertising campaigns and simply to status and image. There’s a large market of excellent mid-priced tequilas available in Mexico. However, as a general rule, premium and 100% agave tequilas cost much more than mixtos, but they’re worth the difference.

Myth 6: All tequilas are the same
Tequilas vary considerably according to the company making them, the processes, aging, and the growing environment. The temperature, soil, types of equipment, age of the plants, how the heads are baked and how the distilled tequila is aged all affect the flavour, colour and body. There is a wide variation in tequila styles like blanco, reposado and añejo - and even more between 100% agave and mixto tequilas.

Links & Resources - 4

Tequila's History - 2

Rejón and increased production. By mid-century his fields had more than three million agave plants. Cuervo was the first distiller to put tequila into bottles - in the late 19th century when others were still using barrels. Today Cuervo is the largest manufacturer, with a huge export market.

In 1873, Don Cenobio Sauza bought La Antigua Coaz, his first distillery. He changed the name to La Preservancia in 1888 and started making mezcal wine. One legend says Don Cenobio determined the blue agave was the best maguey for making tequila, in the 1870s, and the rest of the distillers followed his lead. Tequila was first exported to the USA in 1873, when Sauza sold three barrels to El Paso del Norte. Before his death in 1906, he purchased 13 more distilleries for his own use. Sauza today owns about 300 agave plantations and is the second largest tequila manufacturer. The family sold the company to the Spanish corporation, Pedro Domecq, in 1976, but Guillermo Sauza continues the family tradition at Los Altos.

Tequila Herradura ("horsehead") was founded in 1891 by Feliciano Romo. Its original distillery is now a company museum. Herradura became the first distillery to produce a reposado tequila and until recently has always made only 100% agave tequilas. It was sold in 2006 to Brown-Forman.

Vicente Orendain acquired a distillery from Jose Antonio Cuervo in the 1830s, later selling it to Sauza. Tequila Orendain is the third largest exporter of mixto tequilas. El Centinela was established in 1904, the first distillery (fabrica or factory) in the highlands area, which now has about 20 factories.

The first wave of modernization began around this time. During the Revolution
**Types of Tequila - I**

There are five types of tequila (see no. 1, above) officially recognized by Mexican laws. Types 1, 3-5 can be made with 100% agave. Type 2 is a mixto (not 100% agave). All tequilas are distilled at least twice, some three times.

1. **Blanco or plata** is white or silver; Stored less than 60 days in steel tanks, and may be bottled fresh from distillation. This is generally has more agave nose and is more robust and peppery sharp than other types. Not aged in wood.

2. **Joven abocado** is young and smooth: Basically the same as blanco, but with colouring and flavouring ingredients added to make it look aged. These are also called suave or oro (gold) because of the colouring (usually from added caramel, almond, vanilla and sometimes oak essence). In the industry they're known as mixto*, or mixed blends.

3. **Reposado** means rested: Aged from two months to up to a year in wooden tanks or barrels. The taste becomes richer and more complex. The longer the aging, the darker the colour and the more the wood affects the flavour. Very popular; reposado accounts for more than 60% of all tequila sales in Mexico.

4. **Añejo** (aged) is vintage: aged in wood. Many añejos become quite dark and the influence of the wood is more pronounced than in the reposado variety. It is sometimes removed from the barrels and racked into stainless steel tanks to stop the aging and alcohol loss.

5. **Extra Añejo (Maduro)** - ultra aged or extra vintage. Añejo aged a minimum three years in oak barrels of no more than 600 litres. Some five-year-old tequilas are already on the market, and 10-year tequilas are coming. New category, introduced in March, 2006.

* Mixto is simply called "tequila" today.

**Tequila’s History - 3**

From 1910-1920, tequila became a symbol of national pride, associated with the hard-riding rebels and gun-slinging heroes of the period.

Modern production techniques, including cultivated yeasts, were introduced in the late 1920s. Prohibition in the USA boosted tequila’s popularity when it was smuggled across the border. The decision to use non-agave sugars (usually cane sugars) in fermentation was made in the 1930s, a move that changed the industry and affected its reputation for decades. By 1964 distillers were allowed to use 30% other sugars, which soon climbed to 49%. The blander product, however, helped boost export sales.

During World War 2, tequila rose in popularity in the USA when spirits from Europe became hard to get. Agave fields expanded 110 per cent between 1940 and 1950. In 1948, exports fell to an all-time low, but national consumption grew, due to the portrayal of tequila as a macho drink of heroic rancheros in Mexican movies. The blander product, however, helped boost export sales. During the 1960s, the growing population of tourists and visitors to Mexico were discovering the premium brands. Tequila enjoyed popularity among the cocktail set and high society when tequila bottles, and agave fields.

**Links & Resources - 3**

Mesa Grill Guide to Tequila by Laurence Kretchner and Zeva Oelbaum (photographer) (Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1998) has recipes and drinks, plus mezcal notes, and great colour photographs of tequila production, bottles, and agave fields.

Tequila, edited by Alberto Ruy-Sanchez and Margarita de Orellana (Smithsonian Books) Incorporates articles from Artes de Mexico’s magazines and books. Well-crafted, full-colour with great art, graphics, photographs and vintage images. Update of the Artes de Mexico Guia de Tequila.

Tequila: Cooking with the Spirit of Mexico, by Lucinda Hutson (Ten Speed Press) - full of great recipes that include tequila as a main ingredient.

Tequila. The Spirit of Mexico: a coffee-table book with an unabashedly affectionate look at tequila, Mexico and the industry. The exquisite photographs are paired well with an elegant text presentation in large type. A revised edition was released in 2004 with a chapter on mezcal.

Alcohol in Ancient Mexico, by Henry J. Bruman, University of Utah Press. Explores the from 1910-1920, tequila became a symbol of national pride, associated with the hard-riding rebels and gun-slinging heroes of the period.

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In 1944, the Mexican government decided that any product called ‘tequila’ had to be made by distilling agave grown only in the state of Jalisco. The first standards for tequila were laid out in 1947 and have been upgraded and revised ever since. In the 1950s, many distilleries modernized and upgraded their facilities.

The 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City helped worldwide exposure, and by 1980, the growing population of tourists and visitors to Mexico were discovering the premium brands. Tequila enjoyed popularity among the cocktail set and high society when tequila bottles, and agave fields.

**Margaritas - 2**

The Original Margarita Recipe:

- Three parts tequila (100% agave is recommended);
- One part orange liqueur (Cointreau is preferred, but some people use Triple Sec or Orange Curacao);
- One part fresh lime juice, sweetened to taste with sugar (remember: margaritas are meant to be a little tart, not sweet). Use small Key limes instead of the larger Persian limes and squeeze them yourself. If you can’t find any, then concentrated lime juice is acceptable, but NOT lime cordial (it’s way too sweet);
- Coarse salt (sea or Kosher is best).

**Process:**

- Prepare the glass by rubbing the rim with a piece of lime peel, then place the rim on a sprinkling of coarse salt. Lift it up quickly so only a small amount sticks to form a light dusting around the rim of the glass.
- Put the tequila, lime juice and orange liqueur into a shaker, and squeeze them yourself. If you can’t find any, then concentrated lime juice is acceptable, but NOT lime cordial (it’s way too sweet).
- Shake. Pour into your salted glass.
- Enjoy.

Alternate recipes include putting the ingredients into a blender and whirling until slush, to make a frozen version. You can also add thin lime wedges as a garnish.

Fruit margaritas are made by mixing blended fresh strawberries, peaches or other fruits into the basic mix. These can also be served frozen or as a slushy.
The margarita was allegedly invented in the 1940s by Tijuana bartender Carlos ‘Danny’ Herrera for fledgling actress Marjorie (Margarita) King who was said to be allergic to most other kinds of alcohol except tequila.

An alternate legend says Francisco ‘Pancho’ Morales, a bartender in Tommy’s Bar in Ciudad Juarez, made the first margarita on July 4, 1942.

Yet another story attributes it to Margarita Sames, a Texas socialite who brewed up the cocktail in 1948 for guests at her Acapulco villa, as a challenge to create something new. Her friend Tommy Hilton took it from there to his hotel chain. Other stories place its origin in various Mexican towns, particularly along the US border or even in California, from as early as 1930 to the 1950s.

Regardless of its real or imagined beginnings, tart-sweet margaritas are one of the most popular cocktails in North America and continue to boost tequila sales.

The basic margarita contains lime juice, Cointreau (or another orange liqueur such as Triple Sec) and tequila. Obviously, 100% agave tequila is always the recommended choice when making any mixed drink, but many bars use a mixto instead.

Countless margarita recipes are available, many using a variety of fruit juices instead of lime, sometimes adding other spirits, or even beer. Plus there are many other drinks with tequila, such as the tequila sunrise. Check my links page online for dozens of ideas and recipes for tequila cocktails, margaritas and more.

Unofficial designations

In the past, añejos more than three years old may have been called many tequilas or tequila by the manufacturers. Reserva de casa usually means premium, and may be a limited production variety. Other unofficial categories include gran reposado - aged longer than the minimum - and blanco suave. Types aside, all tequilas have similar alcohol content: 35-40% (70-80 proof), similar to Scotch or vodka.

100 per cent agave: The mark of purity

The most important identifier on the label is "100% agave" or "100% agave azul" - even por ciento de agave. This means it is made only from the blue agave plant, approved by government inspectors to ensure purity, and bottled in Mexico. If it doesn’t say 100%, up to 49% of the alcohol can legally be made from non-agave sources - usually cane sugar - and still be called 'tequila.' Tequila made with less than 100% agave is called "mixto" but on the label it still says "tequila." Mixto uses other sugar during fermentation, but has less taste than 100% agave sugars. Mixtos may contain caramel and almond essence for colour and flavour. Mixto tequilas bottled outside Mexico may not have the same quality controls on their product. In general, 100 per cent agave means better quality, flavour, taste and purity. Mixed tequila drinks (coolers, beers, liqueurs) are made with mixto tequilas or sometimes just agave flavouring (from syrup).

In March 2006, the CRT allowed a new category of flavoured (infused) tequilas to be sold by Mexican producers, blending mixto or even 100% tequilas with various fruit juices, flavours and colouring. These are expected to open a new market for Chinaco became the first premium tequila sold in the USA in 1992.

In 1974, tequila gained international recognition and acceptance of tequila as a product originating only in Mexico - the MO; or Appellation de Origin Contrôlée was published in 1977. The Tequila Regulatory Council (Consejo Regulador de Tequila, or CRT) was founded in 1994 to oversee production, quality and standards in the industry. In 1996 Mexico signed an international agreement for all countries to recognize tequila as a product from defined areas in Mexico. The European Union signed a trade accord in 1997, recognizing Mexico as the sole producer of tequila.

Although the US has been the largest consumer for many years, Mexican consumption grew until 1997 when internal sales almost equaled exports, but slowed when prices soared. Today, exports again dominate sales.

There are 143 distillers in Mexico making tequila today, producing almost 1,200 domestic brands plus 202 brands made solely for export (see www.crt.org.mx for current listings and industry details).
The agave plant takes at least eight years to reach the stage where it is suitable for fermentation and may be left for up to 12 years before harvesting. The mature plant is known as the maguey. It can be up to 12 feet tall, with a rosette of large, pointed leaves. The leaves are used to make tequila, and the plant is pruned (barbado) during this time to encourage the plant to produce more sap. Once the plant is mature, the leaves are cut, and the sap is collected in a process known as the piña (roasting centre). The piña is roasted in a process called the horno (roasting pit). After roasting, the piña is ground into a pulp, which is then fermented in large vats called the ataú (fermentation vat). The fermented juice is then distilled in a process called the enano (still). The resulting spirit is then aged in oak barrels to develop flavor and aroma. The agave plant is native to Mexico and is grown in the highlands and valleys of the country. The agave plant is also used to make other alcoholic beverages such as mescal and brandy. However, tequila is the most famous and popular agave beverage. The agave plant is cultivated in Jalisco, Guadalajara, and Tequila, Mexico. The agave plant is grown in fields called the campos de agave, which are located in the highlands and valleys of the country.
Pulque & Other Spirits - 2

told the Conquistadors that the agave could be consumed and fermented.

Other agave drinks

The cousin of mezcal is bacanora, a drink made by distilling the juices of the roasted yaquiano maguey piña. It is made in the northern state of Chihuahua. So far, there is only one commercial brand available. Tlahuelompa is made from blue agave in Hidalgo state. Aguanamiel, or agave syrup, is available in many areas, sometimes used in fruit drinks.

Raicilla is another distilled agave home brew, made around Puerto Vallarta, on Jalisco’s Pacific coast. You can visit some of the raicilla stills on day trips from that city. Watch for new spirits and liqueurs made from South African blue agave syrups and distilled from South African agave. But beware: they are not tequila.

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The rise in prices, agave farmers were still hurting. When the Mexican government announced a subsidy to help farmers in 2002, speculators got into the act and planted lots of agave.

When the agave came back, production soared. In 1999 agave production was 778,000 tons. It peaked in 2006 at 1.125 million tons (1.14 m tons in 2010). Of that, more than 72% was used for 100% agave tequilas.

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International demand is still on the rise, but domestic consumption has fallen (in large part due to increased retail prices). In spring, 2006, the CRT announced a new NORMA covering tequila. This introduced a new category of ultra-aged agaves called maduro (aged more than 3 years), and allowed for flavoured and infused tequilas.

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Agave was in a surplus again by 2007 and prices were falling. Some farmers started burning and plowing agave fields to replant beans and corn. Some fields were abandoned to weeds, not worth the cost of maintenance. Another agave shortage has been predicted for 2012-15. Registered brands have grown steadily, and reached almost 1,200 by 2010, with 206 brands for export only.

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Field trials showed the plants depend entirely on the rainy season for moisture. Experiments with irrigation showed the larger plants that resulted did not produce any more agave sugars.

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NOM List - 3

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Traditional distillers (tequilleros) let the piñas cook (steam) in ovens (hornos) for 24-36 hours, at 140-185 degrees F to process the natural juices and soften the fibres. The low temperature keeps the agave from caramelizing (which adds darker colour and bitter flavours to the juice and reduces the agave sugars). Baking in ovens also helps retain more of the natural agave flavours than steaming. Many large distillers prefer to cook their piñas faster in efficient steam autoclaves and pressure cookers in as little as a single day (5-14 hours).

The baking process turns the complex carbohydrates into fermentable sugars and softens the piñas so they can then easily release their juice. The piñas are allowed to cool for another 24-36 hours after steaming, then they are mashed or crushed to separate the pulp (bagazo) from the juice (some traditional distillers keep some pulp in the tank during the fermenting).

Originally, distillers beat the cooked piñas with mallets to break them up once they were soft and cool. Then they moved to the tahona, a giant grinding tractor. Modern distilleries use a mechanical crusher, or shredder, like a giant wood-chipping machine called a calabullito (‘little horse’) or , caballito glass called a

To spill a few drops of your drink on the floor of the pulquería was divine, represented by the goddess Mayahuel, who had 400 breasts which oozed nutritious pulque. Historically, it served as an important nutritional element in many communities.

To the Aztecs, pulque was a ritual and ceremonial drink. Other pre-Columbian Mexicans fermented the agave sap (aguamiel or honey water) into a similar drink called octli or pulque. Olmec legend credits the discovery of aguamiel to a woman, Mayahuel, and fermentation of the sap to her husband, Petecatl. Aztec legend says fermented maguey sap was revealed to them by the gods who split a ripe plant with a lightning bolt where the sap fermented naturally. To the Nahua, the maguěy was divine, represented by the goddess Mayahuel, who had 400 breasts which oozed nutritious pulque.

Pulque is still available in some traditional Mexican communities today, usually sold in small pulquearias. It’s a custom to spill a few drops of your drink on the floor of the pulqueria before drinking, in homage to the god of inebriation, Two Rabbit.

Pulque dulce is young and sweet; pulque fuerte is older, stronger and sometimes acidic or sour. Sometimes it is mixed with fruit juices for drinking. While tequila was never made from distilled pulque, the drink

**Pulque & Other Spirits - 1**

Tequila’s ancestral drink, pulque, was first produced in Aztec times. It is made from fermented sap from several types of agave. Pulque is one of about 30 different alcoholic beverages made from agave in Mexico - many of which are regional, and seldom available commercially.

Pulque is like modern beer - it has a low alcohol content, about 4-5% and is a sweet (when fresh), milky and fruity drink, rich in vitamins. Historically, it served as an important nutritional element in many communities.

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**NOM List - 2**

1445 (156) Tequila Artesanal de Los Altos de Jalisco
1449 (160) Tequila Don Roberto
1438 (152) Destiladora del Valle de Tequila
1439 (153) Procegencra y Procesadora de Agave Tres Hermos
1440 (151) Destiladora San Nicolas
1442 (155) Tequileria del Sol
1445 (156) Productores de Agave
1449 (163) Tequila Don Julio
1450 (165) Marco Antonio Jimenez Huerta
1451 (166) Destilerias Sierra Lindo
1455 (174) Fabrica de Tequila el Nacimiento
1456 (171) Tequila Supremo
1457 (172) Tequilera la Quemada
1458 (176) Tequilera La Primavera
1459 (173) Tequila Selecto de Amatitan
1460 (175) Compania Tequilera de Arandas / Tequilera Rustica de Arandas
1463 (177) Cooperativa Tequilera La Magdalena
1464 (183) Destileria 501
1465 (189) Destileria Rubio
1467 (181) Impulsaora Rombo
1468 (188) Destileria 501
1469 (187) Fabrica de Tequila el Nacimiento
1470 (186) Destileria el Eden
1471 (185) Grupo Tequilero Mexico
1472 (187) Fabrica de Tequila Finos
1473 (188) Tequilera la Barranca de Amatitan
1474 (189) Cas Tequilera Los Manantiales
1476 (193) Destiladora Rubin
1477 (194) Letica Hermosillo Ravelo
1479 (195) Hacienda La Capilla
1480 (196) Tequila Los Amartillos
1482 (199) Fabrica de Tequila Taquesque
1483 (200) Tequilera Los Generales
1485 (203) Barucra y Compania (Tequila Cazadores)
1486 (205) Capas Vaino
1489 (206) Destiladores Leyros
1490 (208) Destiladora Arandas
1491 (287) Patron Spirits
1493 (212) Tequila Los Morelos
1498 (213) Tequila La Perla
Mezcal - 3

Mass producers use urea and ammonium sulfate to accelerate fermentation - traditional producers depend on the natural yeasts in the air and on the maguey. The result of fermentation is the nust, or tepache, a low-alcohol juice similar to pulque. Distillation is done twice or even three times in tiny, 25-gallon stills, although mezcal for bulk sales may only be distilled once.

Some mezcals (never tequila!) are bottled with a “worm” (a gusano; actually a butterfly caterpillar). There are two different types of gusano - red (rojo - lives in the root and heart of the maguey, considered superior) and white or gold (oro), which lives on the leaves. Red gusano turns pale in the mezcal, gold turns ashen-grey. Premium mezcal distillers don’t put one in the bottle.

Adding the worm is not a Mexican tradition, but rather a successful marketing ploy from the 1940s, to make mezcal stand out from other spirits.

The worm is harmless - eating it may be a freshman rite. There are regional versions that do not contain tomato paste. Sangrita is a spicy non-alcoholic Mexican drink served as a chaser, a co-sip or as a mix. The traditional method is to alternate sips of tequila with sangrita, but it is sometimes mixed with the tequila and served in a single glass. There is no absolute recipe for sangrita, but almost all versions contain tomato juice and orange juice in roughly equal amounts, with additional lime or lemon juice (or concentrate) to give a sharp tang. The best recipes use fresh ingredients (peel and seed the tomatoes, then blend). The traditional method is to make your own and another interesting way to enjoy tequila. You can also use sangrita in cooking or in cocktails.

Machine.

The resulting sweet juice (aguamiel, or honey water) is sprinkled with yeast and left to ferment in wooden or stainless steel tanks. This can take seven to 12 days, but some modern plants add chemicals to accelerate yeast growth so fermentation only takes two to three days. Longer fermentation results in a more robust body.

The result is a liquid with about 5-7% alcohol. This is distilled twice in traditional copper pot stills (alambiques), or in modern stainless-steel stills. All tequila is clear right after distillation. Any subsequent colour comes from aging in wooden barrels (barricas) or from additives (mixto only). Anise-flavoured and licorice are usually added to the distillate to get the desired alcoholic content.

reposado and añejo tequilas are stored in wooden barrels or casks generally purchased used from American or French distillers (oak barrels are preferred). These barricas are stored in warehouses or bodegas until sufficiently aged. Blanco tequila will remain in stainless steel tanks until bottling, up to 60 days. It may also be bottled immediately after distillation.

Añejo and extra-ànejo tequilas are stored in smaller containers than reposado, less than 330 litres. The final product is usually blended with other barrels or tanks of a similar age to create a consistent taste and aroma. Some premium single-barrel brands are available today.

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Quality Control - 1

OM on the label means Normas Oficial Mexicana: the tequila meets government standards - it's not any guarantee of quality, however. But without NORMA's stamp of legitimacy, you can't even be sure it's tequila in the bottle. All 100% agave tequilas must have a NOM identifier on the bottle.

The number after NOM is the three- or four-digit distillery number, assigned by the government. A lot of apparently competing brands have the same NOM number because they're produced at the same distillery or by the same company, regardless of any real or invented history behind them.

There are only 143 licensed tequila distilleries in all of Mexico, and they make 1,143 different domestic brands (plus 202 for export only). Numbers, of course, change yearly.

Before 1978, the term used on labels to identify industry compliance was DGN (Direccion General de Normas) but that system isn't used any more, but may appear on older mixto tequilas bottled outside Mexico. All Mexican-bottled tequilas and all 100% agave tequilas should also say Hecho en Mexico (Made in Mexico) on them.

Tequilas bottled outside Mexico use bulk Mexican mixto tequila as a base. These are not governed by the strict Mexican laws, and may be adulterated with other ingredients by the bottler. There is no guarantee as to their quality or even the amount of tequila they contain.

A more recent term added to the label is DOT - Denomination of Origin, Tequila, but many labels still lack this stamp (DOT number is listed with NOM at www.crt.org.mx).

Mezcal - 2

Then the piñas are placed in the pit and covered with moist fibre (left over from the previous fermentation, and containing natural yeast residues). This is then covered with a layer of agave leaves or woven palm leaves and earth during the two-three days of cooking. The sugary juice of the cooking magueys acts as a glue to seal the palenque. The baking caramelizes the sugars. After three days, the earth covering is meticulously removed so as not to dirty the roasted piñas. The piñas are left to stand in the sun for several days before shredding and fermenting.

Baking the agave piña in pits is an ancient craft; a traditional method of cooking the agave for eating at least 4,000 years old. The traditional tahona (stone grinding wheel) is used to mash the baked plants. The fibres, pulp, and juice are mixed together with pure water. Airborne yeasts start the fermentation, which takes from 13 to 26 days to complete.

Reading The Label - 1

Learn to read the label so you know what you're buying. There are many legal requirements for information to be displayed on a tequila label but none of them necessarily mean quality. You should be able to recognize these elements on any tequila label:

1. The type of tequila: blanco, añejo, extra añejo, reposado, joven - may also say plato (same as blanco).
2. The purity. Unless it says 100% agave, it's a mixto and may be a bulk product bottled outside Mexico (only tequilas bottled in Mexico can be 100% agave!).
3. The NOM (distiller registration number). There are 1,154 brands (plus 202 export-only brands), but only 143 distillers listed by the Tequila Regulatory Council. A single NOM owner can distill for more than one company.
4. The distiller's name (and sometimes address, but this may not be shown on the front).
5. CRT - Certification by the Tequila Regulatory Council - not a guarantee of quality, simply that the distillery met the official rules for production and labelling.
6. Hecho en Mexico - Made in Mexico. 100% agave tequilas can only be made and bottled in Mexico.
7. DOT - Denomination of origin/tequila number: compliance with Mexican regulations regarding where the product was made. Not shown on all labels.
8. Brand name - Sometimes accompanied by a photo, illustration or logo - seldom an indication of the producer.
9. Alcohol content and volume of the bottle. Alcohol content is 38-42% by volume (mezcal may be as high as 52%). Volume is in mili-litres (i.e. 750 ml) or litres.
10. Of course it should also say "tequila" on the label - otherwise it could be anything inside the bottle.

Mezcal - 2

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