

MAXIM

THE VERY BEST RUMS TO TRY RIGHT NOW

Treat yourself to a taste of the tropics with these fine bottles in honor of #NationalRumDay.

NICOLAS STECHER · 3 HOURS AGO



While traditional luxury libations like [scotch](#) and [cognac](#) have long held prized positions in the shelves of spirit enthusiasts, the fascination with high-end tequila, vodkas, gin and other forms of whisky have skyrocketed in the past decade.

This obsession with premiumization inexplicably bypassed rum; from a public perspective, the versatile spirit seemed relegated to a dark corner as a libation for sailors, rogues, explorers, and other salty ne'er do wells.

But no more: in 2018 alone, the sales of super-premium rums skyrocketed 27% – the biggest leap of any spirit category – underscoring the swelling global appreciation of this fine molasses and sugar-cane distilled spirit. At this year’s San Francisco World Spirits Awards a record-breaking number of premium rum entries qualified.



White-jacketed waiters at Cipriani 25 Broadway in New York offer up delectable Flor de Caña cocktails
Flor De Caña

“I like to think that anything you can do rum can do better,” explains Brian Miller, co-founder (as well as Beverage Director and bartender) of Manhattan’s esteemed midtown tiki-joint The Polynesian.

While Miller suggests playing with your favorite recipes by substituting white rums for gin, tequila, and vodka and darker rums for whiskeys in cocktails like a Manhattan, Old Fashioned, Negroni, Sazerac etc., there are many rums so smooth and amusingly complex that they can (and some would argue should) be sipped neat or with a couple rocks.

Here are our absolute favorites:

MOUNT GAY 1703 MASTER SELECT



With a deed dating back to 1703, [Mount Gay](#) is the oldest commercial rum distillery on the planet. To celebrate their three-hundred-plus years of heritage the Barbados operation created 1703 Old Cask Selection, a cherry-picked blend of the legendary distillery's finest single and double distilled rums from their oldest reserves.

Forty-four barrels were carefully monitored over the years, all resting between 10 and 30 years in their cellars, and then expertly blended for what is Mount Gay's most expensive expression. The long sleep in oak barrels lends the 1703 Old Cask Selection an oaky nose with hints of caramel, and a superb round mouthfeel. \$199.99

APPLETON ESTATE 30 YEAR OLD RUM



For over a quarter of a millennium [Appleton Estate](#) has been crafting premium rum from the verdant Nassau Valley in the heart of Jamaica. Its fertile soil, ideal climate and natural bubbling springs create a unique terroir for its plentiful sugar cane.

Presently the proud house is run by acclaimed Master Blender Joy Spence (celebrating over two decades at the position), who assures Appleton Estate's expressions remain true to their heritage. This year Spence revives Appleton Estate's 30 Year Old rum released in 2008 with a wholly new profile. Using barrels aged at least 30 years (some more than 50) for this edition the 30 Year Old rum is slightly recalibrated with notes of vanilla, toasted oak, ginger and warm cinnamon.

"Jamaicans are proud of their rum-making heritage," explains Spence, "and it's an honor we can bring these truly unique, luxury expressions to the market for people who appreciate an intricate sipping rum." Please drink it neat, she advises.

Given Appleton Estate 30 Year Old rum will be limited to 4,000 bottles worldwide, with only 900 hundred making their way to American shelves, her advice should be heeded. \$495

GOSLINGS FAMILY RESERVE OLD RUM



In 1806 James Gosling sailed to Bermuda and began the [Goslings](#) empire with a shop on Front Street. Papa Rum Single Barrel is Goslings' top-tier experience, with every label etched by hand with bottling date, barrel and bottle number, done up in one of those ornate luxury packages. It is delicious, no doubt.

But if you desire a slightly cheaper inroad to the world of Goslings without sacrificing quality or taste, check out their Family Reserve Old Rum. It uses the same barrel blends as its more expensive cousin – all pot and column distilled from molasses – but is aged even longer than Papa's 15-plus years in medium char, once-used bourbon barrels to add rich velvety notes of leather and chocolate.



As the San Francisco Spirits Competition awarded Goslings' Family Reserve Old Rum a Double Gold Medal and the Caribbean Journal dubbed it the No.1 Aged Rum in the World, this more accessible expression is clearly no Cabin Boy. *Papa Seal Single Barrel: \$199, Family Reserve Old Rum: \$79.99*

THE RUM COOPERATIVE BY BULLY BOY DISTILLERS



When one thinks of rum, arguably the last terroir they'd envision is Boston. Drunk guys spilling out of the Cask N Flagon all ginned up on Captain Morgan and Parliament Lights? Sure, well within the realms of reason. But quality small batch rum hand-crafted in 750-gallon copper pot stills in the city of Happy Gilmore?? Unlikely.

Perhaps that's why [Bully Boy](#) is so shocking. This isn't just a passable brown to be passed around in Coke Zero bottles at Gillette Stadium, Boston's first craft distillery brews a truly superlative spirit. Bully Boy distillery first registered on our radar when they launched their Boston Rum in 2013 to wide acclaim.

Now for the aptly named "Rum Cooperative" expression they're blending that Boston Rum with four other exotic dark rums sourced from founding brothers Will and Dave Willis' favorite rum-making regions. The Rum Cooperative was just recently awarded a Gold Medal at the 2019 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. \$34.99

RON ZACAPA CENTENARIO XO



As far as terroirs go, there is no rum in the world – and arguably no spirit – with as unique a birthplace as [Zacapa](#). Located between angry volcanoes in the highlands of Quetzaltenango some 2,300-meters above the Pacific, Zacapa’s aptly named ‘House Above the Clouds’ is the highest distillery in the world.



For over thirty years Master Blender Lorena Vásquez has overseen production, as passionate about creating a timeless spirit as she is about preserving local Guatemalan culture (every bottle of Zacapa comes adorned with intricate 'petate' grass bands hand-woven by Mayan weavers). While Zacapa 23 and Edición Negra add value to any bar shelf, Vásquez's flagship Centenario XO expression blends rums 6 to 25 years old, with a final aging stage in cognac French oak barrels.

\$110

PLANTATION FIJI 2009 VINTAGE / EXTRÊME N°3



[Plantation](#) specializes in molasses-distilled rums, but other than that unifier almost anything goes. Creator and Master Blender Alexandre Gabriel has quite the gig: he basically travels the world searching for the world's best rums and then applies his own unique second aging technique to manifest a particular Plantation spirit. Previous expressions from Panama, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad distilled in 2004 and 2005 laid the foundation for Plantation, and now Gabriel returns with a pair of spirits from Peru and Fiji.

Utilizing thousand-year-old cane and world renown waters of pristine purity, the latter was created from molasses distilled in 2009 in both pot and column stills by the South Pacific Distillery, and then matured seven years in bourbon barrels.



The blend was then shipped all the way to Château de Bonbonnet in France for a final two-year aging in Ferrand cognac barrels. With such origins you can expect bursts of sweet flavors like vanilla, dulce de leche, quince and ginger ale. Boasting a rich and round mouthfeel, Fiji 2009 finishes off with lingering smoky notes of bourbon and cocoa.

For the true treasure hunter, look out for Plantation's EXTRÊME N°3 Collection which includes two very rare expressions bottled at cask strength. Jamaica HJC 1996 and Jamaica ITP 1996 were distilled by Long Pond Distillery and aged 21 years in bourbon casks, with an additional year in France in Ferrand casks. *Fiji 2009 Vintage: \$54.99, Plantation Peru 2004 Vintage: \$54.99, Plantation Jamaica HJC 1996: \$250, Plantation Jamaica ITP 1996: \$250*

FLOR DE CAÑA 25 YEARS



Sure the Caribbean ostensibly runs the rum game, but don't sleep on Central America. The Pellas family celebrates five generations running [Flor de Caña](#) as a single family estate, never touching additives or artificial ingredients while using 100% renewable energy in its operations. And in case you questioned its ability to, you know, actually make rum, the Nicaraguan house was named Global Rum Producer of the Year by the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC) in 2017.

As the spirits industry's most prestigious distinction, IWSC's award is a powerful endorsement of Flor de Caña's consistent excellence in a country that's seen its share of instability (in 2017 Flor de Caña also took home Best Rum of the Year by the International Rum Conference in Madrid). The minerality of Flor de Caña's soil and the rich molasses it produces can be attributed to the farm's placement at the foothills of Nicaragua's San Cristobal volcano, one of the most active volcanoes in Latin America.



The spirit is then distilled five times before casking in undersized white oak bourbon barrels sealed with plantain leaves. The smaller barrels spur greater contact with the wood, and — in combination with the country's tropical climate, higher temperature and humidity — accelerates aging, lending the spirit a complexity not attainable in any other aging cellar.

Meanwhile the plantain leaves add a natural tropical note to the finished spirit. All of Flor de Caña's younger expressions — 4, 5, and 7 Years Old — will improve your cocktail game, but their ultra-premium 12, 18 and 25 should be enjoyed as you would your finest Speyside single malt. Meaning neat, or at most with a single rock (some say a twist of orange is acceptable). *Flor de Caña 7 Years: \$24.99, Flor de Caña 25 Years: \$144.99*

DIPLOMÁTICO RESERVA EXCLUSIVA



Sadly, very little good news emerges from the once prosperous nation of Venezuela these days. While the country teeters on the precipice of revolution, the one export Venezuela can rely on is [Diplomático](#) – arguably the best rum from South America (and inarguably the most awarded).

Diplomático's golden Reservo Exclusiva is distilled at the foothills of the Andes from sugar cane honeys in pot stills and then aged up to a dozen years in a combination of bourbon, malt whisky, Pedro Ximénez and Oloroso Sherry casks. The result is an eminently smooth, rich and even fruity rum that can be sipped neat as well as any scotch or cognac on the planet. Very difficult to source in America, but Diplomático's dark Reservo Exclusivo rum is worthy of concentrated pursuit (a higher-end prestige range is also available, but the Reservo Exclusiva hits bullseye). \$55 (Estimated)

BACARDÍ FACUNDO EXQUISITO + XA PARAISO



When you hear the word rum, it's quite likely the first brand to pop into your head is [Bacardí](#). The Puerto Rican standard for rum can be found in almost any bar and bodega across the planet, so it's easy to dismiss as a volume brand (which it clearly is, selling some 17-million cases every year). They know how to make a quality sipper, however, and have developed a top-tier collection named after their founder, Bacardí Massó Facundo, sourced straight from the family's private reserves.

The super-luxury Facundo line offers four bottles, but the Exquisito and XA Paraiso top the collection. The former marries rum aged a minimum 7 years with 23-year-old oak-aged rum finished in sherry casks. After blending, the married rum is then aged another month together in sherry casks. Meanwhile the Paraiso is rum aged up to 23 years finished in French XO cognac casks to create Bacardí's ultimate sipping spirit. Expect sweet, rich notes of banana and vanilla, along with the spice of nutmeg, sultanas and cinammon. Truly a spectacular spirit from one of the biggest names in rum. *Facundo Exquisito: \$150, Facundo Paraiso: \$250*

PYRAT XO RESERVE



While one of the more affordable rums in this roundup, [Pyrat XO Reserve](#) is without a doubt one of the most delicious sipping rums available. Pyrat collects the best casks from around the Caribbean, aged up to 15 years (although most only rest for two years), and then carefully blends them to create a flavor profile that is not only unique but boasts a luxurious mouth feel.

The medium-body spirit bursts with flavors of marmalade on the tongue while the accompanying fragrance of orange blossoms fill the nose. It is neither overpowering nor too sweet, but rather balanced in its citrus profile. As Pyrat's treasure is further aged in white oak after the rum is blended, XO Reserve develops a rich color that is deep amber in hue. Although tough to find, look for the Pyrat XO Reserve label — with its serial number hand-written in Anguilla — it should find a spot on your shelf. \$30

DENIZEN VATTED DARK RUM



While previous expressions from [Denizen](#) have included rums sourced from Trinidad and Jamaica, their master blenders have now looked towards two locales for their new Vatted Dark Rum: Guyana and Martinique. While the latter is hailed as the originating nation of rum Agricole, Guyana's role in the world of spirits is a bit more muted.

Still, Denizen opted to marry their dark rum (80%) in the classic vatted style – originally formulated by the British Navy in the mid-18th century – with the crisper, more vegetal notes of rhum Agricole (20%) to create a unique spirit that blends the best of two different rum bloodlines. Expect notes of caramel, burnt sugar, and cacao to blend elegantly with Martinique’s unique grassy, funky profile. \$30