

Headline	Scotch on the rocks		
Country	India	Date	19 <sup>th</sup> May 2019
Publication	Mail Today Online		
Link	<a href="https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/scotch-on-the-rock-1528460-2019-05-19">https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/scotch-on-the-rock-1528460-2019-05-19</a>		

News / Mail Today /

# Scotch on the rock

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New Delhi

May 19, 2019 UPDATED: May 19, 2019 03:34 IST



A whisky tasting session at the Pullman New Delhi Aerocity

"If anyone of you want to get sloshed, I would request you to leave the room," said Jim Murray to a motley group of Delhiites - some whisky connoisseurs and others who were just there to meet the whisky legend. Author of the famous Whisky Bible, Murray, 61, was at Pullman New Delhi, Aerocity, on the eve of World Whisky Day (May 18) doing what he does best conducting - blind whisky tasting sessions. "From the mid-1990s, I've closely seen India's whisky culture grow with a certain degree of pride. These are exciting times for Indian whisky brands and I can see that in the next 10 years, Indian whiskies will be embraced more across the world with more distilleries," says Murray, who gave up a career in journalism to become a professional whisky critic in 1992. "Twenty seven years ago, there were no whisky shows. Today whisky has become much more accessible and touristy, just out there," he adds.

Murray swears by blind tastings. "If people know what they're going to taste, they make their mind up and taste with a closed mind," he says. He recalls serving a group some Indian whiskies at one of the blind tastings. "When I included an Indian whisky, they were shocked because they have a preconceived idea that Indian whisky will not be as good as the others." At the tasting in Delhi, he took guests through The Murray Method - the drill involves getting the whisky glass close to the chest to bring it to body temperature, nosing and then drinking.

Murray doesn't believe in diluting his drink and says, "if you are buying an expensive bottle of single malt, why drown it in water." And that explains why he almost laughs at the idea of cocktails. "If I want to know you, I wouldn't want to know you as part of a group, but individually. Just like that, I try to get people to discover whisky as it is," says Murray who will be tasting close to 20,000 whiskies for the 2020 edition of the Whisky Bible.

## COCKTAIL CULTURE

Meanwhile, across some of Delhi's bars, the whisky story is finding a new meaning with cocktails making it palatable for non-whisky drinkers as well. Says mixologist Richard Hargroves, "Whisky cocktails have definitely helped in introducing non-whisky drinkers to the spirit. The Old Fashioned was first created by Martin Cuneo for a Colonel called James E Pepper at The Pendennis Club in Louisville USA. Legend has it that he wasn't a fan of bourbon but wanted to fit in with all the soldiers who drank just that. The bartender added sugar and bitters along with some orange zest to make the drink sweeter." There are others who want to offer cocktails and yet a variety of single malts. Anglow Whisky Bar and Kitchen at Khan Market, for instance, offers 46 varieties of single malts and seven whisky cocktails curated by them. Says founder and MD, Arpan Gupta,



"The response to our cocktails so far has been fantastic. Customers who like bold cocktails prefer King's Derby (Bourbon, red plum, almond, dark chocolate and Angostura bitters) the most. During daytime, Yellow Breakfast (Scotch, salted caramel, Angostura bitters, egg white and lime, rimmed with cornflake dust), which is on the sweeter side, is the popular choice."

## FINER TASTES

Delhi has always had a steady relationship with whisky what with Patiala pegs keeping conversations exciting over plates of chicken tikka and butter chicken. But just like everything else in the city, even the whisky culture has evolved-from Patiala pegs to 30 ml on the rocks. Elaborates Angad Singh Gandhi, brand ambassador Glenfiddich India, "From blended scotch, people are going towards the single malt drinking culture as Delhiites are travelling more - their palates are getting better and wallets fatter. Delhi is the biggest market for us."

And that's why the brand started the Glenfiddich Experiments last year which was about pairing the single malt with special ingredients native to the Indian landscape. These included the fragrant Mysore jasmine, spicy Malabar clove, Kerala black pepper, cinnamon from the Western Ghats, bitter orange from Nagpur, the Kashmir peach, spiced coriander from Karnataka and other unique handpicked spices for the perfect pairing. The drinks were served in Delhi at restaurants including Dum Pukht at ITC Sheraton, Novele at Shangri-La, Whisky Samba, The Quorum and The Drunken Botanist. It is this evolving whisky culture that restaurants are embracing and that's why the menus are changing.

Says Gupta of Anglow, "Whisky is the drink of rules and so it is not only savoured but also fancied by everyone in the Capital from bureaucrats, businessmen to even expats. Back in the days, there were limited number people drinking single malts in a club. Today there are many who are genuinely interested in the whisky, the making of the whisky, and how it is in comparison with other drinks. This includes both men and women, mainly other young and affluent professionals. For religious and loyal whisky consumers, it is quite important to choose the perfect brand of whisky."

And for that, one might have to go the Murray way-just nosing and tasting, till you find your perfect spirit.