

The rich assortment of natural aromas that peat, heather and other plants bring to whisky, spring from Scotland's unique climate and terrain. Thanks partly to its location in the warm Gulf Stream, this part of the world enjoys few extremes of temperature, plenty of moist air, sheltered plains most suited for growing barley, an important ingredient for scotch and warm soft rain known as 'Scotch mist', making it ideal for Scotch whisky.

The spirit is distilled, refined and enhanced from nature's abundance showered on scenic Scotland – cool, pure air, mountains, lochs and glen, clear streams flowing through the thick peat granite and fields of golden barley and wheat. It is here that the world's most distinctive whiskies are born.

What exactly is single malt whisky? It is the product of one single distillery using only malted barley. Single malts are the rare pure basis from which all blends are developed. They are like unique individuals with variations in taste from subtle to strong, from cask to cask just like fine wines. The varieties of flavour that can be nosed in every single malt are as rich and varied as they are in the most complex of wines.

There are 80 malt distilleries located all over Scotland with production capacities of 2 to 4 million litres of alcohol per distillery. Today, single malts are exported to nearly 200 countries and enjoyed by many connoisseurs all over the world for their distinct flavour, which sets it apart from other whiskies. While the making of Scotch whisky is easily the most complex among all alcoholic drinks, if a single ingredient determined the setting of most distilleries it was the availability of clean, clear water. Particular water sources contribute their own individuality to the Scotch making process and provide the medium for every stage of Scotch making- from the rain, barley growing to malting, fermentation and distillation.

Each single malt whisky is very distinct in both taste and character. They have the flavours of the landscape itself- mountain water, ripe barley, peat smoke and the heather. A good single malt whisky is full of mystery!

Out of a total of 92 million cases of Scotch sold worldwide, about 4 million cases are in the form of single malt whiskies. It is a category which has gradually emerged over the years in Europe and more recently in India too, more and more people are appreciating single

malts. However, single malt has a very distinct taste, a taste that is acquired over a period of time.

Even after opening, blended whisky will not deteriorate provided that its bottle or decanter is tightly sealed. On the other hand, once single malt whisky has been opened, it will lose much of its power and flavour after 2-3 weeks.

Good single malts are usually those that have been matured for 8 to 15 years and during this period have absorbed the aromatic peat smoke and therefore usually have very distinct flavours. Some popular brands that come to mind are **GLENDRONACH 15 YO** from the highland region and **LAPHROAIG 10 YO** Single malt from **Islay** on the S.W coast of Scotland, which are now available in India. Laphroaig is the definitive Islay Malt – the most challenging and individual of malt whiskies, the smokiest and peatiest of them all. These are great to have during or after dinner with a good cigar.

Master blenders in Scotland normally recommend the best way to enjoy a single malt is with an equal measure of water or may be with three cubes of ice, a slight twirl of the glass to bring out the aromas and inhale the complex flavours that single malts contain. Close your eyes and imagine the cool fresh sea breeze, 'the Scotch Mist' floating down the glens and valleys and enjoy the momentary flood of warmth that is experienced. Somewhere in the background, the faint sound of the bagpipers' reaches you.