

Indian Indigenous Liquors, Local Brews with an International charm

India has a long history of producing and savoring alcoholic drinks and has come a long way or perhaps further from the legendary 'Somras', the drink of the Gods to the old Englishman's Indian summer cooler 'Whiskey and Soda'. These days you may find farmers sipping on a glass of locally made world class Chardonnay wine on the outskirts of Nasik in Maharashtra or won't be surprised to know that an Indian Scotch Whiskey being awarded the 3rd best whiskey in the world. Also you may find it a bit paradoxically amusing that Indian Made Foreign liquors, especially a certain Indian rum makes an American sitting seven seas away give up his hedonistic lifestyle and turn into a monk.

However, leaving aside the traditional whiskies, rums, beers and wines aside, we Indians have many hidden gems of indigenous liquors or '*desi darus*' which might not sound or taste as good as your regular choice of drink but may pack a real punch and give you the ultimate kick.

We start our list with the 'Bhaang', the most potent of any locally brewed liquor. Bhaang has been associated with Indian culture since ancient times and known as the 'Nectar of the Gods' and had by Lord Shiva for complete bliss and concentration needed for his eternal meditation making it truly a *Shiva's Regal*. Made with the leaves and flowers of the female cannabis plant, this beverage can be practically made into a milkshake by mixing the cannabis with milk and spices or as a Lassi by mixing water and yogurt with the cannabis. Though popular all around India and had as a religious offering during festivals like Mahashivratri and Holi, it is more easily available in Jodhpur and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan where there are Government authorized shops set up for tourists.

Tully Tip: *It is recommended to have Bhaang along with Indian Mithai such as Bundi Laddoo or Kaju Katli as this combination is said to take the Bhaang's potency to the highest level.*

Moving on, we take you to the laidback backwaters of Goa, where we find '*Feni*'. Though the name sounds like a local Goan chick, it blows a punch harder than a burly Russian Vodka which is guaranteed to make you swirl. Feni is generally made by fermenting the cashew nut apple or with coconut. Feni is what best describes the Goan life, smooth, inexpensive and the most easily available drink in Goa. It has a sharp taste and the locals drink it in soda or lemonade.

Tully Tip: *It is recommended to have Feni with any spicy meat dish such as the local Goan dishes, Vindaloo or Xacuti.*

Moving down to South of India, we come across 'Toddy' which is more of a poor man's drink and should be thought about tasting only if you feel really adventurous. Toddy is made from palm tree sap which is collected overnight in earthen pots. The sap collected if had in the early morning is called Neera, a cool refreshing nonalcoholic drink supposed to help in digestion which if left for a day or more to ferment turns to toddy. If

toddy is further distilled it turns to Arrack which is highly potent having alcohol content of more than 70% by volume and is currently banned in India. Looking slightly cloudier than coconut water, toddy has a sour and sometimes astringent taste. With a potency bit higher than strong beer, toddy gives you a burning sensation as it passes down your throat and is generally had with fried fish in Kerala. Also beware if you are sitting in a crowded room after having toddy, for everyone will be aware of your little toddy drinking adventure.

Tully Tip: *It is recommended to have toddy with fried fish such as fried king fish or mackerel*

Japan has its Sake and the Indian forest tribes have their own rice beer called Hadia. This rice beer is popular in Indian states having more forest tribal population who drink it as a refreshing drink in summer which is made and consumed at home. To make this beer, boiled wild rice is fermented with the mixture of local forest herbs called Ranu. However, the recipe of this beer differs from tribe to tribe as the procedure is passed down from generation to generation. A more frothy, aromatic and tangy version of rice beer is available in Nagaland called 'Zutho' which is made after a long fermentation process.

So what is your poison going to be when you order some drinks next time? Is it going to be a tall glass of a chilled beer or a chilled glass of sweet Bhaang Lassi? Cheers!