



Cover image
Pagoda landscape under a warm sunset in the plain of Bagan, Myanmar
© Stephane Bidouze

CONTRIBUTORS



Adrienne Jordan

A regular freelance travel and lifestyle contributor to *USA Today*, BBC Travel, *Travel + Leisure*, *American Way* and *Men's Journal*, some of Adrienne's standout travel experiences to date include gorilla trekking in Uganda, cruising the fjords of Norway, swimming in "The Devil's Pool" in Zambia and road tripping through South Africa. For this issue, she visited the South East Asian country of Myanmar (page 52). "It was moving to visit the country during the 2015 elections and witness truckloads of people campaigning for Aung San Suu Kyi," she says. "Not to mention savouring the country's delectable food and wine." @MsJasson



Chris Chamberlain

Food, drink and travel writer Chris Chamberlain has been based in Nashville his entire life – except for the four years he spent in California where he studied liberal arts at Stanford University and learned how to manipulate chopsticks. Chris is a regular contributor to *Nashville Scene*, *Nashville Lifestyles*, *Local Palate*, *Edible*, FoodRepublic.com and *Condé Nast Traveler*, and for this issue, he dined his way through his hometown's gourmet offerings on page 102. "Music City has really taken off as a dining destination in the past five years," he says. "I believe I made a pretty shrewd career choice getting into the food-writing biz just as Nashville became so white-hot." @CeeElCee



Eugene Yiga

Graduating from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano, Eugene spent two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market-research companies, and three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. "For twelve of the last fifteen years, brandies from South Africa have won the top prize at the International Wine and Spirits Competition," he says of his story in this month's edition (page 110). "It's high time the world discovered the country's fifty shades of gold." @EugeneYiga



Nick Walton

Nick Walton is a Hong Kong-based travel-magazine editor, photographer and contributor to newspapers and magazines around the globe. When he's not travelling through the jungles of Papua New Guinea or the frozen climes of Antarctica, he can be found exploring the wet markets and emerging neighbourhoods of his adopted home. For this issue, Nick ventured to Kazakhstan (page 84), a less-explored country that is basking in prosperity and travel potential. "Kazakhstan is an exhilarating destination," says Nick. "There is such a unique meeting of cultures and traditions and ideas, steeped with a rich history and an invigorating potential that makes it truly captivating for intrepid travellers." @TravellingNick

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SPIRIT OF... Brandy

Discover South Africa's 50 shades of gold through atmospheric distilleries, Brandy Homes and an urban cocktail route through Cape Town and Johannesburg

Words: Eugene Yiga

It all began in 1672. This was the year when South Africa's first brandy was distilled on *Pijl*, a Dutch ship anchored in Cape Town's Table Bay harbour. Since then, it has won global accolades, including 12 of the past 16 years, and last year the spotlight got even brighter when it netted awards at both the International Spirits Competition (ISC) in London and the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC). Although these triumphs and countless international accolades prove that the nation's brandy is among the best in the world, many locals view it as old fashioned, a perception the South African Brandy Foundation is striving to change.

Established in 1984, the non-profit organisation aims to promote the long-term growth, integrity and heritage of South African brandy with various

initiatives. Each year, three or four people are inducted into the Brandy Guild; from celebrities and entertainers to politicians and chefs, they act as ambassadors for the brandy industry. There are also ongoing campaigns like Fine Brandy Fusion, an annual festival that brings almost all South African brandies together under one roof, and leaves many attendees surprised when they realise that much of the hard work in brandy production is done by hand.

“YOU CAN PAIR IT WITH FRESH OYSTERS OR EVEN SUSHI”

But the foundation didn't expect such an overwhelming response when it launched the Urban Brandy Cocktail Route. There are now over two dozen venues in Cape Town and Johannesburg, allowing brandy lovers to follow a delicious path to

sample small-batch brandies and brandy cocktails that are tailored to a discerning crowd.

It's through initiatives like this that South African brandy has undergone a renaissance, with new brandies being developed, among them Collison's White Gold. Designed to work well in cocktails, it has helped attract a new breed of brandy lovers – including women. “It's not an overpowering brandy,” says Christelle Reade-Jahn, the foundation's director. “They don't age it in new barrels, so it's light and pale. You can pair it with fresh oysters or even sushi, which means a lot of women will say: ‘That's my brandy.’”

Aside from imbibing in bars, the best way to experience South African brandy is to visit a “Brandy Home”. The name is exactly what it suggests: a place where a brandy is born. There are currently 22 in South Africa, including 14 in the Cape Winelands, one in the Northern Cape, and seven in the Klein (“Little”) Karoo, with each offering a fascinating look into the art and science of making brandy. You can meet the brandy master, see how the brandy is made, and taste the product at the end. Some of the distilleries date back to the mid-1800s and use the same methods from many generations ago. And, given the quality of what they produce, it's possible that they'll continue to use the same methods for many years to come.



The award-winning Bramble by Matthew Rohleder from Granger Bay

FOUR WAYS TO SIP SOUTH AFRICA'S GOLDEN LIBATION

BACK TO OUR ROUTES

The Urban Brandy Cocktail Route is all about sophisticated venues and equally sophisticated drinks. There are over two dozen locations, including TjingTjing (a rooftop bar in a 200-year-old house in Cape Town), Kong (one of Johannesburg's top nightclubs) and several five-star hotels in both cities. It's here that you can enjoy delicious cocktails, such as the Fynbos (with South Africa's famous rooibos tea), Ama-Lekker Licoius (with KWV 3 Year Old brandy) and many more. The foundation starts by profiling a venue's consumer to match the right cocktails to the right crowd. The foundation also trains the bar staff on how to make the cocktails and on the basics of brandy. This makes it a fantastic platform for spreading the word and a win for everyone involved. The venue gets exposure, training and cocktail recipes that are updated every year. The foundation gets brandy into venues where it previously wasn't. And the consumer, after sampling a few amazing cocktails, is often willing to taste the base product on its own.

WWW.SABRANDY.CO.ZA/COCKTAILS

RYN AND SHINE

Van Ryn's Distillery was established in 1845 and has been at its current location since 1905. More recently, at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, Van Ryn's Fine Cask Reserve 15 year old won a gold medal, and a silver medal was awarded for the Van Ryn's Distiller's Reserve 12 year old. The latter was also named the best brandy in the world at the International Wine and Spirit Competition. Touring the chateau-style distillery is a fascinating insight into the craftsmanship behind brandy. Van Ryn's is one of the few places in the world that has its own working cooperage, which gives you a chance to see skilled practitioners making the French oak barrels in which the brandies are matured. After the tour, you can also enjoy a pairing of brandy with Belgian chocolate and Brazilian coffee. Another highlight of the visit is AU.RA, a one-off edition of just 107 hand-bottled brandies that are displayed in the distillery's tasting area. Presented in individually blown-glass decanters and housed in solid-oak cases made by furniture designer James Mudge, the 30-year-old blend includes components as old as 40 years.

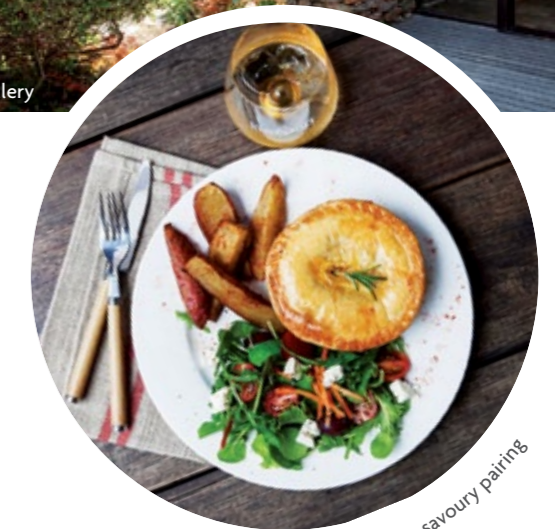
PRICE: Tour and pairing ZAR45 (US\$3) per person

TEL: +27 21 881 3875

WWW.VANRYN.CO.ZA



Klipdrift Distillery



Klipdrift brandy with a savoury pairing

CATCH MY DRIFT

When you take a tour of the Klipdrift Distillery in Robertson, your instinct might be to check your watch when you see that all the clocks look wrong. But they're all set to 8:02pm for a reason: this was the exact time when, in 1938, the first drop of Klipdrift Export was distilled. Over the decades, Klipdrift has introduced several other brandies that include Klipdrift Premium, Klipdrift Gold and Klipdrift Black Gold (with arabica coffee from the Ethiopian Highlands and cocoa from Côte d'Ivoire), each of which is available for tasting in a sweet or savoury pairing. But one of the best brandies is Klipdrift Legend, which pays tribute to the remarkable life of Kosie Marais, a descendant of the French Huguenots who founded Klipdrift. Johan Venter, the master distiller, describes this blend of brandies aged between 10 and 21 years as the “best of best”. It is only released sporadically and is sold exclusively at the distillery so be sure to get your hands on this collector's item, whatever the time may be.

PRICE: Tour and tastings from ZAR60 (US\$4) per person

TEL: +27 23 626 3027

WWW.KLIPDRIFT.CO.ZA

HOME SWEET HOME

When you drive along the R62 in the Western Cape, you'll come across several Brandy Homes. Mons Ruber dates back to 1850 and has been a hotel, a cheese factory and a direct line on the old Diamond Route from Mossel Bay to Kimberley in its previous life. The British royal family even visited the farm in 1947. Because the area is a gem for good-quality Muscat grapes, Mons Ruber's Muscat d'Alexandrie 2003 potstill brandy, with its honey and caramel characteristics, is ideal when paired with desserts and doesn't require the “acquired taste” people might associate with brandies drunk neat. It's much the same at Grundheim, a sixth-generation farm that dates back to 1858. From peppermint, honey and hazelnut liqueurs, to brandies made with fresh ginger and buchu, they release something new every year and plan to launch a 10-year-old brandy this year. They have won silver at the Michelangelo International Wine & Spirit Awards for Witblits (“white lightning”), a “raw” brandy that farm-owner Dys Grundheim describes as “the stuff we use to scare the big guys”. Once you've had a taste of the chilli-infused Brandslang (“fire snake”), you'll understand why.

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