

MAKE LOCAL, GO GLOBAL: HOW INDIAN WHISKY IS CONQUERING THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE

CONFERENCES

Ashok Chokalingam

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Established in 1948 in Bangalore, Southern India, Amrut Distilleries produces whisky, grape brandy, rum, gin and vodka at its local distillery. But as the company's head of international sales and marketing **Ashok Chokalingam** explained, Amrut has also been successful in creating one of the most iconic single malt brands in the world.

Ashok Chokalingam described how his family's business became the first distillery in India to go global with a single malt whisky. Amrut single malt was befittingly launched in Glasgow, Scotland on August 24, 2004. The Amrut Fusion brand was voted the third best whisky in the world by the Whisky Bible in 2010. Between these two landmark moments, the journey was extremely challenging as the brand not only had to meet all the international requirements from raw materials to finished product, it also became the first Indian single malt to secure approval by the TTB in the United States.

Challenges included the negative perception of Indian whisky in the international market, particularly because most Indian whiskies are produced from sugarcane molasses and were considered as rum rather than whisky. However, as a malt-based whisky, Amrut had to dispel the myth that all Indian whisky is the same. To prove the point, by 2010 the company had discovered the magic of blind tastings. To date, Amrut has conducted 500 blind tastings around the world. It has participated in most consumer exhibitions and tastings, ultimately transforming it into one of the most sought-after brands in India and abroad.

Amrut didn't just dispel myths in the international market; it also changed perceptions on the domestic front. The brand was first launched abroad and later introduced to India. Only afterwards did the company witness huge consumer demand for it in the domestic market.



A unique production process

So what really makes Amrut special? Amrut Distillery uses ex-bourbon casks, new American white oak casks, ex-sherry butts and former Port 'pipes' for maturation. All Amrut single malt whisky brands are unchilfiltered and none are coloured artificially.

The distillery is located 300 ft above sea level in Bangalore where the temperature in summer (April -June) can reach up to 39°C and fall to 20°C whilst winter temperatures (October -February) range from 30°C at the top end to 17 °C at the bottom. There is also an average difference of 6°C between the warehouse and ambient temperature. The region is affected by the South-West monsoon (June -August) with 85% of rain in the evenings.

While the average maturation loss (or angels' share) in Scotland is between 2% to 3% per year and the warehouse temperature in a distillery in Islay about 8°C year round, in India the loss is similar to Kentucky at between 10-16%. Whiskies are bottled by taste, not by age.

Amrut is now available in 42 countries and has 23 expressions including two new ones which were launched and tasted for the first time during the AWS presentation: Amrut Double Cask and Amrut Rye Whisky.

The company has not only been able to produce a 10-year-old single malt in an environment like Bangalore, it has also successfully maintained a distinctiveness for each and every variant of Amrut single malt released on the market.