

The Best Smokey Whiskey

Smoke is among the most desirable flavors in good whiskey. A blast of smoke on the nose takes you back to summer campfires and good memories. The most common type of smokey whiskey is a peaty scotch, many of which come from peat-rich regions of Scotland - though not exclusively.

Peat is a compound that, when burned, produces a smokey quality. The peaty flavor is imparted into whiskey when peat fires are used to dry the malt. It's a single piece of the entire process, yet it holds so much weight when your goal is a nice smokey whiskey.

The best smokey whiskey isn't cheap because it's an integral part of the process and must be done correctly. For many, this is okay because it's not the whiskey you're reaching for to take shots, and it's not going into all of your cocktails, either.

Some cocktails call for a good smokey whiskey, but you'll want to try the good stuff neat. If anything, some like it with a splash of water. This lets the flavors shine and really shows you what they have to offer.

If you're smart, you'll sip them slowly and make them last, as is the treatment that all great whiskey deserves.

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1. Lagavulin 16

Lagavulin is one of Scotland's oldest distilleries. The founder began distilling illegally in 1742 and officially opened in 1816. The company has changed hands and gone through many changes over the years, but its location has always been paramount. It's situated next to a peaty riverbank, which contributes significantly to many of its most distinct flavors.

[Lagavulin 16](#) is a single malt scotch that won a double gold medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition in 2017. The peat intrinsic to all their spirits imparts a smokey flavor to just about everything, but it's particularly intense in this one.

The palate is strong and full-bodied, with a distinct taste of driftwood fire and dry peat smoke. Strong maritime notes also come through, with a long and elegant finish. It's a top-notch smokey whiskey that must be experienced neat to get the full effect. It also does quite well with just a splash of water.

2. Compass Box The Peat Monster

[Compass Box The Peat Monster](#) is a unique and interesting expression that results from a large collaboration between distilleries. The final product is a blend of single malt whiskies that creates an approachable expression for those who love big, rich, peaty flavors. The drink is 50% [Islay whiskey](#), 30% Speyside, and 20% from “the Islands.”

We know that the Islay whiskies in the bottle are sourced from Caol Ila and Laprohaig distilleries, while the Speyside single malt is from Ardmore Distillery. The remaining 20 percent is left as a mystery.

Once the individual malts are collected, Compass Whiskey Box Co. marries them for a few months using American oak casks. The aroma is intensely peaty, reminding you instantly of summer bonfires on the beach. Smoke is up first on the palate, well-balanced by the appearance of some light fruitiness. The subtle finish is long and lingering.

3. Caol Ila 12

The Island of Islay is only 240 square miles and has a population of fewer than 3500 people. Yet, it produces an impressive amount of whiskey in a popular style that many people love. Part of this comes from its unique geography and climate. Though small, it still boasts an impressive 130 miles of coastline and pleasant weather overall.

It gets cool in the winter and remains mild in the summer—there are not too many extremes here. Perhaps the most important element, though, is the amount of peat the land contains. Combine this with the salty winds coming off the water, and you’ve got an amazing Islay signature flavor.

Caol Ila was founded in 1846, and the name means “The Sound of Islay” in Gaelic. [Caol Ila 12-Year-Old](#) is a single-malt scotch whiskey with an aroma of citrus, olive oil, and crushed almonds. It offers a sturdy body with notes of smoke, honey, caramel, oak, and a touch of salty tang. It has a smooth, tart finish and ends with that signature touch of peat.

4. Ardbeg Uigeadail

Founded in 1815, Ardbeg Distillery employed almost one-third of the island's population at one point. This should tell you the significance it carried back then, which no doubt stayed with them.

Today, they are still notorious for creating some of the boldest, strongest, and most vibrant Scotch whiskey around. [Ardbeg Uigeadail](#) (pronounced oog-a-dal) is made from a combination of whiskey aged in ex-sherry and ex-bourbon casks. These impart unique flavors that come together to create something new and amazing.

The bourbon casks offer notes of cinnamon, honeyed oak, and baking spices, while the sherry casks bring dried fruits, figs, berries, and caramelized oranges. Together, these elements create a whiskey with unmatched depth and complexity.

The aroma is just as inviting, with notes of ocean spice, violet, Christmas cake, cedar, spice, and leather. The palate starts with the sweeter flavors, including a touch of cherry and dark chocolate. The peat comes through mid-palate along with honey and tobacco. The long finish is chewy and rich with raisins, mocha, and figs.

5. BenRiach Curiositas 10

BenRiach is nestled in the heart of Speyside, where they've been mastering the art of single malt scotch whiskey since 1898. Founder John Duff built the distillery in 1897 after he successfully started and ran two other distilleries. And though BenRiach was an initial success, it closed in 1899 along with many others, as the economy took a terrible turn.

What followed was almost 65 years of silence. The facility remained intact but did nothing but participate in the malting process for another distillery.

However, the BenRiach brand never lost hope, and they officially reopened in 1965. It was bought out in 2004 by owners who have, thankfully, remained faithful to the BenRiach name and still produce incredible single malt whiskies, including the [BenRiach Curiositas 10](#). This expression is made using heavily peated malted barley, producing a strong sense of smoke in the profile.

The intense peat appears first in the aroma, backed by notes of fruit, honey, and gentle oak. The palate also begins with strong and cascading peat flavors, followed by a complex array of fruits, nuts, oak, wood, and spices. From nose to finish, this whiskey is an adventure.

Peated Whiskey Cocktails to Try

While the best smokey whiskey will undoubtedly be a delight to drink neat, some amazing cocktails call for peated whiskey. While amazing, heavily peated whiskey *can* be an acquired taste, and these cocktails are a good place to start if you're new to smokey whiskey.

Most peated whiskey cocktails aren't easy and simple like a three-ingredient martini, but the results are worth the extra effort and ingredients. If you can get your hands on the right stuff, definitely give these cocktails a try:

The Penicillin

This is the ultimate beginner scotch cocktail. It's basically a scotch-based whiskey sour, using a combination of blended and regular scotch. Other than that, you only need lime juice and honey-ginger syrup.

Ingredients:

- 2 ounces of blended scotch
- ¾ ounce lemon juice - fresh-squeezed if possible
- ¾ ounce honey-ginger syrup
- ¼ ounce peated scotch
- Ice
- Lemon peel or candied ginger for garnish

Instructions:

1. Homemade honey-ginger syrup is best; this can be done by boiling half a cup of honey and half a cup of water with a 3-inch piece of ginger. Once boiling, reduce heat and simmer for five minutes.
2. Allow the syrup to cool.
3. Once ready, put the blended scotch, syrup, and lemon juice into a shaker with ice and shake well.
4. Strain the drink into a glass with ice.
5. Using the back of a spoon, gently pour the peated scotch on top. It should float on top.
6. Add your garnish and enjoy!

Canal Street

This scotch cocktail is considerably more complex, having been created by a bartender named Matty Hutchinson, who works at an Edinburgh bar called Bramble.

Ingredients:

- 25 ml Jagermeister
- 25 ml gin
- 10ml peated scotch - Lagavulin 16 is recommended
- 10 ml vanilla syrup
- 20ml lemon juice
- One egg white

Despite the many ingredients, this one isn't too difficult to make:

1. Add all your ingredients to a cocktail shaker.
2. Shake it first without ice.
3. Add ice and shake again.
4. Strain into a chilled glass, and enjoy!

This unique, smokey, sour cocktail mixes herbal, fruit, and heavy peat flavors. It's rich and viscous, with the peat well-balanced by the rest of it.

