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## Drink up! Every country has a signature drink **Not only delicious, these cocktails signify a country's culture and history**

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Prost! Skål! Salud! Cheers!

You know how to toast in a myriad of different languages, but do you know the significance behind that drink you're downing and, more importantly, what it's made of?

While it may be just another way of reaching a blissful state of transitory intoxication to you, that liquor you're drinking actually has quite a bit of history behind it. Believe it or not, both politics and agriculture play vital roles in the background of different countries' alcoholic beverages.

"A cocktail says a lot about a country and its people and their passions," says Ann R. Tuennerman, president of New Orleans' summer event Tales of a Cocktail.

"To find out what people are drinking, first find out what they're growing," adds Paul Tanguay, co-owner of beverage consulting company Tippling Bros. and former corporate beverage director for Sushi Samba.

Take sake, for example. Contrary to widespread belief, this ubiquitous Asian libation did not originate in Japan. Rather, it comes from China, where its existence is attributed to the economy's predominant grain: rice.

"Sake's evolution as a rice-based beverage is due entirely to

these two countries' reliance on rice as a food source," explains Tanguay. "In both places, rice was considered sacred—it still is to some degree today—and traded like money." In the early days of sake, rice was masticated (i.e., chewed) to create fermentable sugars from the starches in the rice grains. "This mastication was done primarily by young virgin women with religious rites and rituals attached to the production," says Tanguay. "This associated sake early on as a religious beverage."

Another legend speaks of the mojito's precursor, the draquecito, created when Sir Francis Drake went traipsing about the Caribbean after being knighted by the Queen. To fight off scurvy, Sir Drake toted along a spirit-and-lemon concoction—a drink that came to bear his name.

Regardless of which tale is more true, the mojito's recipe is relatively consistent. First, squeeze a lime into a highball glass; drop in the rind. Add ice, cover with rum, stir. Add a generous helping of sugar and dash of seltzer water, and top it off with a sprig of mint.

Like Sir Drake, other historical and political figures are credited with coining drinks or spreading their popularity. The success of the pisco sour in Peru, for example, is attributed to former President Augusto B. Leguía. Before entering politics, Leguía was a successful businessman who spent time in the United States and United Kingdom, where he found a passion for top-quality liquor. During his second term in office, 1919 to 1930, he took keenly to the pisco sour, made with pisco (a brandy made from grapes) and, depending on the recipe, lemon or lime juice, sugar syrup, egg whites and bitters.

"He had learned about great cocktails prior to the Prohibition and when he returned to Peru, he instilled the cocktail culture by

introducing the martini and the Manhattan,” says Diego Loret de Mola, president of BevMax International Inc. “As a result, the cocktail culture in Peru was driven by the president of the country, which then translated to promoting an original cocktail authentic to the country. That cocktail became the pisco sour.”

A subsequent leader, Manuel Arturo Odría Amoretti, who held office from 1948 to 1956, was a fan of pisco fresh from the still. He influenced the creation of the Green Must Pisco, a delicate version made by distilling fresh grape wines before they’re fully fermented. He, too, promoted the pisco sour as the national cocktail.

“As a result, every government affair and celebration is now toasted with pisco sour, from the signing of contracts and agreements to the inauguration of cities, companies and the welcome of foreign visitors.” Loret de Mola says. “Furthermore, Peru now celebrates National Pisco Sour Day in early February each year.”

Other drinks came about for medicinal purposes. In a Brazilian caipirinha, the main ingredient is Cachaça, which was prescribed with honey and lime to cure colds and sore throats. Only later did it become part of the nation’s signature cocktail.

“You can’t talk about caipirinha without talking about Cachaça. Also known as aguardente or pinga, Cachaça is only produced in Brazil,” says João H. Rodrigues, account manager for Rio Convention & Visitors Bureau. “Some people mistakenly describe Cachaça as a type of rum, but they differ in that Cachaça is made from sugarcane juice while rum is made from either molasses or sugarcane juice then aged in oak barrels.”

The name comes from the word “caipira,” or someone from the countryside of Brazil. “Like a hillbilly,” explains Rodrigues.

“During the early part of the 19th century, when Brazil was trying to find its own identity, there was a resurgence of food and drinks that had always been part of the core soul of the country. In the big towns like Sao Paulo and Rio, the rich and affluent were forsaking their martinis and cognacs for the drink of the ‘caipiras,’ the ‘caipirinhas.’”

These are just a few of the world’s most interesting—and potent—national cocktails.