

Trending Tequila

BALBOA BAY RESORT'S NEW TEQUILA BAR, WHICH IS REOPENING THIS SPRING, OFFERS SENSATIONAL SIPS PAIRED WITH A LITTLE BIT OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SPIRIT'S HISTORY.

BY ASHLEY RYAN / PHOTOS BY BALBOA BAY RESORT



There's no doubt about it: Tequila is all the rage right now. South-of-the-border culture has made its way to the United States, and this spirit is no different. With a rich history, endless sipping options and sales that are trending upward, it's sure to be a staple for years to come.

A+O Restaurant | Bar is embracing the movement with the launch of its Tequila Bar last summer. After some downtime during the winter, the bar is preparing to reopen later this spring, bringing with it a collection of distinct, ultra-rare and hard-to-find tequilas and mezcals. Offered Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, guests can stop by to sample flights or sip specific selections.

"Tequila and mezcal have been enjoyed by family and friends for generations, and we have a nice collection [here at the resort]," says Jason Hsieh, Director of Food and Beverage at Balboa Bay Resort.

During the offseason, the resort put together a special book detailing the history and process of making the spirit, the differences between tequila and mezcal, the various types and the top pours you can find at the luxury standalone bar. Read on to learn a bit more about this increasingly popular beverage.

A RICH HISTORY

The first iterations of tequila date back to pre-Hispanic times, when Native Americans created what they called "pulque," a drink made with the fermented sap of the agave plant, or maguey. By the time European explorers arrived in the Americas, the drink had been around for quite a while. Spaniards later used European techniques to distill the agave plant, resulting in the creation of mezcal wine. But, eventually, they realized that the mezcal being produced near the town of Tequila was of a higher quality.

This led to the creation of what is now tequila, made only with the blue agave plant in specific regions of Mexico. The king of Spain issued a royal decree allowing Jose Maria



Guadalupe de Cuervo to become the first person to produce and distribute tequila. As he cultivated hundreds of plants, and the Jose Cuervo company began exporting to the United States, the blue agave spread, with millions of plants now populating this region.

Eventually, other brands, like Sauza, also take up the craft of distilling tequila and, in the 1970s, the spirit earned a Designation of Origin certification stating that the agave used to manufacture it must be grown in one of five Mexican states: Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit and Tamaulipas.

Today, tequila has been popularized as part of cocktails like the margarita and the tequila sunrise, but it's also become a luxury good, with flights and tastings providing liquor connoisseurs with more chances to try the elevated beverage on its own—like you can at BBR's Tequila Bar.

STAGES OF PRODUCTION

There is much involved in making a high-quality bottle of tequila. The first step is to plant the agave, which takes five to 10 years to mature. To harvest it, the leaves are removed to isolate the core, or the piña. Next, the piñas spend roughly 48 hours cooking, often in brick ovens crafted from the earth, to transform the sap, or aguamiel, into fermentable sugars.

The third step, extraction, requires mallets or a stone wheel to squeeze the aguamiel from the cores. Then, fermentation must occur by blending aguamiel with yeast, water and possibly

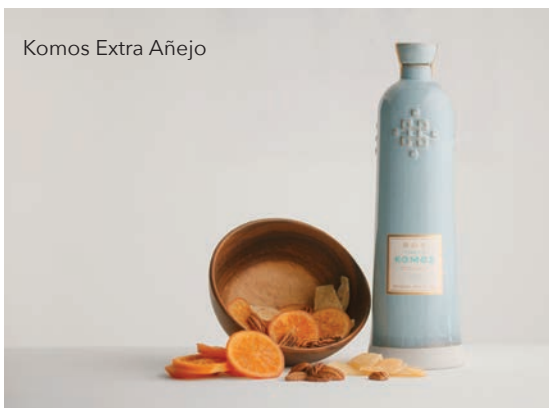
the fibers from the piñas to convert the sugars into alcohol. This can take up to a month's time. The resulting solution, called mosto, is between 4-10% alcohol—and this is the most artistic part of the process, with each brand's mosto largely dictating the flavor of the spirit.

Next up, the liquid must be distilled at least twice to be labeled tequila. This technique separates the water from the mosto, and results in a mixture that is at least 40% alcohol. The sixth step is aging, which is not required if it's a blanco tequila but is an important step for creating reposado or añejo. After the aging process is complete, the final step is bottling, where water, aromatics and coloring are incorporated before the spirit is shipped out.

TEMPTING TYPES

There are technically three types of tequila—blanco or silver, reposado or añejo (plus super añejo, an even rarer form). Blanco, or silver, tequila is the initial result of the distillation process, created without aging for a sweet yet earthy flavor. Reposado, on the other hand, is aged for two months to a year, resulting in a caramel color and mellow oak flavor. Then añejo, aged from 1 to 3 years, offers a smooth taste with flavor based on the barrel it was stored in; super añejo is largely the same, but is aged for more than 3 years.

Types of mezcal—joven, reposado and añejo—are aged for the same lengths of time as tequilas.



BALBOA BAY RESORT'S TOP 10

- AsomBroso The Collaboration (Extra Añejo)
- Clase Azul Ultra (Extra Añejo)
- Codigo 1530 Playboy Rare Hare (Añejo)
- Komos (Extra Añejo)
- OAX Original Tepeztate (Mezcal)
- Olvido Divino Mezcal (Mezcal Añejo)
- Patrón Tequila x Guillermo Del Toro (Extra Añejo)
- Pescador de Sueños Pechuga (Mezcal)
- Tears of Llorona (Extra Añejo)
- Tesla Tequila (Añejo)