



Peter Hunt, left, from Victoria Distillers, and Roberto Roberti, from the Fountana Group Canada, get ready for the Victoria Whisky Festival, which starts today. BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

Enjoy a dram or two at 11th Whisky Festival



FESTIVALS

Whisky lovers from around the world are flocking to the 11th annual Victoria Whisky Festival, which runs today until Saturday, to find out for themselves what the fuss over Canadian whisky is all about.

During the festival, the winners of the sixth annual Canadian Whisky Awards, which celebrates the best Canadian whisky, will be announced.

"Whisky lovers from around the world are looking at us with a different eye," said Roberto Roberti, service manager with the Fountana Group, a Vancouver-based international liquor import/export company. "Canada is now considered one of the top-ranking whisky-producing countries."

The interest in whisky is global, and enthusiasts are increasingly turning their attention to the growing number of notable spirits produced in Canada.

Crown Royal Northern Harvest Rye was recently crowned (pun

intended) the 2016 World Whisky of the Year, with renowned whisky aficionado and author Jim Murray calling it a "masterpiece."

The Fountana Group has recently released its Canadian Rockies 21 Year Old in Canada. The product was previously only available in Taiwan.

Roberti is not surprised at the growing list of accolades and awards Canadian whiskies are garnering.

"We have knowledgeable people passionate about their product," Roberti said.

"We are blessed with extremely high-quality grain, and have each part of the distillation and aging process well covered."

This year's festival will showcase more than 250 whiskies made in 50 distilleries from around the world. Along with Canada, visitors can sample product from Scotland, Ireland, England, the United States, Japan, Taiwan, India and France.

Events include eight consumer tastings on Thursday and Friday, the Canadian Whisky Awards dinner — with longtime whisky writer Dave Broom the keynote speaker — and the Grand Tasting on Saturday.

But the festival isn't all about tasting newly released drams and old favourites. You can improve

your knowledge of whisky by attending one or more of the 36 masterclasses.

Learn about each distiller's process for making the spirit, and the craft that leads to the striking and subtle differences between them.

"With so many new whiskies coming onto the market each year, people are increasingly looking to build their whisky knowledge," said Lawrence Graham, president of the festival.

"Rather than buying their same favourite whiskies, they are becoming more adventurous, armed with a knowledge of the process."

If you are unable to attend, you can still find distillers that are awarded the Canadian Whisky Awards gold, silver and bronze medals at canadianwhisky.org.

The proceeds from the festival are donated to charitable organizations, with Victoria Crime Stoppers and the TLC Fund for Kids benefiting this year.

Individual tastings (including a women's only event) are \$55, masterclasses are \$35, VIP consumer tasting costs \$185 and Saturday's consumer tasting costs \$135 at the Hotel Grand Pacific, 463 Belleville St.

For more information, go to victoriawhiskyfestival.com.