

Alcohol: Reading A

Gin

Holland was the first country to make gin in the 17th century. It was a clear spirit made from grain and sold in chemist shops as a medicine. Because it didn't taste very nice they added juniper berries to the gin. There are also many other plants that are added. The name comes from the Dutch word *genever* meaning juniper.

British soldiers fighting in Holland drank gin to make them warm. They liked it and brought it back to England. Because the English liked the drink too they started to make it themselves and it became very popular with the poor. People drank more gin than beer because it was cheaper. Sometimes gin was given to workers as part of their pay. In 1730 London had over 7,000 shops that sold gin. Because drinking gin was such a problem the government introduced The Gin Act – this law made gin too expensive for poor people to drink.

Gin is now a high quality spirit and it's usually used for making cocktails. Gin and tonic, with a slice of lemon, is a very popular British drink.



Tequila

There's a large plant that grows in Central America called the agave. The heart of the plant is used to make Tequila, Mexico's most famous drink. It was the Aztecs 2,000 years ago who first used the plant to make a low alcoholic drink. When Spanish soldiers came in the early 16th century they had more modern methods of making alcohol. First they tried to make alcohol with grain or grapes but the weather was too hot. So they decided to use the agave plant and a clear drink called mezcal was born.

Mezcal was made all over Mexico but one village made the best – the village of Tequila. Some mezcals put a worm in their bottles. Because the worm stayed as a worm it showed that the drink was good quality and very alcoholic. Many people now think that tequila bottles have worms in but this isn't true.

Tequila is usually served in tiny glasses and drunk slowly. It has become more and more popular especially in the United States. Some Americans say the Margarita cocktail is the most popular cocktail in the country.

Arak

From Lebanon, Jordan and Syria comes a national alcoholic drink called arak. Here, in the Middle East, it's also called the milk of lions because it's so strong and powerful. Also because, when water is added to the drink, it changes to a milky-white colour.

Arak is never drunk without food, this is probably because it is so strong. It's always served with mezza – a meal made of lots of different dishes. People often enjoy drinking arak and eating mezza so much that the main meal is not eaten. Arak, which is the Arabic word for juice, is usually made from local white grapes but it can be made from other things including grain and potatoes.

In fact it was the Arabs who invented the process for making alcoholic drinks, but they used the invention to make perfume and cosmetics. The word alcohol comes from the Arabic al-kuhl (kohl). In the past arak was a local village product but now it's made in large quantities. It's the most popular drink for local people who enjoy alcohol. The best way to drink arak is to fill a glass with one-third arak, two-thirds water and then lots of ice cubes.

Alcohol: Reading B

Vodka

Vodka is an Eastern European drink. It was first recorded in Russia in the 12th century. The name comes from the Russian word *voda* meaning water and at first it was used as a medicine. In the 14th century vodka was the Russian national drink, later it became the national drink of Poland and Finland too. Because it didn't taste very nice they added fruit, herbs or spices to the drink. Nowadays vodka has no colour and hardly any taste or smell either.



In the 15th century vodka was produced in very large quantities and the first country to import the drink was Sweden. In the 19th century Russian soldiers fighting in Europe drank vodka and it soon became popular with other nationalities. It became so popular that they started to make vodka from potatoes. Many people think that this is still true but in fact most vodka is made from grain. However, it can be made from many things.

Russian emigrants took their vodka-making skills to many parts of the world. More vodka is sold in the US than any other alcohol. It's usually used for making cocktails – Bloody Mary is one of the most popular.

Ruou (pronounced zee-ot)

Ruou is what the locals in Vietnam drink. It's a traditional medicinal wine and is made from rice. The unusual thing about this alcohol is that the medicine comes from what animals are put in the drink. Visitors to this South East Asian country are often surprised by the bottles of ruou for sale which have snakes in. However, there can be many other different animals including lizards, birds or goats. Not all ruou has an animal – there are also many secret herbal recipes for different problems. It changes colour depending on what has been added, but you can get clear ruou too.

Ruou has been made for hundreds of years and was always popular in the mountain areas. For these people ruou is a spiritual drink. Villagers often sit around a large pot and drink from bamboo straws. They believe that God taught man how to make ruou and thanks are given when they drink.

Now it's possible to buy ruou in many towns including the capital, Hanoi. It's usually served in tiny glasses and drunk in one go.

Amarula

In South Africa there's a tree that's only grown in the wild, it's impossible to grow it on a farm. It has a delicious fruit and the animal which enjoys it the most is the African elephant so it's sometimes called the elephant tree. They hit the tree to make the fruit fall off and, if the fruit is in the sun for a long time, it becomes a little alcoholic. Many people think that elephants get drunk but this isn't true.

The tree is popular among local people too. Young couples think they will have more children if they get married under the tree so it sometimes called the marriage tree.

However, the real name is the Marula tree and it grows nowhere in the world except in southern Africa. The pale brown alcohol, made from the marula fruit, is mixed with cream. Before 1989 it was only possible to buy the drink in South Africa but now it can be bought in many countries. There are many cocktails but the best way to drink amarula is to pour it over ice cubes. It's also put in coffee or eaten with ice cream.