

Introducing Venezuela

Map of South America showing Venezuela's position



- ◆ Venezuela, a former colony of Spain, has an area of 1 million km.
- ◆ The country lies on the Caribbean sea stretching out its beaches across 2,000 nautical miles.
- ◆ Population of 20 million people..
- ◆ Venezuela celebrated the 504th anniversary of the discovery of the country by Christopher Columbus in the year 2001.
- ◆ Venezuela is well known for:
 - having one of the largest oil reserves in the world
 - the beauty queens it produces
 - the Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world
 - and the best rum of the world.

Rum in Venezuela

Rum is a distillate, which instead of having a grape or grain base, has a sugar cane base. We shall talk about sugar cane and the production and maturing of rum in more depth shortly.

There are three styles of rum: light bodied rums, medium bodied rums and full bodied, pungent rums.

The rums of Venezuela are mostly light rums.

Medium bodied rums are produced in the Caribbean in countries such as Trinidad and Guyana.

Full bodied, pungent rums typically come from the Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Martinique.

Rum has been made in Venezuela for over 200 years. Today, Venezuelans drink more than 3.5 million cases of rum a year. Most of the rum in Venezuela is golden and dark rum.

Santa Teresa is the leading rum brand in the Venezuelan market with 43% market share and sales of around 1.7 million cases. Worldwide, Santa Teresa rums are amongst the top 4 best selling rums.

The Valley of Aragua and Santa Teresa

Map of Venezuela showing location of Aragua.



The sugar cane for Santa Teresa rum is grown in the valley of Aragua in Venezuela. This is also where Santa Teresa rum is distilled, aged and bottled.

Aragua is known for the richness of the land, for the historic heritage and for the palm trees of Santa Teresa.

Picture of Aragua Valley



The Spanish discovered the Valley of Aragua in 1567 and for many years, it was the capital of Venezuela. Aragua historically has been an agricultural valley growing wheat, sugar cane, cotton, cacao and other crops.

In 1796, the Count of Tovar y Blanco combined land given to him by the King of Spain with land from other estates to establish the Santa Teresa Hacienda or estate which he named after his daughter Teresa.

In 1885, Gustavo Vollmer Ribas bought the Santa Teresa Hacienda. Santa Teresa has been making rum since 1896 and was the first rum in Venezuela to register its trademark - Ron Santa Teresa - in 1909.

Picture of plant - inside and outside



Today, Santa Teresa employs close to 240 workers in the production and bottling of rum and has another 100 staff in its nationwide sales and distribution company.

Sugar cane

Pictures of sugar cane in field



Sugar cane originated in the Orient and according to some, it comes from China. Sugar cane was taken to Venezuela from the Canary Islands in Spain in the early 1500's.

It arrived in the Valley of Aragua with the Spanish conquistadors (soldiers). They took sugar cane along with them to sweeten their food and to have their "Guarapo" or fermented juice, which is the forerunner of what we are presenting today: RUM.

Sugar was easy to grow and It was resistant to all kinds of natural conditions. However, they noticed that sugar cane grown in the Aragua Valley had a higher sugar content, a distinctive flavour and a higher output compared to sugar cane from other parts of Venezuela.

So we ask ourselves what makes these valleys so special. It is the combination of the elements of SOIL, WATER, WIND, TEMPERATURE, HEIGHT, SUN and MAN. This is what makes Santa Teresa Hacienda a treasure!!

The deep, fertile **SOILS** of Santa Teresa are particularly rich in potassium which is fundamental to the formation of the sugars in the cane.

Sugar cane needs a lot of **WATER**. Santa Teresa receives an average of 1,200 mm of rain per year. Other sugar cane growing areas in Venezuela receive much less rain - about 700mm per year- or much more rain - 1,600 mm per year and under these conditions, they find it difficult to sow, grow and harvest the crop.

You may be asking why is the **WIND** important? As you can see from the photos, Santa Teresa has a privileged position at the beginning of the Valley of Aragua. The mountains close up around this valley and of course, this has an effect which must be understood. In small valleys, the wind will blow much faster than in open spaces. But, when these winds reach this valley which suddenly opens up, they slow down to an even rate, spreading equally what they bring along - the rain.

Sugar cane grows well in Aragua's agreeable **CLIMATE** which is close to an eternal spring. It is not surprising that the early settlers liked the place so much. Temperatures vary from lows of 8° celsius on the coolest nights to highs of 40° celsius during the hottest times of the year. This difference of up to 32 °C between highs and lows is responsible for the very high concentrations of sugars and the special sweetness of the aftertaste.

The fluctuation in temperature is also due to the ideal **HEIGHT** of Santa Teresa. In the rest of the country, sugar cane is cultivated below 300 m above sea level. In contrast with this, for Santa Teresa, the average height is 535 m above sea level.

MAN, as in everything, makes the difference. For more than 200 hundred years, Santa Teresa has counted on the same hardworking men and women who have developed patience, experience, knowledge and special techniques.

The fact that our sugar cane grows in the Valley of Santa Teresa represents our rum's "birth certificate". However, many years of experience, gathering of techniques and the use of old secrets and methods has put Santa Teresa in a privileged position when it comes to the production of rum.

PROCESS OF MAKING SANTA TERESA RUMS

The process of making Santa Teresa rums can be divided into fermentation and distillation of molasses, aging and blending.

Fermentation

The production of rum begins with the fermentation of the sugar present in molasses. is one of the products left after the sugar cane is milled. **Point out molasses**

There are two methods of fermentation: continuous fermentation and batch fermentation. Sometimes, the two methods are combined. Santa Teresa uses a continuous fermentation process which was developed for use on an industrial scale together with Bacardi.

To begin fermentation, yeast is added to the molasses. During the process of fermentation, the sugar is transformed into ethyl alcohol and carbon gas.

Continuous fermentation takes about 15 hours whilst batch fermentation takes 2 to 3 times longer. The end result is a mixture called the fermented "mosto" .

The fermented "mosto" made by Santa Teresa is very clean. It has less than a quarter of the impurities of mosto made by batch fermentation. Normally, the longer the fermentation period, the more impurities the mosto develops.

When the fermented mosto from continuous fermentation is distilled, the alcohol is very light and has a low content of "tails and ends". This light alcohol is the base of our rums.

Some of the fermented mosto is allowed to ferment and mature a few extra days in order to promote natural acidification. The alcohol distilled from this secondary mosto is rich in "congeners". These are responsible for the unique taste and aroma of Santa Teresa rums.

Distillation

The next step is to distill the fermented mosto. Distillation consists of separating alcohol from water by applying heat and taking advantage of the difference in the boiling point of the two elements. Alcohol vaporises first and is directed through the condensers where it is collected in liquid state.

Santa Teresa distills rum by two methods: by continuous distillation and by "pot" still distillation. "**Pot**" still distillation is done one batch at a time in a still with a capacity of 1,800 litres per day. contrast, the continuous distillation has a capacity of 80,000 litres per day.

Picture of Continuous distillation unit



Rum made by continuous distillation at Santa Teresa is 3 times lighter than similar rum from Jamaica or Martinique. The four columns of the Continuous Distillation unit combine the processes of hydro-selection and rectification to extract the undesirable alcohols such as fusel oils and the undesirable congeners.

We also obtain alcohol rich in desirable congeners which adds special flavours to our blended rums.

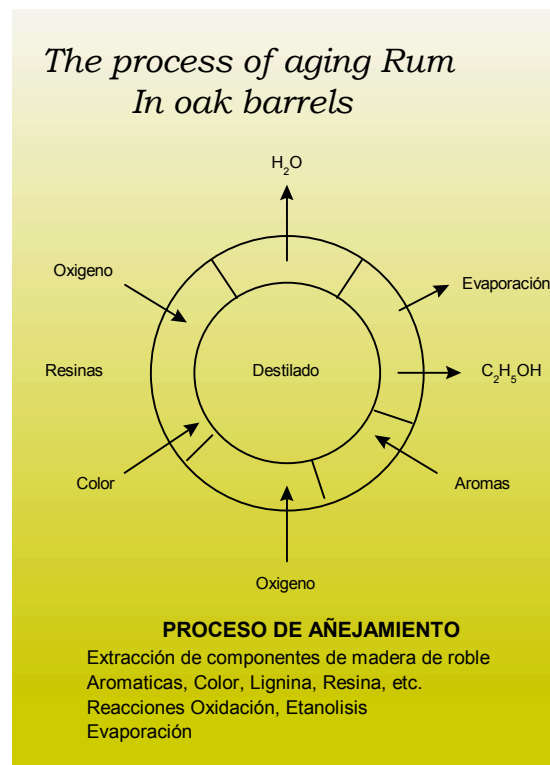
Rum made by the pot still method is distilled by hand. Therefore, the quality of the rum depends on the experience and skill of our still men. We distill the “mosto” twice: the first distillation separates the alcohol from the water. The second distillation is called the two pot still process and adds desirable flavours and aroma.

Rum distilled in the pot still is rich in desirable congeners which gives the rum a distinctive bouquet and sweetness. This is because we use the “mosto” which was fermented for a few extra days.

Aging

We carefully choose the best alcohol from the distillation, using laboratory analysis and experienced tasters. This alcohol is diluted to 60% strength and stored in barrels made of white American oak and French Limousine oak.

Time is the most important element in giving balance, roundness and maturity to the rum. During the aging process, two basic reactions take place inside the barrels which are best explained by this chart.



Firstly, the alcohol and the congeners interact with the lignins and tannic acid of the wood. These elements are responsible for the tastes and characteristic colour produced by aging rum in wood.

Secondly, there is an oxidation reaction resulting from the evaporation of the alcohol and the entry of air into the barrels through the pores of the wood.

These reactions are the key to the magic transformation of rum during aging.

Rum ages three times faster in tropical countries like Venezuela. The warm temperatures also make the exchange between the wood and the rum richer.

In addition, the rate of evaporation is higher than in cold countries. We lose about 7% per year in the first two years and then 4% per year during the remaining years. In comparison, the rate of evaporation for whisky in Scotland is about 2% per year.

At Santa Teresa, we grow a special plant on the walls of the warehouse called “Hiedra” which significantly reduces the rate of evaporation.

Venezuela is one of the few countries in the world where by law, companies must age their rum for a minimum of 2 years. This is important for the overall quality of Venezuelan rums.

Pictures of aging cellars



Santa Teresa has 18 aging cellars with more than 100,000 barrels of rum. There are commercial rums up to 10 years of age. “Crianzas” aged 20 years or more. There are extra aged rums used for very premium blends which are nearly 80 years old. Some of the aging cellars have small barrels 200 litres in size and others have bigger vats that can hold up to 18,000 litres.

Picture aging cellars (bodega barriles / bodega toneles)



The process of making rum requires a lot of time and dedication. When the rums have reached the right age, some are carefully selected to undergo a second unique aging process called the Solera system. Santa Teresa 1796 is the fruit of the Solera system which we will talk about in more detail shortly.

Others are carefully selected and blended under the supervision of the lab and panels of experienced tasters. Blending a rum is like painting a picture. Our "canvas" is the aged light rum which forms the base of the blend. Then, like the strokes of an artist's brush, the different rums such as pot still rum are added in the right proportions.

After blending, the rum is left to settle for more than a week. It is then filtered under low temperatures to purify the rum and bottled.

Santa Teresa 1796

I want to introduce you to Santa Teresa 1796 - a precious aged rum with an unequalled taste and aroma. 1796, as we call it in Venezuela, is one of the few rums in the world made using the Solera system of aging.

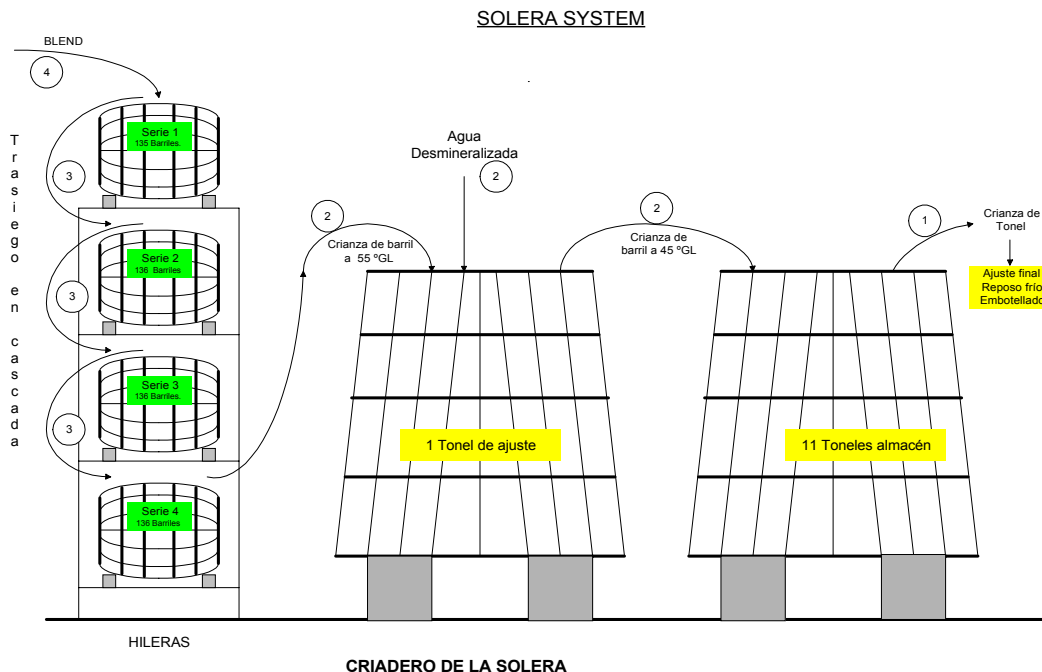
Solera is a system of aging used for sherry and wine in Europe.

The rum which enters the Solera system is a blend which we call "Madre" or "mother rum". This blend is made up of rums of different types, for example, light rum, pot still rum and rum aged with almendron. We also select rums of different ages. Typically, we choose rums between 4 to 35 years of age.

Picture Casa Tovar



1796 is aged in a special cellar which is located next to the Casa Tovar in Santa Teresa where the Hacienda was founded back in 1796. In this cellar, called the "Criadero de la Solera" - Criadero means "Nursery" - there are four levels of French Limousine oak barrels.



In the Solera system, the blend enters the top barrel which is called the Series 1 barrel and is passed down from barrel to barrel until it reaches the Series 4 barrel. This is the heart of the Solera system.

Firstly, about half of the rum of the Series 4 barrel is drawn off and is replaced with half of the rum from the Series 3 barrel. This is repeated until the Series 1 barrel is half empty. At this point, we fill up the empty half of the Series 1 barrel with the blend or "Madre".

The rum taken from the Series 4 barrels is combined in large wooden vats.

Bodega SOLERA



When the rum is in the barrels, it is called "Crianza de Barril". "Crianza" means "upbringing" like with a child. The rum in the vats is called "Crianza de Los Toneles"

Only half of the "Crianza de Los Toneles" is drawn off to be bottled as Santa Teresa 1796. This rum is reduced to the correct strength by adding demineralised water taken from Santa Teresa's own wells. We fill up the half empty wooden vat with the "crianza de barril" from the series 4 barrels.

This technique of drawing off only half of the liquid in the barrel or the vat requires skill and craftsmanship.

We estimate that 1796 spends about 6 years aging in the Solera system. However, since we never completely empty the barrels or the vats, the age of the rum is hard to quantify. It means that the rum is always getting older.

With this technique, some of the rum never leaves the Solera system. This "heart" gives 1796 its unique roundness, subtlety and smoothness of taste.