

U·S AIRWAYS

THE MAGAZINE THAT CONNECTS YOU

11.11

Santa Cruz

A town defined by surf, sun, and (for some) the Giant Dipper

HANGING TEN IN

+
Cool Kitchen Tools,
Scotland's Whisky
Trail, and Sarasota's
Amazing Cultural
Scene

GLENFIDDICH
9100 LITRES
WASH STILL No. 3

Fancy a
Dram?

Nose it, twitch it, drink it — for single-malt
zealots, Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail is truly the
center of the universe. BY CAROLINE TIGER



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOMMY MACNEIL, STYLING BY ANNE MURPHY, HAIR BY JENNIFER HARRIS, MAKEUP BY JENNIFER HARRIS, GLENFIDDICH DISTILLERS COMPANY, GLENFIDDICH DISTILLERS COMPANY

There are many ways to describe a dram of whisky. That's what I discover while paging through the leather-bound book of tasting notes at the Quaich Bar in the Craigellachie Hotel in Speyside.

"I weep as I drink. Like angels crying on your tongue," waxes one bard over a dram of Highland Park 1985. On another page, a gleeful masochist has penned, "Like a horse kicking you in the teeth — but it's a favorite horse." (The beast is a 13-year-old Cadenhead's.) A 16-year-old Lagavulin earns an unequivocal "A+" from a fellow who writes, "My wife says it's like licking an old fire log — she doesn't know anything about whisky, so she can't appreciate an excellent dram."

When the Quaich's bar manager, Daniel Ketelaar, sees me reading the book, he pours me a taste of his personal favorite, Aberlour A'bunadh (pronounced a-BOON-ah).

I nose it. "Nose" is whisky-speak for "sniff." It's one of the terms I've picked up a day into my whistle-stop tour of Speyside, the northeast Highlands region of Scotland that stretches between Aberdeen and Inverness. Around 60 distilleries — more than half of those in Scotland — are located here.

The first whiff of the A'bunadh is cherries. The second is rubbing alcohol. I take a sip and let the amber liquid pool on my tongue. Nothing. Then ... something. Going down, the whisky scorches my throat, but just as quickly the unpleasantness evaporates and is replaced by a nice,

warm tingle.

Ketelaar hovers. "Do you like it?"

I'm not sure "like" is the right word.

"Pour in some water," he suggests, producing a glass pitcher.

"Then look in your glass and see what happens."

I pour in a few drops.

"See how it's twitching?" he asks, excited. "It's like the alcohol and the water molecules are fighting — that's called 'waking the serpent.'"

I look, but all I see is watered-down A'bunadh. Obviously I have plenty of whisky know-how to soak up.

But I came to the right place. Speyside, the birthplace of the scotch-whisky industry, is the center of the single-malt universe. Whisky dates to the 15th century here, and



PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) SHANE/GETTY IMAGES; JEFFREY M. HARRIS/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES HARRISON; MARK STREIBER/ISTOCK



its earliest makers were monks. The libation's history is as winding as the region's Malt Whisky Trail, which spirals out from Craigellachie into the surrounding countryside. After centuries of tax struggles between the government and distillers, the Excise Act of 1823 allowed Speyside's moonshiners to turn legal. Many of today's household names, like Macallan and Glenlivet, were founded soon after.

With the help of Barbara Millar, owner of More Than Golf Tours, I decide to visit three distilleries on the trail — well-known Glenfiddich; smaller Strathisla, which produces the major ingredient in Chivas Regal; and tiny Benromach. Millar, whom I hired for her encyclope-

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dic knowledge and driving skills (sampling whisky and driving on the left side of the road didn't seem like a great idea), zips us along the picture-perfect road to Glenfiddich in Dufftown. We drive past rolling fields dotted with impossibly adorable newborn lambs — it's late April, the end of the birthing season. We also pass through wee villages whose walls of gray granite, all quarried

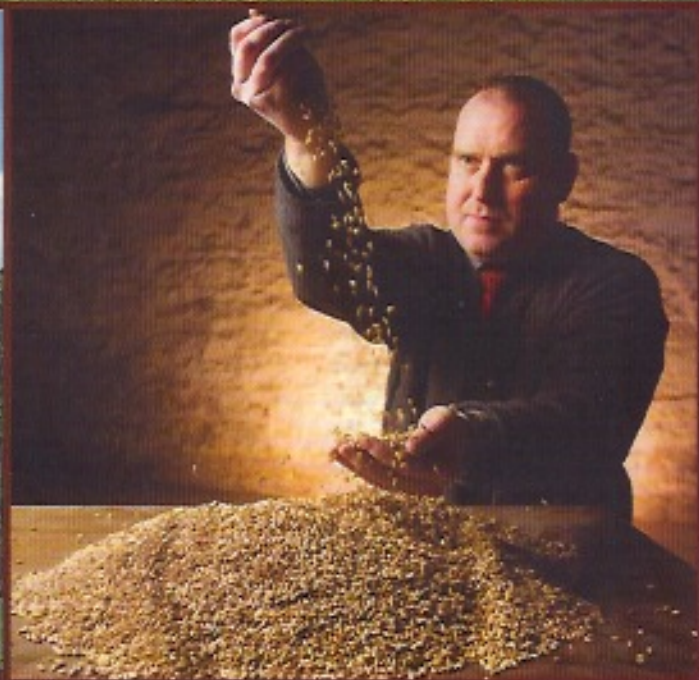
in nearby Aberdeen, twinkle in the bright northern sunlight.

At Glenfiddich, an introductory film recounts the tale of grim William Grant and his dour sons and daughters — all nine of them — hauling 750,000 stones over the course of a year to build the distillery. Grant bought the land and stills with money he'd saved working as a bookkeeper for 20 years. He was 48

PHOTO: MICHAEL ARNOLD FOR TOP LEFT; ANDREW BROWN; COURTESY OF GLENFIDDICH DISTILLERS COMPANY; COURTESY OF STRATHISLA DISTILLERS COMPANY; COURTESY OF BENROMACH DISTILLERS COMPANY



Glenfiddich Distillery in Dufftown, (below, from left) Strathisla Distillery, and Keith Cruickshank, the distillery manager at Benromach



years old when it opened in 1887.

Because I'm on the Connoisseur's Tour, I get to visit Glenfiddich's Warehouse 8, where the whisky ages in different types of wooden casks, including bourbon barrels from the U.S. and rum casks from Cuba. By law, scotch can't be called "scotch" until it's aged for three years, and nothing leaves this warehouse until it's been aged for at least twelve. A small angel statue stands on a pedestal at one end of the building — an artist's interpretation of the "angel's share," the term for the two percent of whisky that's lost to evaporation.

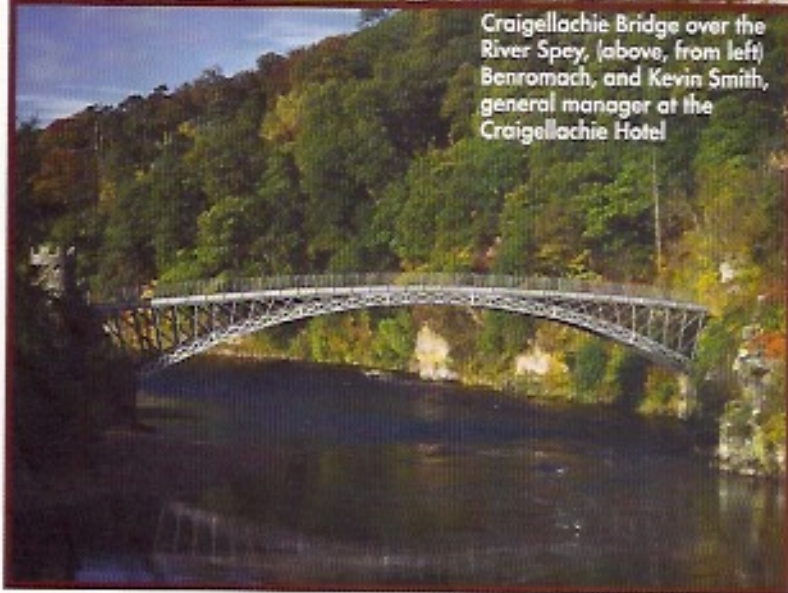
At Strathisla our tour guide, Tom, a 27-year veteran of the distillery, is pleasantly salty. He tells the group how automation made him and most of the staff redundant in the late '90s. Now there are only five men employed, he says: three to push buttons and two to clean. At the Royal Salute Vault, a setup that looks like a county jail shoved into one corner of the cool, dark warehouse, we peer through bars at the Coronation Cask. It was last tapped and bottled in 2003, the 50th anniversary of both the whisky and Queen Elizabeth II's coronation.

Another cask, labeled Prince's Reserve, went in when Prince William was born and was opened when he married Kate Middleton. "You'd cut your mother's throat for a taste of this," Tom says. "We'll open it and bottle some more when they have an heir."

By the time I arrive at Benromach in the late afternoon, I know the routine (video, mashing room, washback room, tasting). This tiny distillery is different, though, because everything here is done manually and by two employees. Benromach is so small its distillery manager, Keith Cruickshank, is on hand to tell me how he plays with different finishes by aging the spir-



Craigellachie Bridge over the River Spey, (above, from left) Benromach, and Kevin Smith, general manager at the Craigellachie Hotel



By law, scotch must be aged for at least three years. Nothing leaves the Glenfiddich warehouse until it's been aged for at least twelve.

its in casks that once held Hungarian sweet wine or marsala wine. He pours me a dram of the latter, and it's my favorite so far.

Back at the Quaich that night, I feel a smidge more knowledgeable about whisky. I know to order something with a sweet finish. And after a day of walking through drizzle and chilly warehouses, I can appreciate the whisky's warming effect. As I sip, read more tasting notes, and eaves-

drop, I realize that many patrons at the bar are locals. A white-haired fellow sitting on a natty couch a few feet away tells a young couple about a long-gone distillery custom where each employee received a ration of four "noggins," or drams, per workday. "They'd be going up the road on their bikes, roaring!" he recalls, roaring himself.

Then there are newbies like me and Ketelaar, the Dutch transplant

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PHOTOS: JAYSON TUCKER/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; KEVIN SMITH: KEVIN SMITH

who married a local girl and got a job at the Craigellachie Hotel as a night boy. As a student in Holland, he'd tried single malt, he told me, but he'd never really thought about it. "Then I walked into this bar," he

says, "and I went, 'Oh!'" His eyes lift skyward, reenacting that revelatory moment. He's thought about little else but whisky ever since. I marvel how destiny led him to his rightful place — the most authentic desti-

nation for anyone in search of the perfect dram.

GETTING THERE: US Airways offers daily direct seasonal service from Philadelphia to Glasgow. Or connect year-round via codeshare at usairways.com.

Start Here

GETTING AROUND

Renting a car is the only option in the rural Highlands. If you're not secure about driving on the left side of the road, consider hiring a guide. **Rabbie's Trail Burners** (rabbies.com) offers packaged tours of the whisky trail, or contact Barbara Millar at **More Than Golf Tours** (morethangolftours.com) for a custom itinerary. Millar has a Blue Badge, meaning she has the highest level of tour-guide know-how in Scotland.

WHERE TO STAY

- Cozy **Craigellachie Hotel** sits on the River Spey, the water source for many regional distilleries. It was built in 1893 to accommodate the newly industrialized Highlands. The rooms are perfectly adequate for crawling back to after a satisfying meal at the excellent restaurant or a few drams at the Quaich Bar. craigellachie.com
- The **Castle Hotel** in Huntly is what one would expect from a family home built by the Dukes of Gordon in the 18th century. The handsome rooms are furnished with antiques; beds are hung with ornate, heavy canopies. Guests are sure to meet effusive owner Andrew Meiklejohn at some point during their stay — most likely in the wood-paneled Distillery Bar. castlehotel.uk.com

WHAT TO SEE

- The **Malt Whisky Trail** (maltwhiskytrail.com) con-



Distillery Bar at the Castle Hotel

sists of nine distilleries. Glenfiddich and Benromach, the biggest and smallest, make an interesting contrast. The Grampian Castle Trail crosses paths with the Malt Whisky Trail, and the Victorian Heritage Trail and the Coastal Trail are nearby. All are worth researching before you visit. aberdeentoday.co.uk

- If the Quaich Bar has one of the best collections of whisky in the world, **Whiskies of Scotland** on Gordon Street in Huntly is a close second. Stop in for selections from closed distilleries and other rarities. dtscotch.com

→ The interactive museum and visitors' center at **Culloden Battlefield** near Inverness is incredibly moving and provides an excellent history lesson on Highland culture and clashes. nts.org.uk/culloden

WHERE TO EAT

- The **Ben Aigan Restaurant** on the ground floor of the Craigellachie Hotel serves hearty, creative dishes featuring locally sourced ingredients like salmon and Aberdeen Angus beef.
- The **Malt Barn Restaurant** at the Glenfiddich Distillery is an excellent choice for a casual lunch. glenfiddich.us



Craigellachie Hotel

PHOTOS (FROM TOP) COURTESY OF CASTLE HOTEL; CHARLIS AT CRAIGELLACHIE HOTEL