

Wine and whiskey: Low price and local choice

By Ye Linn Htut

LOCALLY produced alcohol, including wine and whisky, is increasingly the drink of choice for Myanmar drinkers, market analysts say.

Whiskey no longer has to come from Scotland, or wine from Europe or California. They can be made right here.

"We distribute more than 100 varieties of local and foreign brands, and the local brands exceed the others," said U Ye Tun, executive director of Myat Hmwe liquor distribution company.

Local brands have a 60-70 percent lead in the alcoholic beverage market, mainly because of their low price.

"Of the alcoholic beverages produced by PMG, gin, rum and whiskey all have a huge following. Premier Whiskey is seeing a rise in sales and as lucky draws are included, it has gained customers' attention," said a spokesperson for Myanmar beverage company called PMG.

Much of the reason for the popularity of locally produced alcohol is the recession, which has cut into personal spending power. But even among the domestic beverages, each has its own market niche.

"Grand, Myanmar and Royal Club brands are the favourites of many consumers, whereas Premier, Heather Gate and Grand Royal Gold are consumed by another group of people from a good income group.



Staff and director Bert Morsbach (center) gather together for a group shot during a harvest time at the Aythaya vineyard in Shan state. —Pic: Supplied

"For the foreign whiskey clientele, High Commissioner, with a price about K7000 stands probably at number

one place. People who are able to afford more for special occasions go for Red Label, Black Label, Chivas and

Blue Label. As most people are in the low-income group, they settle for a domestic product," a distribution representative said.

Those who don't like hard liquor can turn to wine, says U Thet Wai, resident marketing manager of Myanmar Vineyard Estates.

Of the many domestically produced wines, wines that are produced with foreign technology have a bigger slice of the market share.

Says U Thet Wai: "Our Aythaya wine entered the market in 2005. And after that white wine was produced, with German, French and Italian technology and it has developed its own market. The grape strains that we use are also from France,

Italy and Germany.

"In 2008, Myanmar was the first country in Southeast Asia to produce the Aythaya sparkling wine. It is being exported to Hong Kong. This year, we produced Kanbosa Semi dry, a wine of international standard and a favourite of Myanmar wine lovers," said U Thet Wai.

There are also plans to produce a kind of brandy (Ferster Fruity Brandy) made from grapes and which contains 40 percent alcohol.

"As a local Grand we distribute Mandalay Whisky. In the joint venture with No.1 Ministry of Industry, our side takes care of sales, distribution, buying raw materials, acquiring bottles and quality control, and the other side

takes care of production", continued U Ye Tun.

According to U Thet Wai, in the hard liquor market has a consolidated place and wines which are produced with the assistance of foreign technology has a 60pc foothold in the tourist industry.

Some religions and traditions forbid alcohol. Others say that if you want to be happy for a lifetime you should grow trees. If you want to be happy for a month, marry. And if you want to be happy for a day, drink liquor.

People drink alcohol because they feel good, and they drink alcohol because they feel bad. The main thing is to drink in moderation.

Translated by Thauung Nyunt

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