

Bacanora from Banamichi



The agave plants after they have been harvested. (Photo by Hotel Los Arcos de Sonora)

Traditional drink of Sonora made from agave

By Jonathon Shacat

Herald/Review

Sun, 01/24/2010

BANAMICHI, Sonora ô Bacanora is a traditional alcoholic drink of Sonora, Mexico, that is made by hand from agave plants and enjoyed with friends and family.

The liquor appears as clear as water. The taste can be compared to tequila, but it has a slightly different flavor.

It takes about seven to nine years for an agave plant to grow big enough to be harvested, said Beto Corella Yescas, a farmer who lives in Banamichi, Sonora.

“An older plant is more mature and it is better and it has more sugar in it. When it is not mature, you will have a smaller head and it is not as good as the bigger one,” he said.

One plant should make between 3/4 of a liter and one full liter of bacanora, depending on the season, Yescas added.

The best time to harvest is in May or June, before the rainy season starts. But, harvests can also be done in December or January, if the previous summer’s rainfall was minimal.

Bacanora is legal to make but not to sell without a tax stamp. The alcohol can be purchased in liquor stores in Hermosillo, Sonora, for example. But many people prefer to make bacanora at home. They typically get permission from a landowner to harvest the wild agave and then give one-third of the final product as payment in return.

Making bacanora is a process that takes about two weeks, said Yescas. It starts with harvesting a special type of agave plant.

The leaves are cut off and the remaining center portion is cooked for a couple days in a very hot fire in a pit lined with stones. The oven is covered with sheet metal and piled high with dirt to seal off any oxygen.

The cooked plants are milled and then placed in buckets for a couple days to start fermentation. Water is added and the mixture sits for up to four more days. Then it is distilled twice. The price of homemade bacanora fluctuates throughout the year. It is cheaper in the summer because many people make it at that time of year.

One liter of high quality bacanora sells in the winter for about 150 pesos, or almost \$12. In the summer, the price could decrease by 10 to 15 percent.

Low quality bacanora, which is not 100 percent agave and contains a sugar additive, costs 60 to 80 pesos per liter, or about \$5 or \$6.

Historically, bacanora was not made until the arrival of the Spanish, Yescas said. Today, it is an important part of the culture of Sonora.

The liquor is often shared during get-togethers or parties, rather than drunk by a person who is sitting at home alone. It is mostly consumed during the winter, and especially at Christmas and New Year’s, said Rosa Flores, who works at the Hotel Los Arcos de Sonora in Banamichi and lives in the nearby town of La Mora.

“People like to drink bacanora more when it is cold outside, and they like to drink beer more when it is hot outside,” she said.

Victor Acedo, who works in Bisbee and used to live in Banamichi and grew up around bacanora, pointed out the liquor is produced very privately, as opposed to the large commercial levels of tequila.

“The communities are small enough to be able to harvest enough to satisfy a community. Now, if it got really big, I don’t think the desert could take that,” he said.

Bisbee Reporter Jonathon Shacat can be reached at jonathon.shacat@bisbeereview.net [1].

© 2010 The Sierra Vista Herald
102 Fab Ave
Sierra Vista, AZ. 85635
520-458-9440

<http://www.svherald.com/content/bacanora/2010/01/24/bacanora-banamichi>

jonathon.shacat@bisbeereview.net

<http://www.svherald.com/contact>

