

Sip across Scotland

Craft distilleries are fueling whisky country's gin renaissance.

BY GINA DECAPRIO VERCESI PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD JAMES TAYLOR



Clockwise from left: Heads & Tales, its No. 8 (gin, lime, Mandarin Napoléon, and curaçao), and the village of Craig near St Andrews.

SCOTLAND'S MISTY LOCHS AND wild, windswept moors can leave visitors with a bit of a chill – and while anyone looking to warm up with a wee dram knows that the Scots do whisky best, the country has blossomed into a place for gin aficionados too. The spirit was all the rage until the late eighteenth century, when bad harvests and acts of Parliament slowed distilling, but the 1999 launch of Hendrick's in South Ayrshire sparked gin's comeback. Today, more than 50 distilleries employ juniper (the foundation of every gin) and

an array of other Scottish botanicals to create an aromatic base for bartenders elevating the country's gin game. Many of these spots can be found on the UK-based Wine and Spirit Trade Association's official Scotland Gin Trail, which added new destinations last summer. Sipping from Edinburgh north or east makes for a spirited introduction to some of Scotland's most innovative distillers.

Juniper 101 EDINBURGH GIN DISTILLERY AND HEADS & TALES

Tucked at the foot of a stone staircase near

Seat at the Bar

Edinburgh Castle is an inviting space that's home to the acclaimed Edinburgh Gin Distillery by day and the convivial Heads & Tales cocktail den at night. Edinburgh Gin, which moved the lion's share of its production to a larger, nonpublic venue in Leith in 2016, offers daytime tours of its boutique operations, along with a daily gin-making experience. For those who prefer their gin education in the evening hours, the popular master classes hosted by Heads & Tales pair history with gin tasting and end with a selection from the bar's Gin It Yourself menu: Choose your glass and add a gin, a mixer, and a garnish for a personalized spin on the classic G&T. Using house-made shrubs and syrups, bartenders mix a selection of inventive cocktails, such as the No. 2, which blends Caorunn gin from the Scottish Highlands with Calvados, lemon, and Mandarin Napoléon. 1A Rutland Place, Edinburgh; headsandtalesbar.com.

The OG G&T 56 NORTH, EDINBURGH

James Sutherland helped pioneer Scotland's gin boom when he opened 56 North, one of the country's first gin-centric bars, in 2008. Today, this stylish spot near the University of Edinburgh carries upwards of 400 gins, including its own Distillery Edition – a collection of small-batch spirits distilled in-house using seasonal botanicals such as heather flowers, meadowsweet, and samphire. The G&T reigns supreme here: Guests choose from an 11-page menu of gins – including Eden Mill Original, which won Gin of the Year in the 2018 Scottish Gin Awards – arranged by flavor profile and matched with a fitting tonic and garnish. The spirit is served in an ice-filled goblet with the mixer on the side, allowing drinkers to sample the gin on its own before topping it off to personal taste. Though 56 North isn't an official stop on the WSTA's Gin Trail, The Scottish Gin Society recently named its gins ones to watch. 2 W. Cross-causeway, Edinburgh; fiftysixnorth.co.uk.

Cocktails on the Farm NB DISTILLERY, NORTH BERWICK

Last spring, husband-and-wife team Vivienne and Stephen Muir – the duo behind the celebrated NB London Dry Gin – opened

their chic new distillery at Halfland Barns, just outside North Berwick, a 45-minute drive east of Edinburgh. More cocktail party than standard guided visit, NB's Connoisseur Tour begins with a stroll through the distillery to see where head distiller Steve Ross makes, fills, and labels every bottle himself, before moving upstairs to the contemporary barn's airy living room for a tasting. Sofas and armchairs create a

relaxed ambience made even more welcoming by a fire burning in the woodstove, while conversation and canapés complete the festive field trip. *Halflandbarns, North Berwick; nbdistillery.com.*

DIY Style DARNLEY'S GIN DISTILLERY, KINGSBARNES

Glass apothecary jars filled with elderflowers, sea buckthorn, lemon balm, and other



Clockwise from top left: A spiced-gin-and-ginger cocktail at Darnley's Gin Distillery, Edinburgh's Royal Mile, NB Distillery, and 56 North proprietor James Sutherland.

Seat at the Bar



From left: A gin fizz at Draffens in Dundee, The Bothy Experience and its sweet yield, and standard Scottish sidewalk tunes in Edinburgh.

botanicals sit on a wooden table at this cottage distillery overlooking the North Sea in Kingsbarns, six miles outside St Andrews. Starting with a scoop of juniper berries, guests assemble a personalized recipe of botanicals in one of six copper mini-stills. While the stills bubble away, the novice distillers spend 45 minutes touring the distillery and sampling the full range of Darnley's Gin, including the new Very Berry, the first release from its limited-edition Cottage Series, distilled with local wild sloeberries, elderberries, and rose hips. Afterward, guests bottle and label their bespoke spirits for safe transport home. *East Newhall Farm, Kingsbarns, Fife; darnleysgin.com.*

From Jam to Gin THE BOTHY EXPERIENCE, KIRKWYND

Self-proclaimed “accidental gin maker” Kim Cameron found her way to craft distilling through jam, setting up shop in an old stone cottage, or bothy, on a farm in Kirriemuir, a two-hour drive north of Edinburgh. When she began infusing gin with her surplus berries, the resulting spirits sold faster than her preserves, and Gin Bothy was born. Her new outpost in Kirkwynd, a short drive south from Gin Bothy's

production facilities, opened last October in a fairy-tale hamlet on the back side of Glamis Castle – the childhood home of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. The Bothy Experience combines Cameron's passion for bothy songs and stories with her lauded fruit-infused gins and gin liqueurs. “Before television, we used alcohol and music to make life better,” Cameron says. “This is tradition meets contemporary.” Local raspberries, strawberries, and rhubarb flavor Cameron's artisanal fruit spirits, while her award-winning mulled Gunshot gin is infused with cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. *Kirkwynd, Glamis; ginbothy.co.uk.*

DON'T MISS DUNDEE

Like gin, Scotland's fourth-largest city is experiencing a rebirth of its own. A longtime shipbuilding stronghold, Dundee was hobbled by postindustrial hardship, but the city has emerged as a hub of innovation and creativity – architect Kengo Kuma's stunning V&A Dundee building, home to the country's first design museum, opened last fall. Gin culture is alive and well here too: In 2017, gin maker Andrew Mackenzie opened **Verdant Spirit Co.**, Dundee's first distillery in 200 years, in the historic Edward Street Mill. At **3 Session Street**, evening tastings showcase gins from the nearby Arbikie Highland Estate. And a little Prohibition-era flair can be found at **Draffens**, a hidden speakeasy tucked along the cobbled Couttie's Wynd alley.

TIP

“My favorite Scottish gin is **The Botanist**, from the Isle of Islay. It's Islay's first and only dry gin, made with a plethora of local wild plants and herbs, including apple mint, gorse flowers, juniper, and sweet chamomile. You can find it at bars throughout Edinburgh – a couple of great gin specialists are **One Square** and **Juniper Edinburgh**.”

– *Siobhan Byrne Learat, Virtuoso agency executive, Dublin*

TASTING NOTES

Set yourself up for Gin Trail success.

GO Your travel advisor can work with **Sleigh Tours Scotland**, a Virtuoso on-site tour connection in the country, to customize tasting adventures on the Scotland Gin Trail, from chauffeured distillery-hopping jaunts to multiday tours that combine gin-sipping master classes with private visits to the country's most popular attractions.

STAY At the end of Princes Street, the 188-room **Balmoral's** Victorian facade has towered over Edinburgh since 1902. Book one of its Olga Polizzi-designed suites with a view of Edinburgh Castle, and don't pass up cocktails and oysters from the raw bar downstairs at Brasserie Prince by Alain Roux. *Doubles from \$253, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

Tucked along the Scotland Gin Trail between Edinburgh and Dundee, seaside St Andrews may be a golf hub, but you don't have to pick up the clubs to admire the 144-room **Old Course Hotel, Golf Resort & Spa's** fairway views. Whisky reigns at the Road Hole Bar on the hotel's top floor (the menu features more than 300 varieties), but several Scottish gins make an appearance as well. *Doubles from \$361, including breakfast daily and one Champagne afternoon tea per guest. VI.*



A blueberry sour and a view at the Old Course Hotel's Road Hole Bar.



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