

# SCOTTISH INVASION

Whisky enthusiasts have one more reason to be in high spirits. Scotch Malt Whisky Society, which started in 1983 in Edinburgh, has launched its Indian chapter. PHORUM DALAL meets the society's global ambassador Georgina Bell

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AS I wait at a suburban five-star hotel for the brand ambassador of Scotch Malt Whisky Society (SMWS), Georgina Bell, I try to recollect the names of all the scotches and single malts I have sipped till date. By the time I get past the fifth, a 24-year-old girl stops at my table. I look up confused. Bell introduces herself. I was expecting someone much more older, but by the end of the interview, I know she may qualify as one of the wisest persons when it comes to whisky. A degree in geography, and a the-

sis on regional whiskies made Bell apply to the SMWS in 2010.

Stepping back in time, Bell explains how the society came together. It was 1970, and there were few single malts and not much variety in the world market. "And the angry Scottish people were keeping all of their warm drinks for themselves," laughs Bell, adding that it was a man, Piphills, who first chanced upon some great unknown single malt when he went to meet a friend. "The friend's neighbour popped over to a nearby distillery and bought a bottle from a strong cask. Piphills was bowled over, and when he returned to

Scotland Street, he narrated the incident to his friends, who chided him for returning empty handed," says Bell. Back went Piphills and shared his find with his friends, who were determined to make these regional, unique cask single malts available to the world.

In 1983, Scotch Malt Whisky Society was formally launched. Thirty years on, SMWS has now launched its India leg in Mumbai (JW Marriott and Indigo) at Pune (JW Marriott). "We are calling this year, the year of the pearl, and India is the only country joining our society in 2013. We are present in 19 countries with 26,000 members, who can visit our bars all over the world and indulge in tastings, enjoy the miniatures of three to four single malt bottles every quarter, and meet other enthusiasts," says Bell, adding that the society introduces 12 to 16 whiskies to its members every year, which may cost anything between Rs 16,000 to Rs 30,000.

Whisky has a strong association power, says Bell. "A whisky can stir a memory," SMWS has its distinct tasting panel that tries every sample of cask. "If they don't like it, we won't bottle it," says Bell.

The tasters are a metaphorical lot. With every sip of whisky they made a memory or taste connection — bacon, marmalade, leather arm-

Yearly memberships are available at JW Marriott (Mumbai and Pune) and at Indigo (Mumbai). The first year costs ₹20,000 approximately, which then drops to ₹10,000 in the second year. Log on [www.smws.co.in](http://www.smws.co.in)

chair, caramelised onion mustard... The names are interesting, such as Buttercups, Bothies and Barbeques, Gunpowder, Treason and Plot, etc.

## The process

For single malt, all you need is just three ingredients — malted barley, yeast and water — and age it for at least three years. Malted barley is soaked in hot water to release sugar, after which it is ground in the grist. Drained, the wort, or useful liquid, is added to the yeast. "This is when the magic begins," Bell explains. The fermentation takes around 48 hours. Another distillation process in a copper container forms the spirit liquid that is diluted to 63.5%. Poured into an old oak cask, it can be called whisky only three years later.

"Every cask has its own personality depending on what has been in it before — sherry, port or bourbon. Thus, every cask is like a story teller, revealing its tale," says Bell.

For all those who are thirsty enough to join, SMWS's pegs are 45 to 66 per cent ABV (Alcohol by volume).



Georgina Bell, brand ambassador of Scotch Malt Whisky Society says they do not reveal the name of the distillery on their bottles, only the cask number. PICS/NIMESH DAVE

