



FNB Whisky Live Festival 2009

“TOO MUCH OF ANYTHING IS BAD,
BUT TOO MUCH OF GOOD WHISKY
IS BARELY ENOUGH.”

Mark Twain (American humourist, writer and lecturer 1835-1910)

Over the last seven years, FNB Whisky Live Festival has become the largest whisky festival in the world. You might think that the point of Africa couldn't be further (geographically and culturally) from the Scottish peat, wild heather and mist, but this festival draws experts and connoisseurs from all over the world and is a highlight on the international whisky fraternity's calendar.

Seven years ago, the domain of whisky festivals was occupied by boring shows which attracted conservative old men in kilts. This all changed when Karen Chaloner and Sian Neubert of NC Connect pooled their resources, experience and expertise to stage South Africa's first whisky showcase.

Their fresher approach has over the years attracted many distillers, blenders and international authors to the shows – as well as thousands of whisky fans. In just seven years, whisky in South Africa has grown exponentially and consumers are discovering its mystery as well as its accessibility.

This year, the FNB Whisky Live Festival was hosted in Cape Town from 4 to 6 November at the Cape Town International Convention Centre and 11 to 13 November at the Sandton Convention Centre.

Karen Chaloner, co-organiser of the FNB Whisky Live Festival, said, “In order to appeal to this ever-changing and dynamic market, we introduced a number of exciting innovations designed to take both whisky connoisseurs and novices alike on an unforgettable journey through the allure, origins, flavours and history of whisky.”

“This year's event,” she added, “had something for everyone, and provided visitors a fun and interactive platform from which to learn about and discover the mystery of whisky.”

Proud whisky-making men from not just Scotland, but Ireland, America and South Africa were on hand to chat to visitors to offer their unique perspective and insight. The phenomenal line-up included the likes of Dave Broom (international whisky raconteur and writer), Richard Paterson (master blender, Whyte and MacKay), George Espie (Macallan Master of Wood), Billy Walker (master distiller, BenRiach), Dennis Malcolm (master distiller, Glen Grant), Ian McMillian (master blender, Bunnahabhain) and Annabel Meikle (Glenmorangie).

For those whose love of whisky was still new and wide-eyed, the educational hub of the festival, the Back to Basics Zone, offered an opportunity for visitors to understand the whisky-making process through all their senses.

Crowned as the official mixer of the 2009 FNB Whisky Live Festival, Schweppes joined forces with LiquidChefs with the entertaining

Schweppes Art of Whisky Cocktail-making Zone. The workshop guided participants through the finer points of making three unique whisky-based cocktails with Schweppes as a mixer, while teaching them some saucy tricks to try at home.

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Whisky workshops, which have been consistently voted as the best learning experience and best value for money at the show by visitors, were again available at the festival. Whisky experts, who possess the knack of explaining whisky jargon in simple everyday language, led these one-hour tutorials. Visitors learned more about the maturation process and the great importance of wood and the spring water used in the flavour of the end product. They also provided visitors with the opportunity to

taste unique whiskies generally not available in the tasting hall or even in South Africa.

Some of the festival favourites also made a comeback. The Lexus Whisky Leisure Lounge once again provided the perfect forum for client entertainment – in an exclusive lounge, offering dinner, whisky cocktails and exclusive tastings of unusual whiskies.

The ultimate guided tour of the festival, the Lexus Connoisseurs' Experience, offered a chauffeur drive, a personalised guided tour of the festival and unique tastings followed by dinner in the Lexus Whisky Leisure Lounge.

According to the Scotch Whisky Association, South Africa is the fifth-largest Scotch market by volume in the world. 2008's FNB Whisky Live visitor breakdown further confirmed that whisky is fast becoming the tippie of choice amongst South Africans, and that the profile of the whisky drinker is changing to include more women, and younger, upwardly mobile adults.

In fact, 30 per cent of the attendees to last year's festival had never been to the festival before and around 71 per cent of the total visitors were aged below 45. This indicates that whisky has become an affordable luxury that is more approachable and suits the lifestyle of many younger South Africans.

“As a fair portion of last year's attendees were women – 36 per cent to be exact – we ensured that there were more attractions that appealed to ladies at this year's event,” said Karen Chaloner.

Besides the extensive range of whiskies and whiskeys, there were whisky cocktails and liqueurs, fine foods, jewellery and entertainment as well as some great prizes on offer, including a chance to win a Royal Enfield Motorbike, the Bushmills distillery manager's classic Jaguar, and a trip to Ireland to visit the Wild Geese distillery.

The FNB Whisky Live Festival promotes responsible drinking. No persons under the age of 18 years old were allowed into the tasting hall, dedicated driver tickets were available, discounted food vouchers and a bottle of Valpré mineral water were included in the ticket price, and taxis were on hand. Part of the proceeds, as with previous festivals, was donated to The Foundation of Alcohol-related Research.

For more information, visit www.whiskylivefestival.co.za.