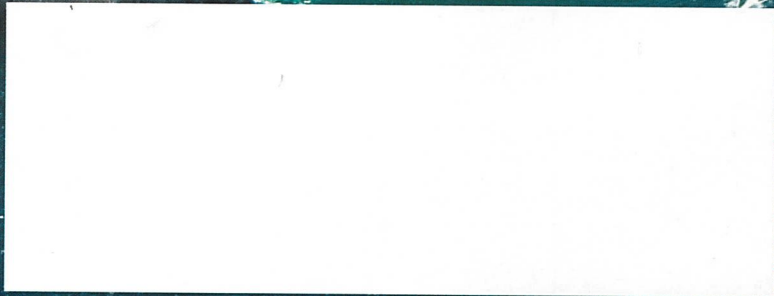


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TW PHOTO BY GAY NAGLE MYERS

Dana Knight is the proprietor of the Sunset Vybz rum bar, one of 2,000 such bars on Barbados, where the spirit has been distilled by Mount Gay since 1703.

Barbados history, distilled

By Gay Nagle Myers

“Desperate Rosemary is the drink you want,” said Ryan Adamson, a mixologist at the Mount Gay Visitor Center on the outskirts of Bridgetown, Barbados.

“How do you know?” I asked.
“You said you like mango, and it’s in there,

along with fresh lime, fresh rosemary and falernum — a sweet syrup we use — and, of course, Mount Gay Black Barrel rum,” Adamson said, handing me the cocktail.

It was one of several specialties on the bar menu that capped an hourlong tour of the Visitor Center, a journey through the history of rum on the island that claims to have invented it.

Tina Forde, my guide on the tour, told us that rum originally was called “kill-devil”

by the Bajans who first distilled it, but as the process became more refined to mitigate the bitter taste of molasses it was dubbed “black gold” for the revenue it brought to the island.

Sir John Gay, a businessman in Barbados, was asked by his friend, the contrarily named John Sober, for help in managing a distillery, and Gay refined the process and in 1703 began producing Mount Gay rum. Forde said that the distillery produces more than 6 million bottles a year.

In the tasting room, surrounded by copper stills and Kentucky white oak barrels in which the rum matures, Forde explained the different blends of Mount Gay signature rums, offering samples of each.

The Visitor Center, open Mondays through Saturdays during the winter season and weekdays the rest of the year, has a restaurant (try the rum barbecue burger) and a gift shop that has many bottles of rum.

Morris Greenwich, a Bajan tour guide, took me to the countryside to check out several rum bars that serve as gathering spots for the locals. “We serve rum anytime,” said Dana Knight at Sunset Vybz in the village of Westburg in St. Michael’s parish on the west coast.

As we drove through the rolling, green hills across the island, we stopped for a scenic view of the Atlantic. There I met Mr. Rum, who was splitting open coconuts on the side of the road. He had plenty of business from a group of cruise passengers on an island tour. “I do about 50 coconuts a day,” he said. “I grow my own and turn the shells into bowls.”

Later at the Old Brigand rum bar in the village of Shorey in St. Andrews’ parish, proprietor Aunty Lucille said she’d been running the place “for a very long time, but I like it. I like good people, I like friendly people, and they all like rum.”

Count me in that crowd.



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