

# Spirit of the Seas

Scotland's craft gin movement posits that seaweed could be the new peat



Scottish spirits have long been dominated by the heady tastes of peat and smoke. But, as gin muscles in on Scotch whisky as the nation's favorite drink, a subtler flavor is emerging: seaweed.

Seventy percent of the U.K.'s gin is now made in Scotland, and domestic sales are projected to outstrip those of whisky by 2020.

Alicia MacInnes of Lussa Gin Distillery harvests seaweed on the Isle of Jura with her aptly named dog, Ginny

With an eye on sustainability and terroir, several of the dozens of craft distilleries that have opened in Scotland over the past five years are exploring the country's 10,000 miles of coastline to bring a maritime flavor to their gins.

"Consumers are becoming more interested in provenance, food security, and the use of local ingredients," says Iain

Stirling of Arbikie Distillery, "and as our coastline has an abundance of different, edible seaweeds available, they are a natural choice." Graham Taylor of Crafty Distillery adds that seaweed is "a sustainable botanical that epitomizes the coasts of Scotland." Here, six distilleries that are bottling the taste of the Scottish seas.



**Arbikie Distillery**  
 This distillery is located along the Angus coast, on a fourth-generation working farm, and it represents its terroir in Kirsty's Gin, which features seaside botanicals (such as carline thistle and blaeberry) chosen by master distiller Kirsty Black. Kelp, historically harvested in the area for use as a natural fertilizer, is abundant on this wild coastline and brings salty notes to the gin.

**Crafty Distillery**  
 The coastal, forested southwestern region of Galloway provides plenty of fresh bladder wrack (named for the buoyant air pockets that help its fronds float) and noble fir needles for a refreshingly complex gin with salty and savory notes. The distillers suggest serving the gin with a fresh slice of mango plus an optional dusting of toasted, powdered Sichuan peppercorn.

From top: Arbikie Distillery production manager Christian Perez-Solar; a diver hand harvests kelp from underwater forests for Isle of Harris Gin

**Isle of Harris Distillers**  
 Hand-harvested sugar kelp from underwater forests off the Outer Hebrides adds a subtly sweet flavor to Isle of Harris Gin. The distillery, which opened in October 2015, also sells small bottles of sugar kelp extract, so you can add a few drops to your drink for a more popping taste of the sea.

**Edinburgh Gin**  
 These distillers venture from Scotland's capital to forage bladder wrack along the East Lothian shoreline. They add the seaweed to their Seaside Gin, which also includes coastal botanicals such as ground ivy and scurvy-grass. The bladder wrack, which was the first source of iodine known to man, adds a savory and slightly mineral flavor, and its high sugar content provides a natural sweetness—perfect for a G&T or, as the distillery suggests, a martini garnished with an olive and an anchovy.

**Lussa Gin Distillery**  
 The distillery's all-female team lives in a community of 30 on the Isle of Jura, the remote island wilderness where George Orwell wrote *1984*. There, they harvest sea lettuce in a small rowboat using a long hook and net. Given its robust flavor, a little bit of this seaweed goes a long way in reflecting the terroir of a landscape that the great author once called "un-get-at-able."

**Shetland Reel**  
 Located on the island of Unst in the remote Shetland archipelago, the U.K.'s northernmost distillery is about as far from London—around 650 miles—as Prague is. The dense salinity of Shetland Reel's Ocean Sent Gin comes from sustainably harvested bladder wrack, which the distillers wash and dry before adding to their award-winning London dry gin. ®

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Lewis Mackenzie (diver, Isle of Harris Gin); Courtesy of Edinburgh Gin (Seaside Gin)