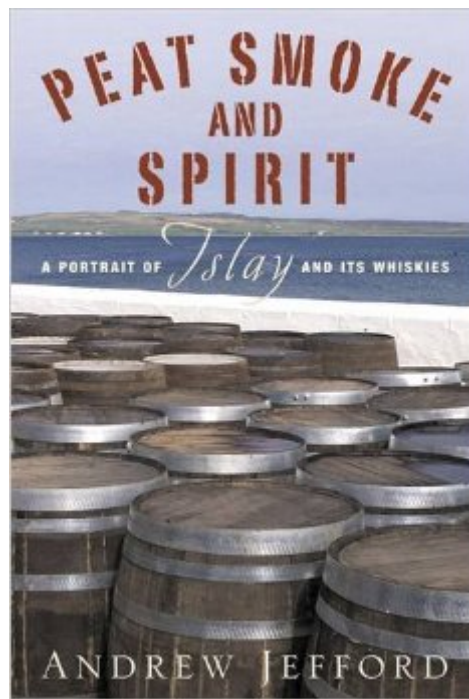


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Peat Smoke And Spirit



Synopsis

Those who discover malt whisky quickly learn that the malts made on the Isle of Islay are some of the wildest and most characterful in the malt-whisky spectrum. In PEAT SMOKE AND SPIRIT, Islay's fascinating story is uncovered: from its history and stories of the many shipwrecks which litter its shores, to intimate descriptions of the beautiful wildlife, landscape and topography of the island. Interwoven through these different narrative strands comes the story of the whiskies themselves, traced from a distant past of bothies and illegal stills to present-day legality and prosperity. The flavour of each spirit is analysed and the differences between them teased out, as are the stories of the notable men and women who have played such an integral part in their creation. PEAT SMOKE AND SPIRIT is the last word on Islay and its whiskies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you want a taste of the Western Isles of Scotland then there is no better book than Peak Smoke and Spirit. Andrew Jefford has distilled a lot of history into these chapters, capping off each chapter with a tour of one of the seven remaining Islay distilleries, among them Lagavulin and Laphroaig. You don't necessarily need to know the Islay whiskies to appreciate this book, but it helps. Jefford invites his readers to have a dram of each of the whiskies in reading the chapters, as he taunts you with the many aromas produced by these fine single malts as they are drawn from their oak casks. In the tradition of great Scottish writers like Neil Ascherson and Edwin Muir, Jefford takes in the terrain of the island as well as its history, following rivers along their courses to the distilleries and noting the flora and fauna along the way, so that you get a sense of the origins of these famous

malted whiskies. He describes the processes in the distilleries in easy to follow terms, along with illustrations to distinguish between the types of vats employed. It was interesting to me that these distilleries were rather small operations, keeping their long standing traditions alive despite the numerous ownership changes over the years. Jefford notes that it was often difficult to get the distilleries to divulge their "secrets," despite it being virtually impossible to replicate these tastes even if you knew all that went into these whiskies, which is why these distilleries have all struggled over the years to maintain their markets. Jefford also describes the various clan battles over the centuries for control of the islands, and how the Hebrides were virtually a nation of islands onto itself at one point, forming a bridge between Irish and Scottish Gaelic culture.

My favorite whisky vlogger Ralfy Mitchell suggested this book as one of only a few must-have whisky texts. In a sea of books on whisky, it is not such an easy task to suggest but a few. Many of the available books can be quite expensive so it's not just a matter of redundancies but of finances as well! I have many other entertaining and wonderfully-photographed books on whisky but by far, this is the most fulfilling intellectually. Chock full of etymological analysis and biological and historical facts, it must certainly rank as one of the most exhaustive texts on Islay (and its whiskies) to date. I must admit that I initially found the extensive bits about some of the early clan figures and their feuds a bit dry but after careful reading and absorption, it fit right in with the all-encompassing nature of the book. I still had some questions regarding specifics of the distillation process and this book answered every one. It covers just about everything you'd ever want to know about the basics and delves further into the individual idiosyncrasies of each distillery. What are the particulars of Lagavulin's condensers? What are the lyne arm angles at Bunnahabhain? What are the spirit cuts at Laphroaig? All this and more are revealed in minute detail. Mr. Jefford also tackles some of the more controversial aspects of whisky production including the influence of peat levels in the water source, what role (if any) seaside maturation plays and the preferences for wood or stainless steel washbacks, among many other things. Mercifully, this is not simply a dry technical text either so just as much energy is put into exploring the geology, natural history, weather and culture of Islay and its people. Perhaps an updated version is in order since quite a bit has changed since the book was written however it is still a fascinating book and if you're a lover of single malt, you'd be doing yourself a big favor in owning it.

This book is about the Scottish (Inner Hebrides) island of Islay and its famous peated whisky. In sixteen chapters, the author pays attention and tribute to each of the seven distilleries, alternated by

typical Islay topics such as history, nature, weather and even shipwrecks. If you're into Islay whiskies you have to like this book, there's no other way. The book was written by one either, and it shows. Hence it's easy to forgive the vocabulary, which isn't exactly simplified English at times, but then again whisky is no simplified drink either. And yes, the best way to get into the book is with a dram (or two) by your side. If you were ever looking for a comprehensive read about Islay and its whiskies, this is it.

Beautifully written overview of the Scottish island of Islay and the (generally) peaty whiskies that make it famous. I don't often read books of this genre from cover to cover, but I had trouble putting this one down. Chapters alternate between descriptions of aspects of the island history and environment and in-depth descriptions of the seven unique Islay distilleries. Each distillery chapter is like a mini tour of the facility (and the watershed and fields where raw ingredients are gathered). Having visited the island with my wife a couple years ago, this book made me feel like I was reliving some of those whisky tours. The author recommends enjoying a dram of corresponding whisky while reading the chapters on each distillery. I followed this advice for a few of these chapters and was duly rewarded. If your liquor cabinet or wallet will allow, I highly recommend this approach to reading the book.

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