



i love lucia

Tom Sandham found that beautiful women, bartenders and Elements 8 made the Food and Rum Festival in St Lucia last month one of the events of the year



Beautiful days



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St Lucia is a beautiful place, have no doubt of that. A Caribbean locale that bathes in tropical sun like its brethren islands, but offers the addition of breathtaking lush, green hills on its vista. While developed in parts, much of it remains untouched and its authentic roots are apparent everywhere you look.

The pace of life is as you'd expect, laid back, almost horizontal, and the beaches are as beautiful as the people. But for a bartender this picture postcard setting is enhanced considerably by the addition of the local product. Rum.

When Elements 8 announced a trip to St Lucia, it was hardly surprising to hear there was a fervent response from those asked. The main purpose of the trip was to experience the Food and Rum Festival on the island, a now annual event in which a host of local producers come together to show off their wares. But the trip also offered the opportunity to sample local life and, of course, a distillery trip.

Elements 8 is created and aged in the oldest distillery on the island, St Lucia Distillers Ltd, where a whole host of rums are produced, including the newly launched Toz.

Laurie Barnard heads up operations here and the distillery itself is a marvel, a small site put to incredibly efficient use and he was happy to show the enthusiastic bartenders around. As he did he revealed the process for the rums, walking them past the four stills that work overtime, talking them through the three artesian distillation techniques for the Elements 8 gold and its three unique



strains of yeast.

The molasses used at the distillery is imported from Guyana but in a bid to express the St Lucia terroir, Laurie and his team are growing sugar cane for the first time since 1962. It's this nod to the St Lucian approach that makes the operation so special.

'St Lucian rum is an elegant product, something that reflects the people here,' says Laurie, who also has Admiral Rodney and Chairman's Reserve in his portfolio. 'People are importing spirits here which is why our craftsmanship must be elevated and the workmanship on our rums maintained.'

Carl Stephenson and Andreas Redlefsen are behind the Elements 8 concept and took it to Laurie because they felt this commitment to rum was fundamental.

'This distillery is not afraid to consider innovation,' explains Carl. 'If you look at our bottle and the rum itself we are trying to do something new with the category and here in St Lucia they're embracing that.'

The festival itself showcased the love of rum in St Lucia and was a week-long experience that included various trips to restaurants around the island to sample food with rum. The highlight was probably the Elements 8 boat trip down to the Ladera Resort and the Dasheene Restaurant where chef Orlando Satchell showed off his impressive skills.

At the centre of the event though was the three day show where producers and experts took to stands for sampling and presentations. Among those making the drinks in the Elements

8 tent was Richard Woods, Charles Vexenat, Julien Gualdoni, Glen Hooper and Theo Sternberg and it's safe to say that their show was the most popular.

But even they were attentive when Tony Abou-Ganim turned up to speak, the American bartender and consultant - a legend in his field who flew in for the event.

'This is my first time to St Lucia but I love working with rum,' says Tony. 'I enjoy the versatility of the drink, it's something we are embracing in the US right now.'

Other mixologists to talk included Raakesh Madoo, Raymond Edwards, Kremour Maloney and Urye Peters, while Angostura master distiller John Georges spoke of the romance of rum. Even our very own Ian Burrell was present to give his views.

Rums such as Toz were launched and there was a nod to the new Angostura Orange Bitter with communications manager, Giselle Laronde-West saying hello. She's a former Miss World.

'This is a great trip for anyone,' says Charles Vexenat. 'A distillery trip always helps you picture the process and understand the rum itself and in the festival you experience the diversity of products available. It's also great to learn from other bartenders in this environment.'

After the business there was, naturally, a bit of pleasure and the rum was put to great use, through dancing in the rain in street parties, falling asleep at various stages and early morning dips in the sea. All in all, a great trip, educational and fun in equal measure and one to be highly recommended next year. ■