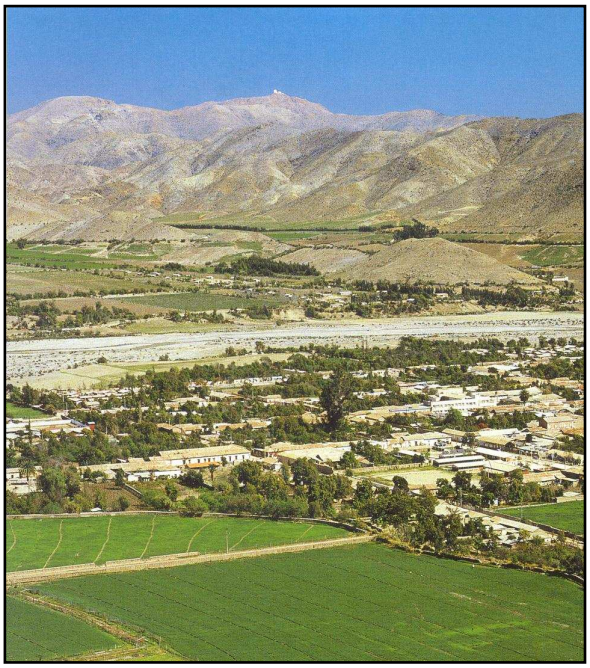
CHILE, LAND OF PISCO

Thriving in climate unique on this continent, Chilean Pisco is a natural product with centuries of history.



Chile, 4239 Km long, is a country as diverse as its weather, tide and eternal ability to astonish. In the continental part alone, experts have discovered 21 different climate zones.

Starting whit the Atacama Desert, the world's driest, and ending in Antarctic ice fields, a world reserve of drinking water, this country offers surprises at every turn. In the north, for example, the desert flowers once a year. And in the valleys and oases nourished by rivers coming down from the Andes mountain range, fruit and vegetables have been cultivated for millennia. This is the area where Chilean's favorite liquor is born, a brandy-like drink with unique characteristics: PISCO.

Have you ever held a glass of PISCO in your hands? It's a young, fragrant, transparent liquid, translucent to drink. In some cases it is slightly amber in color, the result of aging in wooden barrels. Unlike other liquors, it comes from grapes, rather than grains. And only specific kinds of grapes, found exclusively in northern Chile in an area known as the PISCO Region.

THE PISCO REGION

The PISCO Region is located in the north part of Chile, in a region called the Small North. Some of the valleys

that include the PISCO region are Copiapó, Huasco, Limarí, Choapa and Elqui. This were farmers cultivate the grapes used to produce PISCO, known as "Chile's drink" or "national drink".

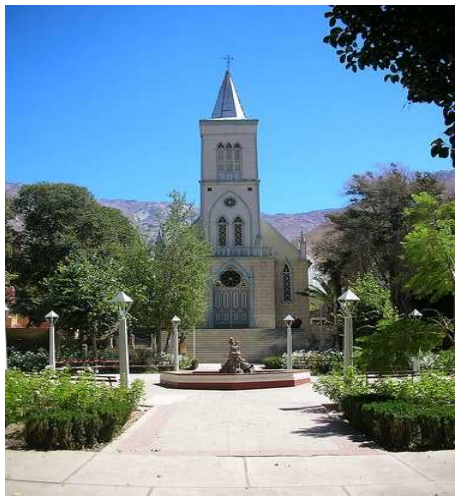
The climate of Region Four explains why Chilean PISCO has such unique characteristics. The grapes ripen in a dry, hot environment, with less than 220 mm of annual rainfall. The interior of the Small North enjoys unique weather conditions not found elsewhere in the country or the continent.

THE ELQUI VALLEY

A journey along the Elqui Valley reveals why PISCO is a drink that can only reach its peak when made whit grapes from Chile's north, which ripen in valleys guarded by mountains and surroundings of exceptional purity.

HILLS AND GRAPEVINES

A powerful image when visiting the valley is the grapevines along both sides of the road and climbing up into the hills. The green leaves of grapevines also carpet the dry, hot ravines, part of a technique used to make the grapes ripen sooner.



The grapevines in some cases climb as high as 1800 meters above sea level. Some simply cover mountainsides, while others employ pre-Columbian techniques, forming "terraces". As the grow, the grape vines wind together, weaving a green roof that may reach as high as two meters.

How is this miracle of growing grapes on such seemingly arid hillsides achieved? The drip irrigation system is used. Pure water from thaws high up in the Andes is collected and then distributed to the valley's grapevines.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

FARMERS AND CONQUISTADORS

PISCO is a grape brandy, first introduced by the Spanish conquistadors. Chile thus has a wine – and liquor – producing tradition several centuries old.

The local people were accomplished farmers and practiced terrace cultivation, a legacy from the Incas in the 15th century, and produced liquors such as chicha, made from fermented grapes or apples. In fact, the word "PISCO" may come from a Quechua term meaning "high-flying" or "bird".

By the 17th century La Serena (city near the Elqui Valley) was already known for its copper production, wines and brandies. All were related. Copper was essential for making boilers and pipes so that the Spaniards could accumulate a permanent stock of wine for church use and brandy produced with the most tender of young grapes.

In 1871 Pastilla PISCO appeared, named after the variety of grape used in its preparation. In 1889 this Pisco won the gold medal in the Paris Universal Exposition, consolidating a tradition that has been maintained to the present day.

GEOGRAPHY OF THE PISCO REGION

Chile's laws provide evidence of the evolution of PISCO distillery throughout its history, starting with a series of statutes, regulations, decrees and edicts from the 19th century up to the first Alcoholic Beverages Law passed in 1902. This law, modified in 1916, defines natural PISCO as "genuinely pure, produced directly from a special grape, with no aromatic additives nor other substances, bottled directly by the distillers".

On 16 May 1931, Decree 181 awarded the name PISCO to all those brandies produced in what are now known as the Third (Atacama) and Fourth (Coquimbo) Regions. The PISCO Region is located between the 27th and 32nd parallels of south latitude.

The Chilean government's Agriculture and Livestock Service, SAG, describes the area as "a predominantly sub-desert climate with very unusual characteristics due to the strong influence of the Pacific anticyclone, minimal cloud cover and no rainfall nine to ten months of the year, enabling a large quantity of solar radiation to reach the surface".

How do these climatic factors affect the PISCO, which eventually emerges? According to the SAG, the combination of "high luminosity with hot but relatively steady temperatures and dry conditions in the spring-summer period favors the maturing of the grape in optimum conditions for high sugar content, especially those varieties used in PISCO production"

The laws only formalized what had become a centuries-old tradition in the production of wines and PISCO. Chile had the requirements to obtain the denomination of origin: nature (soil and climate), tradition, cultural practices, the fame and prestige of the product and – especially important – consumer recognition. For all these reasons, the north became the center of PISCO production in Chile.

HOW PISCO IS MADE

There are six steps in Pisco production. These are:

- Harvesting
- Transportation
- Grape crushing
- Obtaining the basic wine
- Distilling
- Storage and bottling

The grapes reach the plants in a variety of trucks. Before crushing, samples are taken to determine the probable alcohol content, as well as observe the sanitary condition of the product.

THE AROMATIC GRAPE JUICE OR MOSTO

The clusters of grapes are placed in a machine called a *despalilladora* (destammer crusher). This separates the grapes from the rest of the bunch. Then the grapes head into the press, to produce the raw juice or *mosto* (must). All this is done without cracking a single seed or pip, because these would add an unpleasant to the juice.

The *mosto* is chilled slightly and then placed in fermenting containers using a pump. During this stage the juice ferments without separating it from the grape skin. Because the grape skin contains most of the perfume, this produces a very aromatic wine.

FERMENTATION

Alcoholic fermentation is a biochemical process. The grape's natural yeast turns the sugar is *mosto* into alcohol. During the process heat and carbonic gas are emitted.

The process lasts four to five days. During this period density and temperature are controlled on a daily basis. The temperature should not rise over 26 to 28 degrees centigrade.
On the second day of fermentation "over pumping" takes place. This consists of removing the *mosto* from the inside of the steel vat and pouring it over the head in order to achieve a good aeration. This allows for even fermentation.

Once almost all the sugar has fermented and the *mosto* turned into wine, it is removed and transferred into a

storage tank. That's where the fermentation process comes to an end and all the impurities are decanted. The solids are then separated from the alcoholic *mosto* or wine. This procedure is known as "devatting".

Twenty-five to 30 days later, racking is carried out. This consists of transferring the wine from one vat to another to eliminate solid matter (less) that has been deposited in the bottom of the tank. The less has an unpleasant flavor and smell.

After 30 days and once the fermentation process is complete, the wine, with an average alcoholic strength of 14º, is ready for distillation.

PISCO, AT LAST

Once distillation is complete the raw spirit obtained fluctuates between 60º and 63º. It is mixed with demineralized water to lower the strength. During this stage of the process, the valley once again makes its contribution, because the water used comes from an underground spring whose source is the Elqui River. This combination yields a truly unique product.

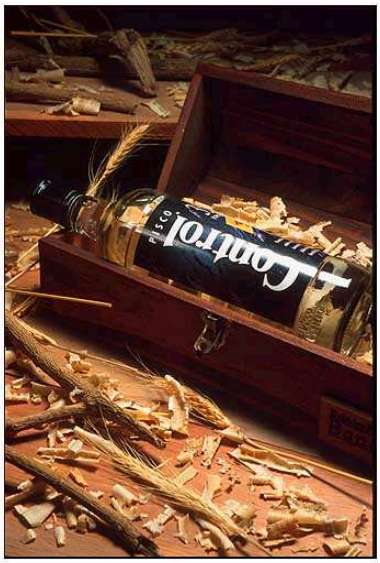
Following the homogenization of water and alcohol, a process lasting almost a month, the Pisco is filtered before it is a bottled.

HEAD, HEART AND TAIL

During the distillation of PISCO three types of alcohol are obtained:

- **Head alcohol**: produced at the beginning of the process. It pertains to the lowest fermentation point and is thus more volatile and has a strong smell. It is not consumed.
- **Heart alcohol**: this is the best quality alcohol. It has the most pleasant flavor and smell. It is used to make PISCO, as long as the chemical analyses show it is apt for consumption. Depending on its quality, heart alcohol is used for making different types of PISCO. This determines the length of the aging period.
- **Tail alcohol**: obtained at the highest fermentation point, it has a strong, unpleasant aroma. It is not consumed.

PISCO SAMPLING: THE FIRST TIME



"Everywhere in the world the earth keeps its own special secrets and among them Chile's north is an enchanted, mystical, and esoteric space. This valley, which absorbs energies and history, is the setting for the wonderful grape liquor that is PISCO. This marvelous drink is for strong men, for those who want to drink it straight or for happy people who prefer to sweeten it with a dash of lemon and sugar", say a young Chilean chef about the wonders of PISCO.

Specialist studies have highlighted the advantages of this PISCO: it is an extremely flexible beverage that can be mixed in a myriad of ways, a noble and high quality product.

A renowned Chilean chef, Coco Pacheco, believes that PISCO's main strength lies in the fact that "it is derived from grapes which makes it healthy, there are no chemicals involved". Pacheco likes to offer it to his clients, many of whom are foreigners trying PISCO for the first time.

Pascual Ibañez, a Spanish sommelier settled in Chile, makes some good suggestions for those tasting PISCO for the first time: "I would present it on its own and as an after dinner drink. I would choose a reserve PISCO served in a glass". Ibañez, who praises its "personality" as liquor, believes that PISCO is Chile's most important national drink, "due to its attributes but also to the lack of other candidates".

THE EVER-POPULAR PISCO

For years Pisco Sour has been one of Chilean's favorite drinks, whether in bars, in parties or at dinner. But thanks to the efforts of the exporters, who now deliver PISCO to 31 countries all over the world, it is no longer a South America privilege.

Wherever, or whoever, you may be just follow a few simple rules, and, with a bottle of PISCO, the basic natural ingredients and a blender, you at home can enjoy this time-honored recipe:

- 3 measures of PISCO
- 1 measure of freshly-squeezed Pica lemon juice (or from any other lemons you have to hand)
- 2/3 of a measure of icing sugar
- Crushed ice

Mix all ingredients in the blender and serve in well-chilled glasses.

And for those occasions when the blender just can't cope with the demand, the big PISCO producers have begun bottling Pisco Sour, as another option among their major brands. The new drink has been a hit, and confirms what we already knew: Chileans love Pisco Sour.