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The Spirited Traveller: Why Madrid serves the best gin and tonic

By Kara Newman

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(Reuters.com) - Energetic Madrid is famed for its tapas culture, usually featuring wine and beer. But dig a little deeper and spirits also have their place at the communal table.



And no, we're not talking about touristy sangria.

Gin and tonics, shorthanded as "gin-tonic", is the mixed drink most often found in Madrid, explains Kathleen Berger, a professional opera singer and Arizona native living in Madrid. "For some reason," she explains, "all bars in Spain have between eight and 15 different brands of gin, even in the teeny pueblos."

Alexandre Gabriel, president of Cognac-Ferrand, whose portfolio includes Citadelle Gin, also points to the refreshing gin-tonic as the thing to drink. Since Spain is the number-one market for Citadelle, Gabriel travels there frequently. "Only Spain knows how to make a gin and tonic," he insists.

However, the gin-tonic may be slightly different from the ones business travellers know from back home, Gabriel says. The tall Collins glass is replaced by a tumbler or large red-wine glass, and may be enhanced with fruit or spices like cinnamon or nutmeg.

Where to enjoy a Spanish-style gin-tonic? Berger recommends The Penthouse in Hotel ME Reina Victoria Madrid, at Plaza Santa Ana. In addition to stunning views of central Madrid at night, look for upscale tapas and speciality cocktails.

Meanwhile, in the middle of Madrid's business district, Lavinia has a quiet bar and restaurant, secreted upstairs from what Berger describes as "one of the best wine stores I have ever seen."

For those craving a more traditional Spanish experience (but not a gin-tonic), La Venencia (91 429 7313) is an old-fashioned sherry bar, perfect for sampling cheeses and embutidos (meats and sausages), such as chorizo, jamón, and cecina (cured beef).

To wash that all down, find sherries of various types. "And ONLY sherry," Berger warns. "Otherwise, you drink water."

Gin-Tonic Courtesy of Alexandre Gabriel

1.6 ounces Citadelle gin

200 ml Fever Tree tonic (about 6.5 ounces, and usually the size of a small bottle provided at the bar)

Lime or lemon skin (for just a little oil from the peel; not the full wedge)

Grated nutmeg, star anise, or cinnamon stick

In a large tumbler, stir together gin, tonic and ice. Twist citrus peel over the drink and add to the glass. Garnish with spice and drink (no straw). And, as Gabriel insists: "Toast to the Spanish!"

(Kara Newman is the author of "Spice & Ice: 60 tongue-tingling cocktails". The opinions expressed are her own.)

Online here: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/15/uk-spirited-traveller-madrid-idUSLNE73E04G20110415>