

Sip the Perfect Potion

Indulge yourself with a luxury cocktail and see if you encounter ecstasy or unearth utopia

VIKRAM ACHANTA

If you love your beverage and are willing to pay for the most exclusive drinks on the planet, then UK-based Holidaysplease has put together the perfect adventure for you. Called the Ultimate Drink Connoisseurs' Holiday, this incredible trip takes you to some of the most exclusive restaurants and bars in locations around the world, where you will sample some of the world's most expensive spirits and cocktails. But this luxury trip isn't just about finding the perfect potion. There will be plenty of time for sightseeing. You will journey to ten iconic places across the world, including Moncao, Dubai, Las Vegas, New York. Since you will spend a few nights at each place, there will be plenty of time to see the surrounding areas. While sipping cocktails laden with diamonds may be one of the high points of the trip, you will enjoy other tours, such as to the Dalmore distillery in Alness, Scotland and the Grey Goose factory in Cognac, France. The departure dates are flexible and the holiday can be tailored to your requirements. The guide price is £ 750,000 per couple.

What would you pay for a pricey cocktail and why? For a taste of the exotic and forbidden perhaps? Or, like an anonymous businessman in Australia did last year, to enter the Guinness Book of World Records by drinking the Winston? And where in India could you hope for such an experience and in an environment conducive to you taking a leap of faith in the ability of the bartender

< SPIRIT OF ROMANCE: GURU PRASHANTH'S LOVE POTION



HEADY START: KICK-OFF WITH INCEPTION AT "THE HIGH"

MIX MAESTRO: VARUN SUDHAKAR AT "AER", MUMBAI

to produce a worthy drink at a price two or three times what you're normally willing to pay for a cocktail?

Swanand Korgaonkar, bartender at the Blue Bar at London's Berkeley Hotel, was kind enough to send us a copy of a special section of the hotel's bar menu called Exquisite Innovation. With a range of cocktails from £ 120 to £ 1,400 (regular cocktail prices in the UK range from 10 to 15 quid), the menu is unlike one we'll see in India any time soon.

In conventional terms, a luxury cocktail is defined as a cocktail which uses super premium spirits in its preparation or could also contain a costly ingredient, which could be edible or not (like the diamond in the Martini).

In the Indian context, judging from my conversations with a few leading bartenders, a luxury cocktail is defined primarily in terms of a great holistic experience rather than just an expensive cocktail. Says Varun Sudhakar, twice winner of Diageo's World Class Bartender championship from India, who plies his craft at Aer, the Four Seasons Hotel's roof-top bar in Mumbai, "Every single cocktail concocted should be a luxury for the guest. The spirit, the ingredients, the service equipment and, of course, a skilled bartender are required to deliver this ultimate potion."

Concurs Korgaonkar, "A luxury cocktail is an overall experience created by a bartender for his patron, taking into account the history of every product and its contribution to the taste, flavour and aroma of the cocktail, which must complement the patron's mood."

You do, however, need time and patience to allow the bartender free rein to conjure up his creation and then, with due respect, pay full attention as he explains which ingredients he used to create the cocktail and why. Only someone who's travelled the world, points out Sudhakar, will order such a drink and, more importantly, will appreciate the effort which has gone into creating it. A bartender who can put together a quality cocktail must be held in as high regard as a Michelin star chef, feels Sudhakar.

Guru Prashanth, Director, Bar Operations of The High in Bangalore, which

A LUXURY COCKTAIL IS AN EXPERIENCE CREATED BY THE BARTENDER

is considered one of the finest cocktail bars in the country, has developed a set of three luxury cocktails--Unfinished Business, Inception and Love Potion--each priced at Rs 1,200. The Love Potion, which sounds appropriately decadent, is inspired by a Classic Cosmopolitan. It's blushed with bubbles (induced via a fancy cocktail system from Perlini) and has as ingredients designer vodka Roberto Cavalli, Grand Marnier liqueur, orange blossom water and a cranberry and citrus pressed reduction. It's finished with gold dust and silver pearls. With a cocktail like this up his sleeve, it's no wonder that Prashanth claims that a luxury cocktail is for an individual who likes to drink with all of his/her senses--visual, olfactory, taste, touch and feel. "It's for people who are passionate, who dream big and like to make their loved ones feel special," says Prashanth.

I always knew bartenders were a versatile breed, but I never suspected them to have a poetic touch. But Prashanth changed my mind with his remark, "A drink like this can get the customer to taste a bit of my soul." Cheers to that! And remember, next time you're in a bar which looks and feels a little bit out of the ordinary, indulge yourself with a luxury cocktail experience and see if the earth moves for you. 