

IN-STORE

Diageo focuses on distillery portfolio for bespoke whisky experience

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Royal Lochnagar's Distillery Director

By JEN KING

Spirits distributor Diageo is emphasizing the distilling process of its Royal Lochnagar Scotch whisky through a yearlong educational program.

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Luxury Daily

The Royal Lochnagar recently launched the Distillery Director membership club that takes whisky enthusiasts on an educational journey from whisky drinker to whisky maker. Providing insights into the distilling process, the Distillery Director program will help consumers appreciate the skill involved in making Royal Lochnagar Scotch whisky as well as the other high-end spirits under the Diageo umbrella.

Royal Lochnagar Distillery is part of Diageo's distillery portfolio and one of the jewels in the Royal Deeside crown that still employs many of the manual, traditional techniques of historical whisky-making," said James Thompson, managing director at Diageo Reserve.

"The program invites members to learn more about the traditions that have cemented the success and aura around whisky as a premium consumer product," he said. "By providing our members with behind-the-scenes access to Royal Lochnagar and the opportunity to work alongside our operators, we are able to celebrate the history of whisky making with

them, in a way that is just as relevant today.

"We know that for luxury brands in particular, creating experiences and things that people will talk about, is key to how we should be communicating and Distillery Director does that in a unique way. The core of our business remains in luxury, premium spirits – brands we're incredibly proud of from Johnnie Walker Blue Label to Ketel One Vodka and Tanqueray No. 10 – but being able to expand the way in which we build relationships with our consumers, through two-way dialogue and these sorts of real-world experiences, is an exciting direction to be traveling in for the whole portfolio."

Learning a craft

Part of Diageo's distillery portfolio, Royal Lochnagar is located near HRH Queen Elizabeth's Balmoral Castle in the Scottish Highland village of Crathie. The distillery's village is half way between the villages of Ballater and Braemar where the Highland Gathering and Games are held.

A smaller distillery compared to Diageo's Johnnie Walker, the Distillery Director club will attract whisky enthusiasts from around the world to take part in this unique, hands-on experience.

During the 12-month program, club members will be guided through the journey of whisky making through educational touchpoints and first-hand encounters with the Royal Lochnagar distillers.

Upon membership, whisky drinkers will receive a bespoke toolkit and attend on-site masterclasses on tasting notes. This will be conducted through exclusive whisky releases delivered to members throughout the year.



Royal Lochnagar's Distillery Director club

The first to be delivered is Royal Lochnagar's 12 Year Old Single Malt Scotch whisky, the foundation of the distillery. From there, the member will be sent three samples to learn about production and maturation and then another four to teach blending.

Feedback on flavor preferences given throughout the year will help Royal Lochnagar's

master distiller to create the Director's Edition release. This special-edition release whisky will only be available to connoisseurs enrolled in the Distillery Director club.

Through participation in the program members will gain an opportunity to cultivate and enhance their palate and to improve upon their knowledge and appreciation of fine whisky.

In a brand statement, Jackie Robertson, distillery manager at Royal Lochnagar, said, "It's a unique opportunity for people to build and enhance their knowledge of whisky and be part of the whisky making process. We've been making whisky at Royal Lochnagar since 1845, using much the same methods today as were used then. The Distillery Director program offers rare chance to be part of this heritage and we look forward to welcoming members in to share the knowledge and expertise built up over some 170 years."



Distiller marking a whisky barrel at Royal Lochnagar

Members will also have exclusive access to the bespoke concierge service at the Royal Lochnagar distillery. The concierge is on hand to coordinate behind-the-scenes access to the distillery for Distillery Director members.

These tailored trips give members a chance to experience the distillery first-hand as well as to sample exclusive cask malts.

Annual Distillery Director membership is available for \$2,263. Applications and additional information can be found on Distillery Director's dedicated [Web site](#).

Deeper drinks

Diageo has worked with its spirits brands to develop initiatives that act as interactive tools that both educate and entertain consumers.

For instance, Diageo, the distributor of Scotch whisky-maker Johnnie Walker, unveiled an interactive smart bottle concept that when scanned by a smartphone will provide marketing materials.

The spirits brand officially showed its concept, which may soon grace the sides of Johnnie Walker Blue Label bottles, at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona after

announcing the project in late February. The concept was developed by Diageo Technology Ventures and printed technology maker Thin Film Electronics ASA and may have potential in other sectors such as apparel and beauty ([see story](#)).

Also, Johnnie Walker aimed to increase digital interactions with wealthy spirits drinkers through the introduction of “Johnnie Walker House — World of Privileges.”

Johnnie Walker House is a series of stand alone and airport boutiques dedicated to the whiskies distilled by Johnnie Walker. Located mainly in Asia, the Johnnie Walker Houses are designed to inform consumers about the brand’s products, while the new digital component will serve as a membership rewards program ([see story](#)).

"In an increasingly busy world, time, knowledge and influence have become valuable commodities, and more and more people are seeking out products, brands and experiences that allow them to further their understanding of subjects they're passionate about," Mr. Thompson said. "Distillery Director is aimed at these people – at those who wish to enhance their knowledge of whisky in a unique and experiential way.

"The bespoke Distillery Director is an ideal experience for professionals and luxury consumers, typically ranging from 30-45 years old, who think of themselves as creatively-minded people," he said. "In fact it's bespoke concierge service is specifically designed to assist those who are looking for luxury as part of their experiences."

Final Take

Jen King, lead reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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