



# THE SCOTSMAN

DRINKERS ORDER WHISKY GALORE ISLAND'S ENTIRE STOCKS  
... FIVE YEARS TOO EARLY

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Not a brick has been laid to build the first distillery on the island where Whisky Galore! was filmed—but connoisseurs have already signed up to reserve the entire batch of its first-year casks.

Peter Brown will begin building the distillery on Barra in the autumn.

The distillery, costing more than £1 million, will make about 5,000 gallons of Isle of Barra Single Malt Whisky a year using water from Loch Uisge, the island's highest loch.

It will use barley grown by crofters on the island before being milled and malted locally and be bottled at the distillery in Borve.

Whisky needs to be matured for three years before it can legally be called whisky so the distillery will not have its first consignment until 2014.

In the meantime Mr Brown has taken orders for the £1,000 oak casks from individuals and groups of friends from countries including Germany, Japan and Sweden, and the rest of the U.K.

More than half the casks will be retained by the distillery but he is already selling his public quota of second-year reserve.

Mr Brown said it was impossible to tell at this stage what the whisky would taste like but that it was 'unlikely to be excessively peaty'.

He said it would sell at about £30 a bottle at current prices at the premium end of market.

Mr Brown, who ran a courier company in Edinburgh before moving to Barra 12 years ago, said: 'The whisky will be of the island, from the island. It will be a

reinforcement of the Highlands and Islands tradition of 200 or 300 years ago when there was scarce an island or glen that did not have its own cottage distillery.

‘The essence of this is to create something going back to what we had in Scotland before the Customs and Excise shut it all down. We will not be like a call centre turning up with computers which can then be closed down as quickly as it opened.’

Mr Brown added that the *Whisky Galore!* ‘legend’ would be a great advantage.

‘There is a lot of *Brigadoon* sentiment in the film but it is sufficiently rooted in some kind of fact to give it meaning. It is hugely helpful because people have an automatic association between whisky and Barra.’

Whisky experts say Mr Brown’s venture is part of a wider expansion trend in Scotland over the past two years to meet demand from new markets including India, Brazil, China, Russia and south east Asia.

Other new distilleries currently planned include those at Annandale in Dumfriesshire, Huntly in Aberdeenshire, and Falkirk.

Major new malt whisky distilleries have also recently opened at Roseisle near Elgin and Ailsa Bay in Girvan.

Annual exports are worth £3 billion to the U.K. economy.

A spokesman for the Scotch Whisky Association said: ‘The developments on Barra are part of a wider, encouraging trend in the whisky industry, with investment in new, and the expansion of old, distilleries supported by the growth of demand.’

‘There is optimism about Scotch whisky’s future prospects despite the current economic conditions.’

Alasdair Allan, SNP MSP for the Western Isles, said: ‘I’m delighted with this progress with the Barra distillery plan and wish the venture every success.’

‘You only need to look at Islay to see how important economically whisky can be for an island. Barra’s many connections with the novel and film *Whisky Galore!* can also be exploited. There is no reason why the Outer Hebrides with its pristine environment and abundant peat should not benefit from such developments.’

### *Festival to celebrate spirited tale of salvage*

Barra became associated with whisky after Sir Compton Mackenzie’s 1947 novel *Whisky Galore!* was turned into a classic Ealing comedy.

Mackenzie’s novel immortalised the true events of 5th February, 1941, when the SS Politician, sailing to New York, foundered on rocks in the nearby Sound of Eriskay. About 264,000 bottles of whisky among her cargo were lost, leading

to a salvage operation by islanders, who hid a large number of the bottles before excise men arrived.

In 1949, film director Alexander Mackendrick brought a film crew to Barra and many local people appeared as extras alongside the stars of the day—Basil Radford, Joan Greenwood, Bruce Seton and Gordon Jackson.

The novel and film centred on the salvage operation and how the local policeman was persuaded to turn a blind eye and thwart the efforts of the Home Guard to stop the salvaging and search the island for bottles.

The island is holding its first *Whisky Galore!* Festival on 18th–20th September as part of the Homecoming celebrations. The programme includes screenings of the film, ceilidhs and film location tours.

The Craigard Hotel, in Castlebay, where some of the scenes in *Whisky Galore!* were filmed, has a bottle from the ss *Politician* in a case in its bar.

In December 2008, a bottle of Ballantine Scotch Whisky salvaged from the ss *Politician* sold at auction for £2,200.

