

A thirst for travel

Over the years, a few special drinks have stuck in **Nick Dall's** memory. Here's what his hypothetical day of perfect drinks would be, based on his adventures around the world.

ILLUSTRATION **NICOLENE LOUW**



I start the day with a coffee, but not just any coffee. I pop into the café near my flat in Bologna, Italy. I stand at the bar and order “Un caffè” from the bow-tied, Brylcreemed barista. I order a single because only tourists order doubles in Italy, and I’m trying to blend in. Then I wash it down with a thimble of soda water and repeat the process.

All that caffeine keeps me going for a while, but by mid-morning I’m in need of something healthy, so I whizz across to the Mercado de Sopocachi in La Paz, Bolivia. Upstairs inside this hodgepodge market clinging to the slopes of the Andes – in contrast to the grisly butcher’s stalls downstairs – bowler-hatted women sit behind mounds of multicoloured fruit. I choose the stall with the happiest looking owner and the widest selection of fruit, and – pointing at whatever seems ripest and most alluring – build my smoothie from scratch. Today I’ll opt for a combo of açai berry, banana and *tamarillo* (“tree tomato” in English, but actually something more similar to a mango). Tomorrow it could be *achachairú* (literally “honey kiss”), ginger and mint.

If I really wanted to, I could order a frog smoothie. No jokes, it’s supposed to be good for your fertility, but I’ve also heard that the highly endangered Titicaca water frog is often the main ingredient, which kind of puts me off.

By midday I’ve earned a proper drink. I’m spoilt for choice now. After some deliberating I set my sights on Brittany in north-western France. Crisp Breton apple cider comes in champagne bottles and it’s the drink of choice in the region’s famous crêperies, where it’s drunk from wide ceramic bowls, not glasses.

But I’m also craving some white wine to go with lunch... Which wine will it be and where will I drink it? When most people think of a Spanish rioja they think of a red, but the lively white riojas are great lunchtime wines, especially if you’re sitting at one of the alfresco cafés in the medieval town of Laguardia, in the heart of the winelands.

But all that jet-setting is tiring and I’d actually rather hop into the car and drive to the Overberg. The wineries around Elim specialise in expressive cool-climate sauvignon blanc and many have great, farm-style restaurants, too. What’s not to like?

I overindulged at lunchtime and now I need a pick-me-up. So I settle in for a *ca phe den da* (iced black coffee) in Da Nang, Vietnam. The café is a modest affair – ant-sized plastic chairs and tables wedged up against a wall in a tiny alley around the corner from the school where I taught English once.

I sit with Mr Bac, the manager at the English school, at our usual table and soon a woman in a wide-brimmed hat appears with our standing order: a coffee each plus one cigarette for Bac.

After Brazil, Vietnam is the world’s second largest producer of coffee. Most families roast their own beans in an open pan, usually adding butter, sugar or even eggs for extra flavour. The results are mind-blowing: If you think *moerkoffie* is strong, you haven’t been to Vietnam. To take some of the zing out of it, and to counteract the incessant tropical heat, I have my coffee on ice; ice that is crushed on the pavement in a tarpaulin bag using a small, silver hammer. Mr Bac drinks his coffee hot, with lashings of condensed milk. And he doesn’t even break a sweat.

Now I’ve got my mojo back so it’s off to Chile for a drink of seismic proportions: a *terremoto* (Spanish for “earthquake”), which consists of *vino pipeño* (a rough, fermented white wine) and pineapple ice cream. Although it sounds gross it’s surprisingly refreshing. *Terremoto* is traditionally served in a one-litre glass and chased by a 500ml replica or “aftershock”.

But now it’s almost sunset and I still haven’t had a beer! I could jet off to Germany for Hefeweissbier, Belgium for La Chouffe or Denver for Mothership Wit, or I could just catch a taxi down to Woodstock in Cape Town for a pint of Woodhead Amber Ale. Or I could sip my beer in Darling (Bone Crusher), Clarens (Red Ale) or the KZN Midlands (Pickled Pig Porter).

Enough of beer. I’m getting peckish and no evening meal is complete without a good-sized glass of robust, unapologetic red wine. And no country does this better than Argentina, home to the finest beef in the world and juicy wines to match. In its native France, malbec (literally “bad taste”) is an unremarkable filler used only in blends, but when it’s grown in the high-altitude semi-desert surrounding Mendoza, malbec is a plush, velvety fruit bomb that at first leaves you reeling but soon has you coming back for more.

I’m something of a morning person, and by this time I’d usually be more than ready for bed. But for the purposes of this column I’ll soldier on and extend the search into the wee hours. I could keep things classy and savour a fine Japanese single malt at one of Tokyo’s incredible, eye-wateringly expensive whisky bars, or a Singapore Sling in the iconic Raffles Hotel. Or I could embrace the grimier side of my travelling past and polish off a “whisky bucket” of dodgy Thai whisky mixed with imitation Red Bull on the beach in Phuket.

Regardless of where the night takes me, the great thing about this kind of fantasy binge is that there’s absolutely no hangover. However, if there was, I’d know exactly what to drink to sort it out: *leche de tigre* (Spanish for “tiger’s milk”). *Leche de tigre* is the juice left over at the bottom of ceviche, a dish of raw fish, lemon juice and chilli, which is Peru’s answer to sushi. If day-old fish juice doesn’t clear your head, then nothing will.

Cheers! Or, as they say in Spanish: “*¡Salud!*”

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