



Meet the Mesmerizing Rums of Mexico:

DEADHEAD, BONAMPAK, AND COZUMEL

In Chiapas—Mexico’s southernmost state—the climate is tropical and the soil is fertile. Bananas, mangoes, cacao, and coffee grow in abundance here; perhaps more surprisingly, sugarcane also flourishes. In fact, Mexico is a top producer of the crop—and though it’s best known for its agave spirits, the country is also home to rum distilleries like the family-owned Ronés de México, which has been making rum on the second-oldest sugarcane plantation in Chiapas for three generations, since 1948, receiving a multitude of awards for its efforts over the decades.

Recently, Ronés de México teamed up with California-based company Iconic Brands Incorporated to distribute three of the separately owned rum brands it produces: Deadhead, Bonampak, and Cozumel. The joint enterprise has successfully made them available in 25 countries.

Bonampak Rums are a blend of pot-distilled cane juice and column-distilled molasses. The brand’s sizable portfolio includes a Blanco, a three-year-old Añejo, a five-year-old Dark Rum, and a 13-year-old Gran Reserva, as well as three infused rums: organic coffee, organic cacao beans, and a

botanical blend of basil and ginger. Bonampak also offers a sugarcane-based aguardiente and is soon to release a pox (pronounced “posh,” the ceremonial spirit originated with the Mayans as a distillate of sugarcane and corn).

The Cozumel Mayan Rums lineup consists of four expressions: Mayan White, Mayan Aged, Mayan Extra Aged 12 Year, and Mayan Spiced Rum. These artisanal spirits are fittingly packaged in eye-catching limited-edition bottles made by a master glassblower. Varying slightly in shape and color, no two bottles are the same.

And speaking of packaging, the image of Deadhead’s bottles is likely indelible to all who’ve seen them. They pay tribute to the Shuar, an indigenous people of Ecuador and Peru who were known to collect the shrunken heads (*tsantsas*) of their vanquished foes, believing that the soul (*muisak*) remained within. While Deadhead’s vessels don’t contain souls, they do contain exceptional spirits: The Cask Aged Rum is aged for six years in toasted American and Chiapas oak barrels, and the recipe for its slow-roasted, cacao-infused Dark Chocolate Rum was inspired by ancient recipes used by Mayan emperors.

Rones de México takes full advantage of Chiapas’ agricultural bounty in sourcing its ingredients. Distilling, blending, and aging them is an art, one that Rones de México master blender Jorge Pérez Rafael has perfected. Rafael holds a Ph.D. in Food & Spirits Science and Technology (with a research specialty in fermented and distilled spirits and natural extracts). For him, rum “is more than an industry—it is art and science; it represents history and culture and great moments with family [and] friends.”

Iconic Brands CEO Kim Brandi brings up culture too. She says that her company, Rones de México, and the three rum brands they represent “embrace a shared value of culture where they not only strive to enhance their economic success but also to advance the economic and social conditions of the communities in which they operate.” She adds that the partners are committed

to preserving and respecting the earth and the environment. For example, to minimize its carbon footprint, Deadhead has eschewed the use of plastic in favor of glass, and Rones de México when distilling all its spirits “participates in fair trade . . . and is green industry certified,” according to Brandi. What’s more, the brands donate to local schools, health clinics, and the arts.

While rum will not likely supplant tequila and mezcal in Mexico, the country may well soon be an international player in the rum category—and it will have its most-awarded producer, Rones de México, and Iconic Brands to thank for that.

IMAGE COURTESY OF COZUMEL RUM COMPANY



A Cozumel Rum bottle goes into the fire while being hand crafted.

Cozumel Rum Company Mayan Spiced Rum, Chiapas, Mexico (\$86)

In shiny metallic mosaic, the bottle is one of the most magnificent collector’s items we have seen. The 80-proof liquid is also outstanding, with scents of ginger and succulent spiced apricot; on the palate, it’s exceptionally balanced, with notes of clove, orange peel, and cinnamon. Banana, peach, and vanilla musk pick up the pace through the finish. **95** —*M.M.*

Bonampak Botanical Rum Infused with Basil & Ginger, Chiapas, Mexico (\$45)

The namesake ingredients are not overpowering but rather gentle and refined on the nose. The zingy ginger warms the palate, softened by the basil, in this 70-proof rum with a billowy mouthfeel. **92** —*M.M.*

Bonampak 13-Year-Old Gran Reserva Rum, Chiapas, Mexico (\$79)

With its whiskey-style nose of stone fruit, grain, and maple syrup, this is an elegant 80-proof spirit. Brown sugar melts on the tongue, followed by sassafras and cigar leaf. Oatmeal and pecan drive more textural complexity. Leather and oak are magnificent on the finish, which shows pure depth of character. **96** —*M.M.*

Bonampak 3-Year-Old Coffee Rum, Chiapas, Mexico (\$45)

Aromas of roasted organic Chiapas coffee beans slathered in dark chocolate are wonderfully authentic. The deluxe mouthfeel further expresses the coffee flavor, which has sweet mocha, black pepper, and tobacco as running mates. A delight on the rocks. **94** —*M.M.*