



Grenada's oldest rum factory

Mozart had not yet composed *The Magic Flute* and the Industrial Revolution was just gaining momentum, but the water wheel in northern Grenada was turning and still is today. For more than 235 years, the power of the Antoine River has squeezed the sweet juice from Caribbean sugar cane through a traditional process into the organic rum found only on the Caribbean island of Grenada.



Doesn't seem of this world. A discarded pressure vessel on the site of the oldest rum factory Antoine Rivers / © Photo: Georg Berg

Good looks old even better

This manufacture is not only old. It looks downright dilapidated and has many poorly repaired areas. But the company has been running longer here than anywhere else and that is what fills the whole workforce with pride. To ensure that everything continues to run smoothly, every employee has to fulfill several functions, one of which is particularly important: training in fire-fighting. This is urgently needed because open fires are burning in many places. And this is very close to the containers in which the substance is manufactured, which is not allowed as luggage on the plane because of its fire hazard.



The wood fire blazes under the boiling flask. The age-old safety regulations are probably still sufficient / © Photo: Georg Berg

The *Antoine Rivers distillery* on Grenada may not be the oldest rum factory according to the documents. *Mount Gay* rum has been produced on the neighboring Caribbean island of Barbados since 1703 . But the Antoine Rivers manufacture is legendary and looks every bit as old as it is. It is certainly the oldest where you can experience the manufacturing process as it was established at the time.



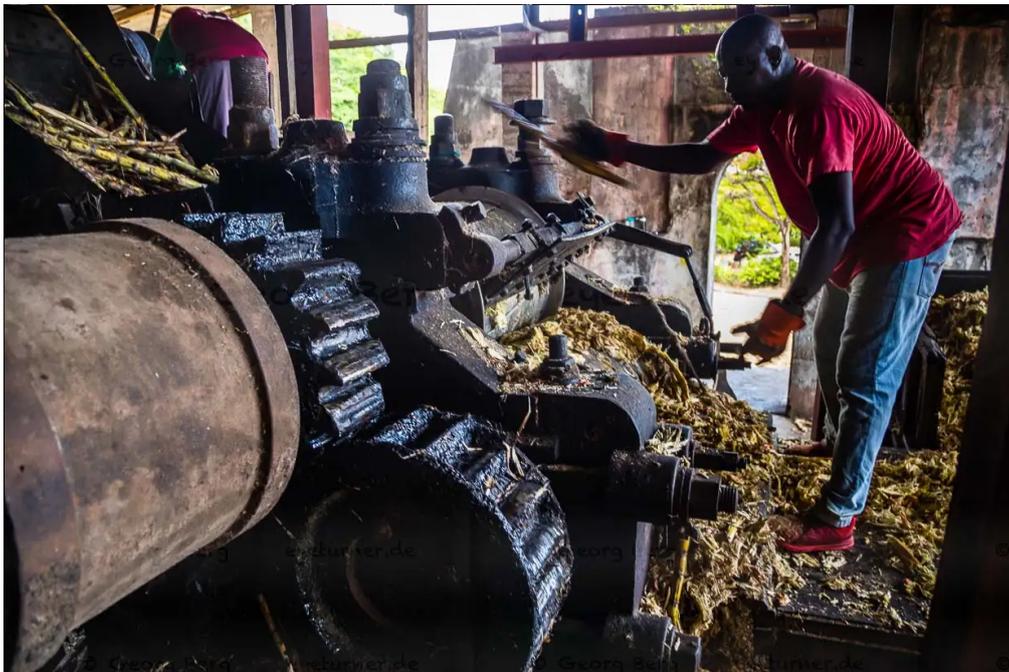
Sugar cane is harvested all year round in Grenada / © Photo: Georg Berg

Every day, workers heave sugar cane onto the conveyor belt, which, like the press, is driven by the water wheel made in England almost 300 years ago. The construction works reliably and has proven its durability for 235 years. Several men supervise the pressing process, during which some sugar cane is pressed through the roller several times.



High up on the machine, the foreman oversees the continuous supply of sugar cane / © Photo: Georg Berg

In the dry season, sugar cane is more concentrated on Grenada. However, the press then also has a lower output because the mill wheel is only driven with less water. So both factors balance each other out and it is down to the talent of those responsible to achieve the usual quality through processing. The pressed sugar syrup flows through an open channel into a hall where it is further processed.



During ongoing operation, individual pieces of sugar cane are sent through the press a second time. It's hard to believe that this machine was already working reliably in Goethe's time / © Photo: Georg Berg

Behind the pressing plant is a huge mountain of pressed stalks (the bagasse), which are dried in the sun and used as fuel to heat and thicken the molasses-containing sugar solution. After all, by-products also have their uses and do not have to be regarded as waste. The processes here also have something organic about them.



On Grenada's only 50-meter-long railway line, the bagasse, the pressed sugar cane, is pushed over the heap on a rickety wagon / © Photo: Georg Berg

Old-fashioned: all 80 jobs are secure

In the Antoine Rivers rum manufactory, 80 employees have been producing 500 bottles of rum a day for years, thus only satisfying the demand of the island of Grenada, which has a little over 100,000 inhabitants.



This is what sustainability looks like: The rail vehicle has been in service for more than a hundred years / © Photo: Georg Berg

It's good for the workforce and for the brand that there are no plans to increase production. Because the modernization would entail an enormous reduction in staff. The company, it was calculated, would get by with just eleven employees. But could the rum still be as legendary as its history?



The sugar juice arrives in the main building of the manufactory. There, the solid press residues are sieved out / © Photo: Georg Berg

Craftsmanship inspires the spirit of rum

The juice pressed from the sugar cane is scooped back and forth between several copper bowls with huge spoons until it is concentrated enough for fermentation. Under the *Coppers*, a fire from the dried *bagasse* creates the necessary heat.



When the first molasses falls out, it can be decanted / © Photo: Georg Berg



Each copper container has a different temperature and concentration. Finally, in the front container, a syrup simmers, which has absorbed the yeasts necessary for fermentation from the air / © Photo: Georg Berg

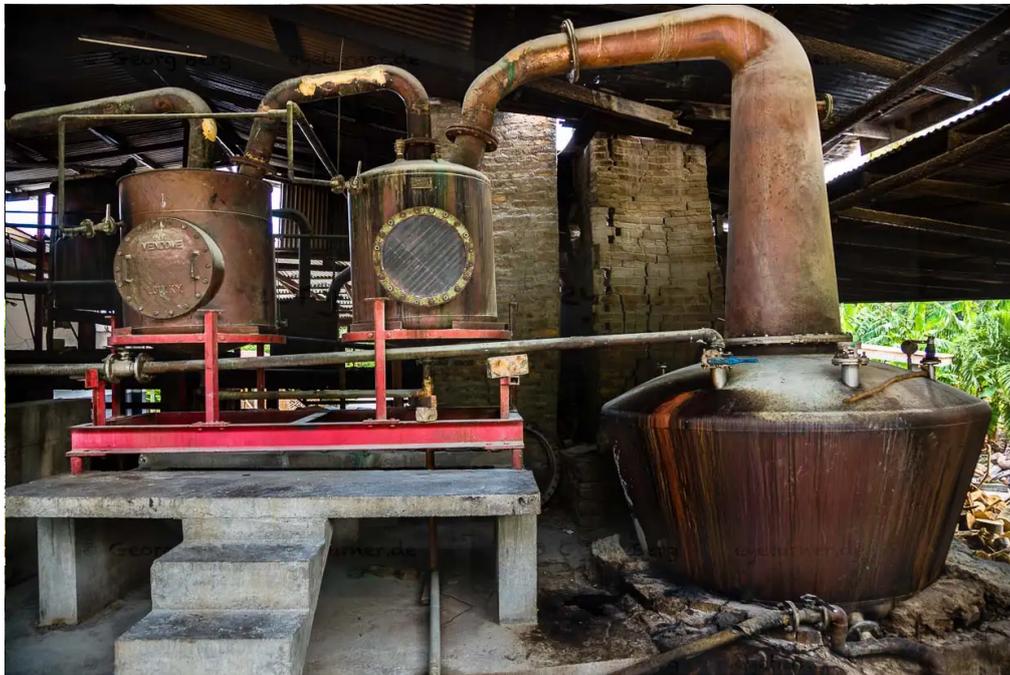
In the Antoine Rivers manufactory, no yeast is added to the brew, because the culture that has been at home in this building for centuries is still being worked on. After eight days of fermentation in large concrete tanks, the sugar and molasses have turned into alcohol and the typical aromas of rum.



The fermenting sugar cane syrup simmers quietly in concrete tanks at tropical room temperature for eight days / © Photo: Georg Berg

After the fermentation is over, the liquor containing alcohol is placed in large copper flasks that are heated over a wood fire. Because of the higher heat required, a fire made from leftover sugar cane (bagasse) is no longer sufficient.

At the beginning of the distillation, unwanted methanol evaporates, which is released with a loud hiss when it reaches its boiling point. The following phases are collected in several intermediate cooling steps until finally the 75 percent white rum collects in the last collection vessel.



Only a concrete platform was subsequently built under the intercoolers. The vessels of the distillation column are still in the form they were in when they were founded in 1785 / © Photo: Georg Berg

As in every country, Grenada's customs keep a precise record of the amount of alcohol produced. All bottles are finally filled manually from a small refrigerated bottling tank and labeled by hand. In the sensory test, the 75 percent *overproof* rum was particularly convincing, with a very round finish and surprisingly much milder than the rum diluted to 69 percent with water.



On the left the "slightly overproof" Rivers Royal Grenadian Rum. On the right the export variant, which for safety reasons may only contain less than 70 percent alcohol. Antoine Rivers Rum Distillery in Saint Patrick, Grenada / © Photo: Georg Berg

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 July 25, 2022
 Granada