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India creates its first formal certification for single malt whisky

A new trademark sets production rules requiring 100% malted barley, copper pot stills, oak aging and bottling in India.

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The Indian Malt Whisky Association has introduced a certification trademark with a secure hologram for single malts that meet a new set of production standards, creating what the group says is the first formal industry framework for the category in India.

The New Delhi-based association said the mark will identify whiskies made from 100% malted barley at a single distillery, distilled in copper pot stills and aged for at least three years in oak casks no larger than 700 liters. To qualify, all stages of production, including bottling, must take place in India. The rules also bar the use of molasses, neutral spirits and external flavoring agents.

The association said the standards are meant to align with globally recognized benchmarks while reflecting India's climate and terroir. The requirements closely resemble the legal definition for single malt Scotch whisky set by the Scotch Whisky Association in 2009.

Malt whisky has been produced in India since at least the 1980s, but the category has operated without formal rules until now. The association, founded in 2024 as a nonprofit body representing Indian malt whisky producers, said the certification comes as Indian single malts gain wider recognition abroad and stronger demand at home.

Rajesh Chopra, the group's director general, said the category's expansion in domestic and export markets had made an industry-owned validation system necessary. He said the mark was intended to create a common baseline for authenticity and production integrity, bring clarity to a fragmented market and strengthen consumer trust.

The move could matter beyond whisky makers. A clearer definition for Indian single malt may help reduce ambiguity in labeling, improve traceability and protect the reputation of the term as more producers enter the market. That could also make it harder for opportunistic operators to market products that do not meet those standards.

India has become one of the world's fastest-growing major drinks markets. Domestic sales reached 440 million nine-liter cases in 2025, according to the association, while exports of Indian spirits were valued at $375 million in 2024 after double-digit growth since 2022.

Whisky remains central to that growth, though the largest-selling products in India are still blended whiskies, including those made with neutral spirits and Indian-made foreign liquor, or IMFL. The new certification is aimed specifically at single malts, a smaller but increasingly visible segment of the country's spirits industry.