vinetur

Japanese whisky led travel retail spirits with a 44% value surge in 2025.

IWSR said global travel retail alcohol sales kept growing, propelled by Irish whiskey and agave spirits, with Cognac under pressure.

Thursday, September 17, 2026



Global travel retail kept growing faster than much of the broader beverage alcohol business in 2025, but a new IWSR analysis says that growth is shifting toward categories such as Japanese whisky, Irish whiskey and agave spirits while some

traditional segments lose ground.

The report, released this week, found that combined global travel retail volumes for spirits and wine rose by 5% in 2025. Value also increased, with spirits up 7% and wine up 5% at fixed exchange rates. All four regions tracked by IWSR posted value growth, led by Europe and Africa/Middle East, both at 11%, followed by the Americas at 7% and Asia-Pacific at 2%.

That overall picture, however, hid sharp differences by region and category. Asia-Pacific showed softer spirits performance than some other markets, even as India remained strong. In the Americas, Latin America was more resilient than North America. IWSR said ongoing changes in traveler tastes are also reshaping which products win shelf space and shopper attention in duty free stores.

Charlotte Reid, senior insights manager for global travel retail at IWSR, said traditional spirits categories are under pressure as consumers shift quickly toward newer or faster-growing segments. According to the group’s data, spirits as a whole posted 6% volume growth and 7% value growth in 2025, but performance varied widely between sub-categories.

Whisky remained the main engine of growth in travel retail. IWSR said whisky value rose 12% in 2025, making it the strongest major contributor to category expansion. Within whisky, Japanese whisky stood out by a wide margin, with value up 44% and volumes up 37%. Scotch whisky and American whiskey each recorded 10% value growth, while Irish whiskey rose 11%.

Reid said Japanese whisky benefited from strong cultural appeal, traveler curiosity and a willingness among shoppers to spend at premium price points. She also said Irish whiskey is gaining broader momentum as more new distilleries reach international travelers and attract trial.

Outside whisky, agave spirits also posted strong gains. IWSR reported 10% volume growth and a 28% jump in value in global travel retail during 2025. Reid said those sales were driven less by casual exploration and more by brand-led purchases, with many consumers entering duty free stores already knowing which bottle they wanted.

Vodka also outperformed the overall spirits market. IWSR said vodka volumes climbed 7% and value rose by a double-digit rate in 2025. The category was helped by flavored vodka and by consumers moving away from gin in some core European markets.

Not all major spirits categories shared in that growth. Cognac and brandy remained under strain, with volumes down 6% and value down 8% in 2025. Reid described the category's problems as structural, saying the premium XO tier was hit especially hard as traditional gifting occasions weakened. She said VS expressions were more resilient because of growing use in cocktails.

IWSR said any recovery in Cognac is likely to depend on how brands present the category to travelers. The report pointed to experiential retail, lower-priced entry expressions and efforts to reposition Cognac beyond gifting and toward self-purchase or consumption during trips.

Rum also lost volume, falling 6%, but value still increased, suggesting consumers were trading up even as fewer units were sold. IWSR said premiumization in rum is still at an early stage and that producers have room to grow in premium and super-premium segments. Dark rum has been a driver of premiumization, while flavored products continue to support impulse purchases and craft labels gain traction on cruises.

Gin volumes were broadly flat in 2025, though value rose 7%. IWSR said local and craft gin performed relatively well in markets including the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom and parts of Asia-Pacific. Flavored gin, by contrast, weakened.

Wine also turned in a positive year in travel retail. IWSR said wine volume rose 2% and value increased 5% in 2025. Still wine delivered the largest absolute gains, while light aperitifs were the fastest-growing wine-related sub-category, with volume up 16% and value up 25%.

Champagne had a mixed performance. Volumes fell, but value increased, which IWSR said was a more resilient outcome than in many domestic markets. Prosecco moved in the opposite direction from earlier growth patterns, with both volume and value declining. The report described that shift as a sign of "Prosecco fatigue" among travelers.

The data also points to a market where travel retail continues to offer better opportunities than many domestic alcohol markets, even as operating conditions become more complex. Reid said the channel remains attractive for brand owners, but shoppers are becoming more selective and more open to trying categories that were once niche.

Looking beyond 2025, IWSR's forecast through 2030 shows Scotch whisky providing the biggest absolute growth opportunity in spirits within travel retail. Japanese and Irish whiskies are expected to maintain the strongest momentum rates, while Cognac and brandy are projected to stay essentially flat in value terms over that period.

For wine, future value growth is expected to come mainly from still wine and Champagne, with smaller gains from fortified wine and other sparkling wines. IWSR expects Prosecco to remain under pressure and to edge down slightly through 2030, while light aperitifs are forecast to remain the fastest-growing wine-related segment.

The near-term outlook is more difficult. IWSR said forecasts for 2025 through 2027 are being weighed down by several external pressures, including conflict in the Middle East, airspace closures, flight disruption, higher fuel costs and ongoing cost-of-living strains.

Africa and the Middle East are expected to be the hardest hit. IWSR said the region could see a single-year volume decline as steep as 22%, with recovery unlikely before 2028. Europe is also highly exposed because of disruption tied to the Middle East and is expected to face the slowest recovery among the major regions. The Americas and Asia-Pacific are seen as less affected, though not immune to the wider pressures on aviation and consumer spending.

The report suggests that duty free alcohol sales are still expanding, but the products driving that growth are changing. Travelers are spending on whisky, especially Japanese and Irish expressions, and on agave spirits and some premium vodka offerings, while older pillars such as Cognac, flavored gin and Prosecco face a tougher market.