





JON NICKSON - EYESPICE PHOTOGRAPHY

Opposite page: Islander Ginger Beer is a refreshing Caribbean beverage brewed with tropical ingredients. It is based on a recipe rich in TCI history and tradition.

Above: Salt Cay (historic salinas shown here) plays a part in the fascinating history of fermented ginger beer.

# A Taste of History

“Turks & Caicos Born” alcoholic ginger beer debuts in Caribbean and US markets.

By Kathy Borsuk

Most people know that the Salt Islands—Grand Turk, Salt Cay, and South Caicos—were known throughout the Northern Hemisphere for their export of sea salt, an important preservative, during the 17th and 18th centuries. Although that industry exists no longer, one of its descendants has created another product with the potential to attract similar attention: Islander Ginger Beer. The true-to-history formulation offers a thirst-quenching, 5% alcohol beverage that is perfect for warm weather, and sure to appeal to the rapidly expanding market for hard ciders and craft beers.

Fermented ginger beer has a fascinating history. It was popular throughout the Caribbean since the 17th century, and considered a household staple in the islands. Because it was easy to make with ingredients on-hand (sugar cane, ginger, citrus fruits, spices), it was the “alcohol of every-man.” As the appealing beverage’s popularity spread north, so did the growth of breweries to make it. At the height of its popularity in the mid-19th century, there were over 4,000 ginger beer breweries in Great Britain and more than 1,500 in the US and Canada. Over-taxation of such low-alcohol products led to a decline in consumption of the fermented formula, as it was replaced with a soft drink variation to which rum was added. (This drink today is the popular “Dark and Stormy.”)

The White House is the largest remaining relic of the salt industry in Salt Cay (besides the salt ponds themselves.) It belonged to the Harriott family, who was the most prominent salt-producer there and whose ancestors still reside in the house. Thomas Harriott was a famous explorer and mathematician who set sail on an imperial voyage to explore and map the New World in the late 1500s, working closely with such notables as Sir Walter Raleigh (who bankrolled the mission) and William Shakespeare. Coincidentally, Thomas Harriot is credited with bringing ginger from the Caribbean on the return voyage, resulting in its rise in popularity in Great Britain. His son Thomas (the Younger), was among the first to colonize Bermuda, with his family eventually settling on Salt Cay, where they became the “Rockefellers of salt.”

Georgia Dunn, who is a 13th-generation descendent of Thomas Harriott, recalls during her childhood on Salt Cay many Turks Islanders brewing fermented ginger beer for their own consumption. This memory spurred Georgia on her mission to re-create and market the distinctive beverage. She recalls, “I was living on Grand Turk and an avid consumer of the fermented ginger beer produced at the time by a Canadian couple there. They chose to return home and were interested in having someone continue the business.” It sounded like a good idea, until Georgia discovered that the product lacked shelf life and was not commercially viable.

Enamored of the idea of bringing back a truly local product, the budding entrepreneur returned to the US for nearly two years. During this time, she carefully researched ginger beer’s original formulation, combing various archives to find 17th and 18th century recipes. Then, she worked with the food research departments at North Carolina State University, Appalachian State, and the “fermentation Vatican” at University of California-Davis to



ORIGINAL PORTRAIT BY CHAS FAGAN - DIGITAL COPY BY ALEXANDRA BRACE

This image of entrepreneur Georgia Dunn was painted by artist Chas Fagan, best known for his portraits and sculptures of US Presidents and First Ladies, as well as European Royalty.

create an FDA approved fermented ginger beer that could be produced and distributed throughout the Caribbean, as well as around the world.

Georgia explains, “I changed the brewing process dramatically to extend the shelf life while staying faithful to age-old recipes which combine fresh, tropical ingredients and a unique blend of spices. It has a clean, crisp taste and a long finish that appeals to ginger and citrus-lovers alike.” To go along with the new product, Georgia also designed an eye-catching bottle label and attractive carton artwork, both of which prominently feature the Turks & Caicos Islands, where the beer was “born.”

Georgia, who serves on the Board of the National Museum of Bermuda along with such distinguished members as Winston Churchill’s grandson and the Vanderbilts, had a global network of contacts to consult with. It included Bacardi, which ultimately referred her to the brewery that they use for a beer distributed in South Florida. This led Georgia to a new way to spend her 16-hour days: working with the brewer on the proper formula for producing batches larger than her original one gallon-recipe, obtaining proper permits, and exploring the best way to market the exciting new product.

And, of course, Islander Ginger Beer must be available in Turks & Caicos first and foremost. During an early-

November visit here, IGA agreed to be the country-wide wholesaler/retailer, following a tasting that garnered universal approval. Georgia and her husband Bill met with as many resorts as possible during their quick visit, with each eager to carry the beverage in their bars and restaurants. Then, it was back to the brewery where Georgia personally supervised production of the first large batch on November 14, 2014, with distribution and marketing to begin in the Caribbean islands of Bermuda and Cayman and the United States, starting with North and South Carolina and Florida.

Georgia Dunn is a woman in the throes of a passion. Committed, full of energy, and quite determined, she knows she could be a part of a larger trend in the beverage industry. An article in *Investor's Business Daily* this summer noted the trending of hard cider as the new "it" drink on the rise around the US, commenting that it appeals to changing consumer tastes in alcoholic beverages. It says that "Consumers are willing to try new things if it's something interesting, something different, and something benefiting to them. Today's consumers tend to look for quality and authenticity and a connection to nature." Hmmm . . . sounds like Islander Ginger Beer to me! Not only is it gluten-free and full of fresh, healthful ingredients, but the back-story is fascinating.

However, it's clear that Georgia Dunn has a larger mission—that of promoting her beloved Turks & Caicos as an upmarket, high-end destination, as it was originally conceived years ago. She explains, "Islander Ginger Beer is like the Starbucks of coffee. We're going to be priced as any craft beer or fine quality wine because the ingredients are fresh and the beer is brewed in small quantities. This is a high-quality product for the discerning palates of a high-end service economy."

Georgia, like others, believes that the TCI should continue a thoughtful strategy of "less is more," focusing on fewer visitors who appreciate a pristine environment with the best beaches in the Caribbean to boost the economy while protecting its natural resources, ensuring that the country remains "Beautiful by Nature" for years to come. She recalls the visionary leaders of Parrot Cay, Pine Cay, and Salt Cay who, years ago, carefully and thoughtfully built establishments which created a premier luxury destination, collectively benefitting the Islands as a whole. She firmly believes that Islander Ginger Beer is a product that, in its own modest way, can become a brand ambassador to draw just the right kind of attention to the Turks & Caicos Islands.



*For more information, visit [www.islandergingerbeer.com](http://www.islandergingerbeer.com).*