

Xtabentun

Xtabentun – A **Mayan Liqueur** with a Legend. There is more to Mexican alcohols than tequila, mezcal, Kahlua, Corona and Dos Equis beer, there is Xtabentun! The word xtabentun means, “vines growing on stone” in the Mayan language, and is a delightful Mayan liqueur made from the honey that bees extract from the xtabentun flowers on vines that grow only in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, and is distilled with anise seed and rum.



Like many things Mayan, xtabentun has a legend. According to legend, the vines grew from the grave of a woman called Xkeban, who although compassionate towards her less fortunate neighbors of her village, lived a life of love, which greatly displeased her neighbors. It is said that when she died, she turned into a tiny aromatic flower that grew on vines, and that the nectar of this flower was as intoxicating as her love life. Aphrodisiac? Perhaps. It is definitely worth sampling a bottle or two and conducting your own research and conclusions.

We first tried xtabentun after dinner at a restaurant on a trip to Cozumel with our friends, Eva and Carl Fiacchino, many years ago. We brought home a bottle as a remembrance of our trip, as we are often apt to do when traveling, and offered it our guests, who enjoyed this honeyed anisette. Soon, the bottle was finished, and we began our search for a replacement bottle of this delicious honey anise liqueur at our local liquor shops to no avail. Not only did the stores not have xtabentun, no one even knew what xtabentun was!

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When we mentioned it by its brand name or as a honey anisette they offered us Italian anisette, which is definitely not the same. We explored the liquor shops on subsequent trips to Mexico in Los Cabos, Tijuana and monthly trips to Nogales and Mexico City, and yet we still could not find xtabentun! Finally, on yet another trip to Mexico City, our Butler, Victor Hugo, said that he knew where we could find this liqueur, so off the three of us went in the limo in hot pursuit of xtabentun! We arrived at the liquor store, and the clerk said that yes they had xtabentun, and climbed a very high ladder to the very top shelf and produced one bottle of this delicious elixir. After so many years, and so many quests, to only end up with a single bottle of xtabentun was a bit disheartening to say the least. We had so many friends and family that had requested that we purchase a bottle for them, including Edward's sister-in-law Christine who fell in love with the aromatic liqueur at her first sip, that we felt that one bottle was only a tease. We asked him if he had any more, and again he climbed the ladder, and asked how many bottles we wanted. We took all that he had – a case! One bottle of the xtabentun was for Victor Hugo to enjoy, and the rest was to fill our "request list" as well as keep a couple of bottles for us. We have been carefully doling it out to select guests since then.

Why was it so hard to obtain this liqueur? Xtabentun is only made in the Yucatan Peninsula and distribution is apparently limited. In May 2005, we returned to the Yucatan Peninsula for a short trip to Cancun, and yes, we returned home with xtabentun! In the past, we had purchased D'Aristi Xtabentun Crema, which has a pale yellow color with a creamy, decidedly anise taste flavored with honey.

On this trip, our friend, Roger Sauri, introduced us to another brand of xtabentun, Vallisoletano Xtabentun, which is a richer light amber color, with a more pronounced honey flavor on the palate followed by anise, and is 30% alcohol. Different xtabentuns, but both delightful and make an intriguing offering at your bar or on your drinks table. Search for this liqueur as the quest is worth it. Xtabentun can be sipped neat, served chilled over ice, and when added to coffee, you will forget all about ever using sugar again!

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