

## Ypióca: the Rich History of Brazil's Poor Man's Drink

Contributed by Ernest Barteldes  
Thursday, 09 August 2007

Visitors to Fortaleza should not miss the chance to visit the Museu da Cachaça in Maranguape, which is about 15 miles from the capital of the Brazilian northeastern state of Ceará. Located at a former distillery of Ypióca, one of the largest producers of cachaça (a spirit distilled from fresh sugar cane) in Brazil, the museum traces the history of the Telles de Menezes family, which is intertwined with the recent history of the state itself.

The first stop during the visit is a stroll through the house where everything began - where the company's founder, Dario Telles de Menezes purchased the grounds where the museum is located today, and after much thinking, he settled on producing aguardente (the product's original name) by using an old alembic he had brought with him when he emigrated from Portugal in 1843.

Back then, cachaça was not bottled, but sold from wooden barrels carried on donkeys' backs. His product was only bottled years later, when Menezes' son, Dario Borges Telles took over the farm in 1895.

During that time, the Ypióca brand was created and marketed locally; during those years, cachaça was seen as a "poor man's drink" (a stigma it more or less carries to this day), and was sold in an affordable manner. Only when the third generation took over, via Paulo Campos Telles in 1924, did the product actually begin to reach a higher class of consumer.

Touring the grounds, you get to taste artisanally made cachaça (extremely strong) and learn about the aging process for the beverage. You also get to know about the various social programs supported by Ypióca, which gives back to the society by donating proceeds from their sales to child welfare programs such as Iprede and the Abrinq Foundations in Brazil, and sample the various brands included in their production line.

The museum is still active in the aging process of cachaça, and they own the biggest wooden barrel in the world, certified by the Guinness book of records.

They also have a 1930s-style pub, a large restaurant and various attractions including the Bodega de Seu Zé, a small bar that is named in honor of Zé Leite, a longtime employee who had the idea for the museum's creation and who also wrote a short book, *Ypióca - Sua História, Minha Vida* (Ypióca, Its History, My Life), which narrates his own life throughout the company's history. Mr. Leite passed away in 2002, but his legacy lives on - not only is he honored in the museum, but his daughter is also employed there.

Today Ypióca is one of the largest producers of cachaça in Brazil; they export their line of products to various countries, including the US. It's hard to find a bottle of Ypióca in New York, though; the only place I was able to get one was at Ferry Liquors in Newark, New Jersey.

In addition to the simpler brands, they also market a high-end cachaça called 160, which is blended with imported malt whiskies, giving it a special taste; they also produce Acayu, a cachaça made from the cashew juice, and more recently the company has introduced an organic line.

Visiting the museum is a breathtaking experience; the climate in Maranguape is milder than in Fortaleza, and what you learn (and taste) stays with you forever. For more, visit <http://www.ypioca.com.br/>

Ernest Barteldes is a freelance writer based on Staten Island, New York. He can be reached at [ebarteldes@yahoo.com](mailto:ebarteldes@yahoo.com).

The picture is by Renata Baluk.