

Wine Importation, Regulations, and Consumption in Thailand



Introduction

Thailand, a country renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary traditions, has experienced a remarkable growth in the consumption and appreciation of wine in recent years. Wine importation plays a pivotal role in meeting the increasing demand for both domestic and international wines. This article aims to explore the importation process, regulations governing the industry, and the evolving wine consumption culture in Thailand.

Wine Importation

Thailand's wine importation industry has expanded significantly to cater to the diverse tastes of consumers. The process involves importing wines from renowned wine-producing countries such as France, Italy, Australia, Chile, and the United States, among others. Importers collaborate with international wineries and distributors to bring a wide range of wines to the Thai market. These wines encompass reds, whites, rosés, sparkling, and fortified varieties, ensuring there is something to suit every palate.

The importation process begins with importers sourcing wines directly from wineries or through authorized distributors. These wines are then shipped to Thailand and go through customs clearance and inspection processes to ensure compliance with import regulations. Importers must adhere to labeling requirements, health and safety standards, and pay appropriate taxes and import duties imposed by the Thai government.

To protect consumer interests, the Thai Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the importation and distribution of alcoholic beverages, including wine. The FDA conducts regular inspections and tests on imported wines to ensure compliance with quality standards. This includes monitoring factors such as alcohol content, labeling accuracy, and the absence of harmful substances. Additionally, the Thai government enforces strict regulations regarding the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, setting a legal drinking age of 20 years.

Regulations

The Thai government has established comprehensive regulations to ensure the quality, safety, and authenticity of imported wines. These regulations are designed to safeguard consumers and maintain the integrity of the wine market.

Labeling requirements form a crucial aspect of the regulatory framework. Importers must ensure that wine labels contain accurate and transparent information, including the name of the producer, country of origin, grape variety, vintage, and alcohol content. Labels must also include any necessary warnings, such as the presence of sulfites, to comply with international standards.

Health and safety standards are also of paramount importance. Importers must ensure that imported wines adhere to quality control standards to protect consumers from health risks. The Thai FDA conducts regular inspections and testing to verify that imported wines meet these standards.

Furthermore, importers must pay applicable taxes and import duties imposed by the Thai government. These financial obligations help regulate the market, promote fair competition, and contribute to government revenue. Failure to comply with tax and duty requirements can result in penalties or legal consequences for importers.

Wine Consumption Culture

Thailand has witnessed a significant rise in wine consumption and a growing appreciation for the culture surrounding it. Factors such as a burgeoning middle class, increased exposure to international travel, and evolving culinary trends have contributed to this shift.

Wine is no longer seen as an exclusive luxury but has become a part of social gatherings, celebrations, and fine dining experiences. Wine appreciation has gained traction through various avenues, including wine tastings, events, and educational initiatives. These initiatives aim to educate consumers about different wine regions, grape varieties, and pairing techniques, thereby enhancing their overall wine experience.

The rise in wine consumption has led to the establishment of wine bars and specialized retailers in major cities across Thailand. These establishments offer a wide selection of wines to cater to diverse preferences and budgets. Knowledgeable staff members are often available to assist customers in selecting wines based on their preferences and guiding them through the tasting experience.

Restaurants and hotels have also embraced the wine culture, incorporating extensive wine lists into their offerings.

Local vineyards and wineries have also gained recognition, contributing to the development of the domestic wine industry. Thai wine producers have embraced traditional winemaking techniques and experimented with grape varieties suited to the local climate. This has resulted in the production of high-quality wines, further fueling the interest in wine among Thai consumers.

Conclusion

Thailand's wine importation, regulations, and consumption have evolved significantly in recent years. Importers adhere to stringent regulations to ensure the authenticity and quality of wines entering the market. The growing interest in wine culture has fostered a vibrant wine scene, providing consumers with an array of choices and enhancing their overall wine experience.

Importing alcohol into Thailand

Two Acts, namely the Liquor Act of 1950 and the Alcoholic Beverage Control Act of 2008, regulate the manufacturing, import, and sale of alcoholic beverages in Thailand.

The first defines the term 'spirit' or 'liquor' as any material or mixture that contains alcohol and is consumable or becomes consumable after mixing with water or other liquids.

They are subdivided into two categories:

1. Undistilled spirits or mixtures of fermented spirits with distilled spirits with alcohol volume less than 15 degrees.
2. Distilled spirits or mixtures of distilled spirits with fermented spirits with alcohol volume more than 15 degrees (e.g. whiskey, brandy, rum, vodka, gin, etc.)

The Excise Department is not only responsible for collecting the excise tax on alcohol, they are also the regulatory agency for alcohol production and distribution (in accordance with the Liquor Act B.E. 2493). The licensing system of the Excise Department obliges the licensee to sell the above-mentioned alcoholic beverages in line with Thai regulations.

Import of alcohol

First of all, before importing alcohol that was not manufactured in Thailand, it is necessary to obtain approval from the officer of the Excise Department and complete the form SOR2/74.

The other documents required for the licence depends on whether the applicant wishes to trade or not:

Import for trade

1. Copy of liquor selling license Type 1 (see below).
2. Copy of invoice and performa invoice.
3. Letter of label approval (except wine).
4. Sample of label (only wine).
5. Copy of household registration of business place or lease contract.
6. Copy of the ID card (if it concerns a physical person) or a certificate of registration in case of a juristic person.
7. Power of attorney

Import for non-trade

1. Copy of the (performa) invoice.
2. Copy of the ID card (if it concerns a physical person) or a certificate of registration in case of a juristic person.
3. Power of attorney.

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