

Sahti Facts

- Sahti is a relic of an ancient Finnish rustic brewing tradition. It is still brewed much the same way as it was some 500 years ago, to be consumed at weddings and other festive occasions. A farmhouse beer style indigenous to Finland, it is one of the oldest beer types still brewed today. It is thought of as “the only primitive beer to survive in Western Europe.”
- The earliest written records of Sahti only date back a few hundred years to the late 18th century (1792), but casks of the traditional Finnish style were found aboard a sunken Viking ship dated back to the 9th century. Some historians even claim ancient beer styles like Sahti were the motivation behind developed agriculture in Scandinavia.
- Sahti belt: runs through the old provinces of Satakunta and Häme, a few hundred kilometers north of Helsinki. “Suomen Sahtiseura” (the Sahti society of Finland) keeps the tradition alive and arranges a yearly Sahti competition for home and farmhouse brewers.
- Sahti has been granted the TSG (Traditional specialities guaranteed) protection status of the European Union. TSG protection requires “a food must be of “specific character” and either its raw materials, production method or processing must be “traditional” but does not necessarily certify that the protected food product has a link to specific geographical area.

What makes up a Sahti?

- Sahti is top-fermented (an ale yeast - not a lager yeast, which is bottom-fermented), unfiltered, unpasteurized, and turbid (cloudy, hazy).
- Color varies from pale yellow to dark brown.
- Flavors: indication of rye and juniper; bananas and cloves not unlike a hefeweizen; sometimes a little sour due to bacterial infection (similar to sour beers & Lambics).
- Typically 6-8% Alcohol
- Low (residual) carbonation levels
- Grain Bill: malted barley and other malted and/or unmalted grains: rye, wheat, oat, and barley, according to the specific recipe. A commonly used grain bill contains about 90% malted barley and 10% malted rye, but old hands have been known to use an even higher proportion of rye, up to 40%.
- Being made with rye and other grains high in protein, and since they were un-boiled and unfiltered, the beer would have tons of suspended proteins. The bitter, bright flavor of juniper berries was used instead of hops to counterbalance the sweetness of the beer.
- Close relatives to Sahti exist on some Baltic islands. Gotland, Sweden, has a farmhouse brew called “*dricku*” and Saaremaa and Hiiumaa (Estonia) have “*koduõlu*.”

Brewing Sahti:

- Traditionally, Sahti was brewed entirely with ingredients available near the farm. Generally this meant a grist made entirely of malted and unmalted barley, a heap of juniper branches with berries, and sometimes other available herbs and spices. However, as a farm style, ingredients changed from one village to the next. For example, the southern Tammisaari region of Finland was known for including raspberries in its Sahti.
- Traditionally brewed by females who measured the temperature by their fingers and the tip of the elbow.
- To malt the grains, brewers left sacks of grain in a stream to germinate. The malt was then dried in a *Riihi* (smoky drying barn) or sauna.
- 2 brewing cycles:
 - tupulisahti* (strong Sahti) for the men
 - jälkijuoma* (lit. “the second drink,” nosedrops) i.e. weak Sahti for the women and priests. Also called “*naisten sahti*” the name being as ancient as the style.
- Traditionally brewed in the sauna in a “*Muuripata*,” a wood-heated built-in cauldron, which is standard equipment for heating water in a Finnish sauna. In the olden times sauna was also the malt house, the smokery for Finnish *palvi* meats, and a place to give birth, among other uses. Commonly thought of as cleanest part of Finnish household.
- After mashing (steeping) the grains, the wort (surgery liquid that will be fermented) is strained through a *Kuurna*. Traditionally made from a split Aspen or Juniper log, a *Kuurna* is a hollowed-out trough that filters the wort through a bed of juniper boughs.
- Around the 14th century, hops made their way onto the Finnish beer scene. Hops were typically sprinkled on top of the juniper in the *Kuurna* and used both for their flavor and antiseptic qualities.
- Traditionally unboiled.
 - Over time people learned that a short boil at the end of the brew help produce a more stable and longer lasting product. One way to boil was to add hot stones to the wort called “*kivisahti*” (stone Sahti). This method is ancient, reaching back to a time when people did not have metal vessels.

Fermenting & Drinking Sahti:

- Traditionally Sahti was fermented in a Juniper cask and then drank straight from the cask soon after brewing. Eventually, the cask was commonly replaced with a milk can, a *maitohinkki*.
- Historically spontaneously fermented by yeast in the air. If a preferred yeast was found, the yeast cake was saved for later use much the same way homebrewers do so today. The yeast cake would either be collected in a clean jar and stored in a cool river or well, or dried and wrapped.
- Contemporarily brewed with Finnish commercial baker’s yeast.
- After fermentation is just about done, the Sahti was traditionally enjoyed straight from the fermenter. There may be some natural carbonation from active or secondary fermentation, but generally it is seen as an “uncarbonated” style to be enjoyed soon after fermentation is done.
- The traditional drinking vessel for Sahti is a wooden cup called a “*haarikka*,” which is often passed around, particularly in the sauna.