



Made in St. Augustine: From datil peppers to popsicles, the Ancient City known for many unique products

By Colleen Jones
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Say you want to send out-of-town relatives a gift basket that provides them with a sampling of all things St. Augustine. Thanks to a variety of specialty products produced in the Ancient City, there is no shortage of items that lend their unique stamp to the rich heritage that is St. Augustine. We've rounded up just a few of the products St. Augustine is known for.

Datil peppers

Nothing may say St. Augustine more than the humble datil pepper which is native only to this area and have become somewhat of a delicacy. Known for their smoky, slightly sweet heat, datil peppers are mixed into everything from hot sauces to jellies, oysters to chocolate.

Legend has it that the Minorcans were the first peoples to introduce the datil pepper to the First Coast. Mike O'Steen's roots on both sides go back several generations to the original Minorcans who settled here. (Mike's uncle owns O'Steens Restaurant, famous for its seafood.)

Striking out on his own, O'Steen began experimenting with growing datil peppers the way his grandfather taught him and marinating them into sauces, jellies and salsas under the "Minorcan Mike's" label. He says his products are made with 100 percent datil pepper, not combined with chili or jalapeño peppers as some others may be.

"They're sweet with a little heat, and a smoky, almost paprika flavor," said O'Steen. "They mix into almost everything." O'Steen bottles his products "old school" in a Mason jar and sells them in a number of local outlets as well as area Ace Hardware stores.

Gourmet chocolates

The story behind Whetstone Chocolates goes back to the 1960s when the tourist industry St. Augustine was founded upon began to stir up again. Thinking they could cater to visitors, in 1966 Henry and Esther Whetstone started up an ice cream business from the kitchen of their home on St. George Street.

Buoyed by the early success, the couple expanded into homemade chocolates, still serving them up from their home kitchen. Expanding sales forced the Whetstones to move their operation to a larger facility, at 51 Cordova Street, where the business now gives tours.

The original store, now known as Tedi's Olde Tyme Ice Cream continues to serve Whetstone Chocolates.

A more recent entrant to the gourmet chocolate scene in St. Augustine is Claude's Chocolate. Chef Claude Franques and his wife Nicole moved to the area less than 10 years ago but have quickly made a name for themselves creating hand-dipped European-style chocolates, including bon-bons and truffles.

St. Augustine spirits

San Sebastian Wines and its close-by neighbor, St. Augustine Distilleries, have both made a name for themselves in the beverage business. San Sebastian Winery, founded in 1996, is located at 157 King Street, in one of Henry Flagler's old railway buildings. It produces a number of award-winning wines, sherry and port.

The winery is working with the St. Augustine Distillery to create a special-blend port using the distillery's bourbon barrels. Since opening in 2014, the St. Augustine Distillery has quickly established a reputation for excellence in small-batch, handcrafted spirits, including its own line of rum, vodka, bourbon, whiskey and gin. The distillery, which shares a space with vintage bar and restaurant The Ice Plant, was also voted as having the top distillery tour in North America in the 2018 International Drammie Awards.

Fountain of Youth water

No one is saying it actually works, but no gift basket of St. Augustine products would be complete without a small bottle of "magic" water from the actual Fountain of Youth where explorer Ponce de Leon apparently stopped to quench his thirst when coming ashore in 1565. Visitors can fill up their own water bottles from the fountain or pick up some pre-packaged in bottles from 2 ounces to 750 milliliters in the gift shop.

Craft beers

Two local brewery stand out in the growing craft beer scene in St. Augustine. For the beer enthusiast, samples from Old Coast Ales or Ancient City Brewing may satisfy. Old Coast Ales operates a brewery and taproom at 300 Anastasia Blvd. featuring their own IPAs, ales, porters and other craft styles.

Another microbrewery startup is Ancient City Ales, which creates their products at a facility on Agricultural Center Drive off State Road 16. Ancient City Ales has about five flagship beers, churning out seasonals like Black Cherry Ale and Imperial Vanilla Porter.