Victoria festival gets frisky with whisky for soldout event on Sunday

Pedro Arrais / Times Colonist January 16, 2013

Hotel Grand Pacific general manager Reid James and Whisky Festival organizer Iain Hooey are getting their taste buds ready for this weekendÕs Victoria Whisky Festival, which runs today through Sunday. Photograph by: LYLE STAFFORD, Times Colonist

People who don't have a ticket to this weekend's Victoria Whisky Festival should be prepared to cry in their beer instead, as the eighth annual event is once again sold out.

The festival, which runs today through Sunday at the Hotel Grand Pacific, has become the largest whisky gathering in Canada with 1,400 tickets sold. Some experts are calling it the best-organized whisky festival in the world.

Last year the event attracted guests from across Canada, overseas and the U.S.

While ticket holders will have the opportunity to sample a dram (or two) of more than 180 whiskies from around the world, the four-day event is also educational. Whisky lovers can hear international experts talk about their favourite spirit.

People can choose to attend up to 44 events, such as dinners, grand tastings, master classes, VIP and consumer tastings. The third annual Canadian Whisky Awards are also part of the event.

"We do this for our love of the spirit," says Iain Hooey, festival host. "It allows people to get an education and to taste many types of whisky."

All the imbibing by participants promotes a warm glow for local charities as well. Organizers take no profit from money realized by the event. Net proceeds, which added up to $27,000 last year, are donated to several groups.

Organizers don't want anybody to drink and drive. Everyone who attends the festival for the consumer tasting is given a ride home.

Over the years the event has served to raise the profile of whisky, which is distilled in Canada and around the world.

"When we started the event, there was one whisky club in the [capital region]," says Hooey.

"Now there are at least six or more up-Island."