Pisco is a kind of spirit distilled from recently fermented ‘pisco grapes’. Pure pisco is made from a single variety of grape only. Green must pisco is distilled from partially fermented must. Pisco acholado (half-breed) is made from a distillation of mixed varieties of aromatic and non-aromatic grapes, which are already fermented. Pisco is a clear colourless spirit that has a soft smell of alcohol.

Only authorised grapes are to be used to produce pisco: Italia, Moscatel, Albilla, Torontel, Quebranta, Common Black, Mollar, and Uvina. The grapevines are planted in trenches in July. The branches are trimmed in early August and then the buds are cut. As soon as they are harvested, the grapes are sent to the press to be trodden in order to extract the grape juice on the same day of harvest. All equipment, machinery, containers, and other items used for pisco preparation, as well as the factory or the production area, must comply with hygiene regulations. The fermentation process needs to be carried out with partially or totally macerated grapes. The temperature and decomposition of sugars needs to be strictly controlled. Distillation (a three-stage process) must start immediately after fermentation, except for fresh pisco, which is directly distilled to collect the body (the best part of the distillate) separately from the head and the tail of the product. The distillation equipment used must be made from copper, tin or stainless steel. Before bottling and distributing, Pisco must be aged for a minimum of three months in containers made of glass, stainless steel or other materials that do not alter the physical, chemical or organic properties. The information that appears on the label must include the word ‘pisco’.

The pisco production area is located on the coast of Lima, Ica, Arequipa, Moquegua, and the Locumba valley; Sama and Caplina in Tacna in the southern part of the Republic of Peru.

Natural and human factors contribute to the specificity of this beverage. The factors that enhance the reputation of pisco include good quality grapes, fertile soil, and suitable weather conditions. All these features are present along the Pacific coast of South-Western Peru, from Lima to Tacna. The soil in these areas is salty and the pH level (acidity of the soil), is between 5.6 and 7.5, which facilitates the spreading of the grapevine roots.

Pisco is produced using methods that maintain the traditional principles of quality and that date back to the 17th century.

The first vines were brought from the Canary Islands to the south of Lima in 1551. The local winemakers began to make a grape spirit that they shipped to other Spanish colonies from the port of Pisco, which gave its name to the spirit.