

Hong Kong – paws for thought!

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for the

CHINESE NEW YEAR OF THE RABBIT

Fings (cough!) - ain't so bad really... despite the poor air quality in Hong Kong which can seriously affect your health, one of the greatest burdens to *sheegar afishionados* here is the heavy 'dutiabale goods' tax we must pay to enjoy this jolly pastime. Though the cost of a decent puff is somewhat prohibitive, it still works out quite nicely compared to some countries yet not for others. For example, here is a price comparison between a Duty Free store at the London's main airport, compared with Hong Kong's least costly source for quality Cuban cigars i.e. IMEL (see article - Dec 98)

Cigar	IMEL HK (HKD / Box)	IMEL HK (USD / Box)	BBR UK (GBP / Box)	BBR UK (USD / Box)
Hoyo de Monterrey - Churchill (25)	\$2,380	\$307.89	£225	\$369.94
Montecristo No.1 (25)	\$1,665	\$215.39	£187.20	\$307.79
Montecristo No.3 (25)	\$1,320	\$170.76	£155.40	\$255.51
Montecristo No.4 (25)	\$1,135	\$146.83	£99	\$162.78
Punch - Punch (25)	\$1,800	\$232.86	£165	\$271.29
Punch – Churchill (25)	\$2,380	\$307.89	£243.20	\$399.87
Romeo Y Julieta - Cazadores (25)	\$1,425	\$184.35	£187.50	\$308.29
Sancho Panza - Sanchos (10)	\$1,730	\$223.80	£255	\$419.27

nota bene

1. The following price comparisons are taken from BBR's (Dec 98) and IMEL's (Feb 99) price lists - as distributed by each company. This is done this way simply because many of the cigars were unable to be matched up for a Dec:Dec comparison; and the prices of IMEL have not significantly altered from Dec 98 to Feb 99.
2. All prices are quoted in HKD and GBP respectively, then converted to USD at the following prevailing rates as listed in The South China Morning Post as at 1 Feb '99 (US\$1 : HK\$7.73) (US\$1 : £0.6082)

And if you're not confused enough already, here's a comparison from a quick whirl around the virtual world of a few online stores in Switzerland, UK, Portugal and Australia. The prices listed are for *cigars for export* only and do NOT include shipping and handling charges; some of which can increase the *cost per box* significantly. Heady stuff...

Cigar	Switzerland (USD / Box)	UK (USD / Box)	Portugal (USD / Box)	Australia (USD / Box)
Hoyo de Monterrey - Churchill (25)	\$300	-	\$341	\$285.50
Montecristo No.1 (25)	\$215	\$345.28	\$201	\$242.75
Montecristo No.3 (25)	\$200	\$295.96	\$172	\$192.25
Montecristo No.4 (25)	\$150	\$217.03	\$140	\$162
Punch - Punch (25)	\$225	\$295.96	\$207	\$171.50
Punch – Churchill (25)	\$300	\$411.05	\$341	\$285.50
Romeo Y Julieta - Cazadores (25)	\$180	-	-	\$177.75
Sancho Panza - Sanchos (10)	\$190	\$256.49	\$155	\$268.40

Note: All prices are quoted at source either directly in USD or have been converted to USD at the following prevailing rates as listed in The South China Morning Post as at 1 Feb (US\$1 : £0.6082)

When in England... and if you're passing through Central England and find yourself in the vicinity of Birmingham (just up the road from Shakespeare country), be sure to pay a visit to ***John Hollingsworth & Sons Ltd*** - specialist tobacco and cigar merchants, where you are sure to have a superb shopping experience. I paid them a quick visit before Xmas and after some interesting and sporting negotiations with the knowledgeable and good-natured proprietor, I purchased a box of Don Carlos robustos from their extensive range of fine Cuban and other country brands at a most attractive price. This fine store has been there for donkey's years and is well worth a visit.

When in China... stick to your own brand because the other day, a cigar store proprietor chum and I took apart a 'Great Wall' stogie to have a peek at its innards. What we found is enough to make you run ... literally! The wrapper – a typical light tan colour with little or no veins, bumps or tears; this surrounds a binder made of – and wait for this – 'outhouse' paper (eh?!) which in turn contains cigarette-type short filler. Now the 'outhouse' paper in question looks/feels very similar to the regular type of kitchen-roll paper sold in North America / Europe etc. – you know the type - where *super absorption* is a definite must!?!

Despite the unsettling thoughts one might conjure up whilst puffin away at this little Chinese beauty,

Kevin's comment: Just in case you want to edit this bit out... cut from here [spare a thought for "Bill", his 'insignificant other' and his own personal *most favoured stick*. If he had been using one of these under recent circumstances – you know the place: where the sun rarely shines – even if there were just one slip of the tongue, the

‘outhouse’ qualities of this particular brand would definitely come shining through! OK – enough of that.

Finally,] ***to here. END******

the acrid taste of the paper binder is definitely a real turnoff and will probably not assist the clean air policy of any city where it is enjoyed(?); and just for the record - this brand is commonly available in China, and by all accounts – is quite popular. So, now you know!

Other News

Aficionado Cigarros has already commenced their ambitious expansion into China - by way of a new cigar divan in the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou (Canton) Province. This is a joint venture arrangement, with the divans under management by a local partner. A bold venture in these times of economic uncertainty.

Watch out for the upcoming interview with Hong Kong’s cigar-peddling merchant prince - Nicky Peck. The dynamic driving force behind the ever-expanding *Aficionado Cigarros* empire.

Cigar Time - a new cigar divan recently opened at the Excelsior Hotel, Causeway Bay. There’s not much room in this tiny divan - where on a good day, one might – in this new year of the rabbit, even catch a glimpse of Alice through the looking glass! It does however, offer a small range of mixed brands and is handy for a quick cigar pick-(me)-up. And I suppose, anytime is a good time for cigar time!

The Nurse – a bright new hi-tech offering from Pacific Cigar Co. Ltd. is located in the Ritz Carlton hotel. *The Nurse* – as one would expect, is decked out in brilliant white and will have instant appeal to the newbies, wannabes and their other regular customers. *The Nurse* is an antidote to Pacific’s other famed divan at the Mandarin Hotel (see article - Sept 98) For example: instead of darkness and designer (?) dinge, expect to find whitewashed walls providing a somewhat antiseptic environment. What hasn’t changed is *the nurse*:customer ratio – it seems that there’s always at least 2-3 staff at varying distances *i.e.* a) in your face, b) at your back or c) on your shoulder) - keeping their beady eyes on the activities of (their colleagues (?) but more likely,) you – the customer. This is NOT a good way to encourage repeat business. Unconfirmed reports from inside sources suggest this might have something to do with petty pilfering on a grand scale? Bitter medicine indeed.

The Nurse is split into two levels: on the ground floor – you can see through (literally) a wall of plastic private humidors which are available for hire – to those that like this sort of thing. This nifty ‘acrylidor’(?) brings cigar storage into the modern age ... call me old-fashioned, but I prefer a more traditional Spanish cedar-lined ’dor to house my segar stash; yet from a business perspective - it allows the staff to keep a constant eye on how much or how little the “members” are keeping in store – a great way to urge repeat sales, especially amongst the *eejits*. Up on the first floor is a very smart TV – one of those that hangs neatly on the wall like a picture ... you can even bring in your own DVDs and have them played whilst you enjoy a puff with your favourite “friend”, secretary or considerable other. They will also provide wine, food and a wide range of Cuban cigars. So, if this sounds your kind of place then come and enjoy. Of course, the prices are a bit stiff -- *ooops ... sorry nurse!* -- for Hong Kong (see article – Dec 98). And if the prices don’t make you wince, just bear in mind the feeling you last had when visiting the proctologist.

La Tradición Cubana – is a delightful little store that sits nicely in the Shun Tak Centre – the launching pad for travellers heading off to Macau by helicopter; or to Macau & China by ferry, jetcat or turbowhatever. The range of cigars on offer is quite limited but there’s enough of a selection to satisfy even the most demanding *sheegar afashionado*. There are some fascinating old Cuban cigar labels mounted on display boards that are worth a gander. They also have a delightful range of humidors manufactured under their own brand, as with a number of other cigar accessories. If you’ve time enough for a quick puff then it’s worth a visit ... the greetings from the pleasant sales staff is genuinely warm, maintaining perhaps – *la tradición cubana!*

Oh no, not another new cigar store... yep, there’s yet another new cigar store is planned to open in the Regal Hotel, Causeway Bay. And there are even more in-store! *Oh dear ... groan.*

New cigar launch... details - coming soon!