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A SHORT HISTORY OF CIGARS AND TOBACCO

Have you ever wondered where cigars were first produced? It is widely believed that cigars were first produced in Spain. But before cigars became all the rage in Europe, tobacco was needed to make them. Tobacco is indigenous to the Americas, where native peoples have produced it for hundreds of years. As the legend has it, the Maya of Yucatan peninsula in Mexico and parts of Central America cultivated tobacco, and even smoked it! Tobacco use spread to other tribes, both north and south. Its first use in the United States was probably among the tribe along the Mississippi. It was not until Christopher Columbus sailed his famous voyage to the Americas in 1492 that the rest of the world came to know tobacco.

It is said that Columbus was not impressed by tobacco or its use among native peoples, but many sailors grew fond of the peculiar fragrance of tobacco leaves. Soon it quickly caught on in Spain and Portugal. From there, it spread to France, where the French ambassador Jean Nicot lent his name to the scientific name for tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*). The origins of the word tobacco itself are still debated, although many believe it is simply a corruption of the word Tobago, which is the name of a Caribbean island. Still others believe it comes from the word Tabasco, a region (and now a state) in Mexico.

In 1612, the first tobacco plantation was established in Virginia. More tobacco plantations followed in Maryland soon after. Although tobacco became a popular crop, it was only smoked in pipes. The cigar was not introduced to the United States until the late 18th century. Israel Putnam, an army general who had served in the Revolutionary War, is credited with introducing the cigar to the United States. He had traveled to Cuba after the Revolutionary War and returned with a box of Cuban cigars. Their popularity quickly spread, and soon enough cigar factories were built in the area of Hartford, Connecticut, where General Putnam resided.

In Europe, cigar production and consumption did not achieve widespread popularity until after the Peninsula War in the early 19th century. British and French veterans returned to their homelands after years of serving in Spain with their tobacco pipes in tow. Among the rich and fashionable, the favored method of taking tobacco was the cigar. Much like wine tasting, cigar aficionados have created a culture around the art of smoking, assembling various theories and accessories to facilitate smoking. In the 1980s and 1990s, cigar smoking was portrayed as a trendy habit associated with the upper echelons of society. While industrial development has allowed today's public to access inexpensive machine-made cigars, premium cigars crafted from a blend of top-quality tobaccos and aged to perfection remain popular among celebrities and the business class.

THE PARTS OF A CIGAR



What are the different parts of a cigar? While it is true that you can enjoy a cigar without knowing how it was put together, learning the basic parts of a cigar can be instrumental in helping you choose the best quality cigars and follow the discussions on cigar smoking.

Basically, a cigar can be divided into three basic parts: the head, the body, and the foot (as shown in the above diagram).

Head

This is the end that you put into your mouth. On the tip of the head is the "cap" of the cigar, which is applied with a piece of tobacco to prevent it from unraveling and drying. The cap must be cut before smoking.

Body

Between the head and the foot, the body of a cigar is composed of three important layers: the filler, binder, and wrapper.

The first thing many smokers notice about a cigar is the wrapper, the layer of tobacco on the outside of a cigar. The wrapper provides much of the flavor of the cigar, as the best quality tobacco leaves are usually used to construct the wrapper. They range in color from very clear (claro) to very dark (oscuro).

Binders are known as the 'intermediate leaves.' They are used to hold the tobacco filler together before the wrapper is applied.

The **filler** is the tobacco used to make the cigar. Generally, filler can be either long or short. Higher-end cigars use long filler consists of whole, hand-rolled tobacco leaves. In contrast, lower-end cigars are machine-made, which uses short filler consists of scraps of tobacco leaves.

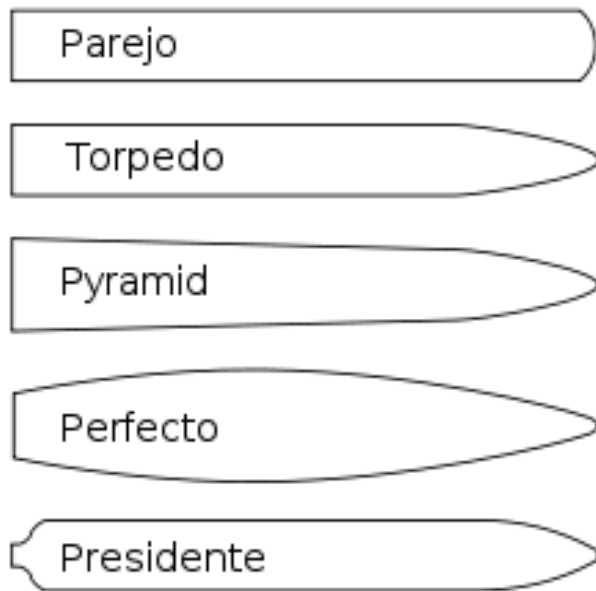
You may also notice the stripe of paper applied around the cigar---this is called the **band**, which identifies the manufacturer of the cigar.

Foot

The foot of the cigar is the part that will be burned. The techniques for lighting will be discussed in detail in [How to Light a Cigar](#).

ALL STYLES AND SIZES: THE BASIC TYPES OF CIGARS

For a new smoker, the different styles and sizes of cigars can be mind-boggling. It helps to know that the name of a cigar refers to its length (in inches) and width (in ring gauge, which is its diameter in 64th of an inch). All cigars can be divided into two broad categories: Parejos and Figurados.



Parejos refers to cigars that have a cylindrical body and straight sides. They are subdivided into three categories: coronas, panatelas, and lonsdales. The size of Coronas is the benchmark against all other sizes is measured, and they come in a variety of styles and famous brands. They are known as cigars with an 'open foot' (or tip) and a rounded head. Panatelas are generally longer and thinner than coronas. Lonsdales are also longer than coronas, but are thinner than panatelas.

The second basic category consists of the figurados. Figurados refer to cigars with that are irregular or somehow hand-shaped so that they are not strictly straight. The smallest type of

figurados is the Belicoso cigars, which are known for a larger foot and a smaller, rounded head. There are also the Pyramids, which have pointed heads that taper to a large foot. This feature is much appreciated because the tapered heads allow smokers to more easily taste their complex flavor. Unlike Pyramids, Perfectos are tapered on both the head and foot, with a thinner middle. The largest Figurado is the Diademas, known as the 'giant' of cigars because it is eight inches or longer.

CIGAR FLAVORS

Before you venture on to purchase your first cigar, you might be wondering what does a cigar actually taste like, and how would a tobacconist describe the different flavors and cigar brands to you? Just like with wine, many cigar connoisseurs have their own poetic ways of describing cigar aroma and flavors, but there is several basic knowledge and terminologies to help you get started.

First, the flavor of a cigar is determined by many factors, including the type of tobacco and wrapper, the age of the leaves, and the rolling process.

Whether a cigar is mild, medium, or full bodied does not correlate with quality, but rather, the nicotine content. A mild or medium cigar is often described as smooth with a fragrance aroma (thus recommended for beginners); while a strong and full-bodied cigar packs a punch and can taste earthy and spicy.

Recall that the wrapper, the outermost tobacco leaf of a cigar, ranges in color from light to dark. While the wrapper does not entirely determine the flavor of the cigar, darker wrappers tend to add a touch of sweetness, while lighter wrappers usually produce a hint of dryness.

Words used to describe cigar flavors and textures can be grouped as food terms (spicy, sweet, creamy, peppery); dessert terms (caramel, cocoa, vanilla, cinnamon); earthy terms (woody, nutty, burnt, aged); chemical terms (acidic, bitter, bold); and many others (fruity, smoky, leathery, etc). Some cigar enthusiasts also use vocabularies similar to that of wine-tasters to describe the overtones and undertones observed while smoking a cigar.

Now you are ready to choose and try out different cigars. Remember to relax and appreciate the aroma and taste, and maybe jot down a few lines to keep a record of the experience!

BEST CIGARS FOR BEGINNERS

Cigar smoking is an art of intricacies. With the many different brands, various sizes, shapes and flavor characteristics to consider, it is very easy to become overwhelmed and confused when purchasing cigars, especially if you are not a seasoned enthusiast.

It is recommended for a beginner to start with milder to medium-body cigars. While very few cigars can be described as "mild", there are huge differences in body and strength among the many brands.

Recall that a cigar's flavor is derived largely from its wrapper. One of the most common is a Connecticut-shade leaf, which has a light tan color and thin, elastic quality. Cigars made with Connecticut shade, or similarly, Ecuador wrappers, tend to be milder in body.

If you are looking for cigars with a hint of sweetness, try the ones with dark Maduro wrappers. The type of tobacco leaf in Maduro wrappers is typically grown at the "crown" or top of the leaf, which allow them to gain the maximum sun exposure. The darkness of the wrapper is created by the fermentation process that brings all of the oils and sugars to the surface of the leaf.

Other wrappers such as Sumatra and Corojo leaf are often described as peppery, and may create spicy sensations noticeable on the lips.

Keep in mind that blending is a craft, and these are just generalities. It is usually difficult to determine exactly what a particular individual may be looking for in a cigar because of the huge variety of distinctive flavours and characteristics available. Tastes may vary and be influenced by many factors. Like wine tasting, your ability to distinguish and identify basic flavours improves and expands with time and practice, and hence the enjoyment of the cigar experience.

In general, the larger the cigar is, the milder it is. The reason for this is that larger cigars contain more elaborate blends, and therefore greater potential for flavour complexity, depth and aging. In contrast, smaller cigars are often stronger and more intense, with less depth and flavour. The best starting point for beginners is often the medium sizes, and here are seven best cigars for beginners:

1. Gran Habano Connecticut #1



Made by Guillermo Rico in Honduras, this is a mild-to-medium bodied cigar, but closer to the upper end of that range. The Connecticut #1 blend is made with Ecuadorian Connecticut Shade wrappers and a blend of filler tobaccos from Nicaragua. This cigar is not only appreciated by beginners, but also by mainstream cigar smokers who enjoy a flavorful cigar without a punch.

2. Guantanamera



Considered to be one of the ultimate Cuban cigars for beginning smokers, Guantanamera is a very mild and light-bodied cigar. It originates from the Vuelta Arriba region and is very reasonably priced.

3. Montecristo #3 Connecticut Corona



Montecristo is a premium cigar brand. Although generally marketed to experienced cigar lovers, the Montecristo #3 Connecticut Corona is one of Montecristo's very few mild cigars. It offers a lovely smooth draw and rich flavorful smoke that a beginner will appreciate.

4. Jose L. Piedra



Made with tobacco leaf grown exclusively in the Vueta Arriba region of Cuba, Jose L. Piedra is another mild-to-medium and extremely popular brand. Machine-bunched and hand-finished, they come in various sizes and are very competitively priced.

5. C.A.O. Criollo



Originated in Nicaragua, the mild-to-medium cigar has been known for its chestnut flavor and a subtle sweetness to it. It also has a woody, cedar smell that appeals to many smokers. Commonly constructed to be 6 inches long with a gauge of 50, it should last about 30-40 minutes if smoked at a leisurely pace.

6. Gispert



Gispert is a mild-to-medium bodied cigar made in Honduras. With a reasonable price of \$3 per stick, this is a wildly loved cigar with an earthy and woody flavor and a hint of leather. The aroma is consistent and quite pleasant, which makes it a popular pick for smoking in a public setting.

7. Helix Blue Tubular



A great choice for beginner cigar smokers, the Helix Blue Tubular cigar has a very enjoyable mild flavor and strength. The cigar is made by the General Cigar Company in Honduras, and share some of the characteristics of their more expensive and popular line of Macanudo cigars. Helix cigars are also available as artificially flavored cigars, which are also new cigar smokers' favorites.

CIGAR PURCHASING



DRUGSTORE CIGARS: A GOOD BUY?

The sheer diversity of cigars can be confusing for new smokers. Many new smokers want to know: is it okay to buy cigars from their local drugstore or chain store? What is the quality of these cigars? Can you expect to get good flavor from these cigars?

Although it is perfectly fine to purchase drugstore cigars, be aware that these packaged cigars are usually of poorer quality. While prime cigars are made from 100% tobacco, most 'drugstore' cigars contain preservative or other non-tobacco ingredients such as paper, Glycerin, and saltpeter. These extra ingredients serve to prolong the cigars' shelf lives for extended periods. In addition, drugstore cigars are generally machine-made, with short fillers made up of scrapes of tobacco leaves discarded by premium cigar manufacturers. While an experienced roller can adjust the amount of filler necessary to achieve the perfect smoke, a machine cannot.

In order to get superior cigars, you will have to visit your local tobacconist. While many mail order businesses do carry good quality cigars with great prices, they usually will not sell singles, only boxes. Visiting your local tobacconist will allow you to gain valuable knowledge on different kinds of cigars, test different brands, and pick your favourite type before buying a whole box. Once you have established a relationship with your local tobacconist, you will also be able to get advice and information on the accessories that you might be considering purchasing as your love and experience with cigars grows.

TASTING THE WORLD: CIGARS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Stepping into the world of cigar smoking is an enriching learning experience. You will soon discover that every cigar-producing country has its own unique flavor and character--- the soil quality, the aging process, and the way the tobacco is produced and rolled all contribute to the overall flavor and texture of the finished product.

One must of course allow for significant regional variety, here are some very basic guidelines for getting to know the world's flavors.

Most beginners start out smoking cigars from Caribbean countries like Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, which have milder flavors. On the other end, cigars from Central American countries like Honduras and Nicaragua are known to be full-bodied and rich in flavor. On the top of cigar connoisseurs' list is perhaps the handcrafted Cuban cigars, which are renowned for their overall premium quality. The uniqueness of a fine Cuban cigar comes from its smoothness and full-bodied flavor, a combination that is difficult to achieve.

Whatever country you purchase from, remember that a good way to gauge the overall flavor of a cigar is to note its diameter and length. In general, cigars with a thicker diameter will have a richer flavor. Longer cigars are generally cooler.

Since Cuban cigars are by far the most well known and sought-after tobacco, they will be the topic of focus in the following articles.

HOW TO PURCHASE CIGARS FROM CUBA



Every cigar aficionado knows that the very best cigars come from Cuba. Unfortunately, buying the best can often be a risky proposition. But many cigar enthusiasts are willing to take the risk to get a taste of the very best. If you are wondering just how one would get their hands on a box of Cubans, read on. Because of the relationship between the United States and Cuba, there are many people looking to take advantage of cigar aficionados. Purchasing Cuban cigars should be done with great caution in order to avoid being duped.

First, be aware that importing cigars from Cuba is considered illegal. The United States placed economic sanctions on the Cuban government in 1963. Ever since then, Cuban cigars have become the holy grail of cigar enthusiasts. There is, however, one loophole: visitors to Cuba who return from a sanctioned and licensed visit are allowed to bring back cigars. However, visitors are not able to bring back more than \$100 worth of cigars, and they must be intended for personal use, and not for resale.

In fact, it is against the law to buy, sell or trade Cuban cigars in the United States. Violators may face up to \$55,000 in civil fines. This type of fine, however, is quite rare. The more likely scenario is that you will have your cigars confiscated.

When purchasing a box of Cuban cigars, keep in mind top quality does not come cheap. Prices can range from about \$150 to \$500 or more. If you are offered a box below these prices, chances are it may not be the real thing. Most Internet businesses that sell purportedly genuine Cuban cigars tend to be imitations. Always avoid shops or retailers that offer "discounted" Cuban cigars.

How to get your hands on the real thing? The easiest way to get a box of authentic Cuban cigars is to head north to Canada. Buy them in Canada and repackage them so that they are not in their original Cuba packaging. Remove the rings and place the cigars in a different box. Customs agents rarely inspect cigars carefully, and it is generally not considered a serious offense to bring Cuban cigars into the United States. In fact, many clerks at tobacco shops will even offer to repackage Cuban cigars for you.

HOW TO SPOT FAKE CUBAN CIGARS

Cuban cigars are considered the most coveted cigars, and because of their perceived status, counterfeits are somewhat commonplace. Indeed, Cuban cigars are so prized that many illegitimate dealers have been known to sell fake Cubans to unsuspecting cigar smokers. If you have an opportunity to purchase a box of purported Cuban cigars, but have your doubts, here are a few tips to help you spot the fakes from the real thing.

First, make certain that you purchase your cigars from a legitimate dealer. Buying from your local tobacconist or a reputable mail order business can protect you from forking your money over for a box of counterfeit cigars.

Next, know that the key to identifying counterfeit cigars is to examine the packaging. Authentic Cuban cigars will contain a green and white warranty seal on the left front side of the box. The seal will contain an insignia that has a picture of a shield and a hat.



On the upper right hand corner of the box, you should find a white sticker that is placed diagonally with the word 'Habanos' (the worldwide exporter of Cuban cigars) printed on it.



Alternatively, the words 'Habanos' may be impressed onto the bottom of the box in the form of a heat stamp. Fake Cuban cigar boxes often find other ways to imprint this label, such as using rubber stamps or paper labels. You should also note a factory code at the bottom that is stamped in green, blue or black ink. This stamp will tell you when and where the cigars were rolled.



If you can open the box, take the time to smell the tobacco. Cuban cigars will have a deep, rich aroma, unmistakable to dedicated cigar aficionados. If the smell is off, or very weak, chances are you do not have a box of authentic Cuban cigars in your hands. The cigars should be facing the

same way, and the top row may appear slightly flattened. The caps on all the cigars should appear identical, and the foot of each cigar should be cut clean. The bands on all the cigars should also be identical, and should be arranged so that they face the same direction. If allowed, test the cigars out by pressing down on them. Feel along the entire length of each cigar, checking for soft or hard spots. The cigars should feel firm yet pliable.

The cigar manufacturers have worked hard to protect their reputation and maintain the standards of quality expected by the customers. Identifying authentic cigars is one of the ways in which we show support and honor the cigar industry.

HOW TO GIFT CIGARS

Now you have some basic knowledge of cigars, is there a cigar aficionado on your gift list? Here are some simple hints that can help you sniff out (sometimes literally) the ideal cigar to gift---or to enjoy yourself!

Today, cigars have entered the mainstream. Once the symbol of the rich and powerful, it is easier than ever for just about anyone to purchase a good cigar. Of course, you probably will not be able to buy your friend a box of top-tier Cuban cigars, but you can definitely buy them a decent quality cigar that will put a smile on their face.

First, visit your local tobacconist or specialty smoke shop for the best quality and widest selection. Avoid drugstore cigars. Although they may be inexpensive and convenient to purchase, remember drugstore cigars are usually filled with preservatives and generally of poorer quality. You should make sure that the cigars you purchase are made of 100% tobacco. If you have any questions regarding the cigars ingredients, ask the salesperson. An experienced and knowledgeable sales clerk will be able to tell you extensive information about the ingredients.

Your local tobacco shop is a good place to shop because you might be able to smell and touch the cigars. First, note the texture of the cigar. Squeeze it gently. Is very soft, or rigid? A good quality cigar will give a little when squeezed, but should still be firm, with no excessively soft or hard spots. Never buy a lumpy cigar---a good cigar will have a consistent texture. Next, look at the wrapper. If you notice any drying, cracks, or discoloration, stay away. Ideally, the wrapper should be tight and smooth. Finally, look at the end of the cigar. Pay particular attention to the color of the tobacco to make sure it is even. Some color variation is normal since most cigars are made from a blend of tobaccos. However, if the color changes abruptly, chances are inferior

leaves are used, or the cigar was not rolled properly. Improper rolling may result in uneven burning and unpleasant odors.

If you are not sure how much your friend smokes, choose a longer cigar. Longer cigars tend to have a 'cooler' taste—an excellent choice for beginners. If you know your friend is an experienced and regular smoker, choose a cigar that is greater in diameter. Bigger cigars tend to have a richer flavor that cigar enthusiasts will appreciate.

CIGAR SMOKING 101

What are the basics of cigar smoking? Cigar smoking may have its roots in tradition, but it is hardly old-fashioned—plenty of modern celebrities enjoy lighting up a stogie as well. Cigar smoking is a habit that can contribute style, sophistication and pleasure to your lifestyle.

However, if you get it wrong the first time---perhaps lighting the cigar improperly, or making a mistake of inhaling--- you could come off with totally the wrong impression. In the article that follows, we will walk you through the steps of cutting, lighting, smoking, and extinguishing your cigar with care and grace.



HOW TO CUT A CIGAR

Before you light a cigar, the cap end must be cut off. This is a crucial step that must be done with care because if the cap is cut jaggedly, the cigar will not burn evenly when you smoke it.

How to clip a cigar properly? Although every cigar aficionado has their own proven method, here are some basic guidelines to get you started.

Use a good quality clipper to cut off the cap. You do not want a cheap cutter that will result in frayed or split cuts. You can purchase a guillotine (a single-bladed cutter) at your local tobacco shop that is designed to do the job. Do not use dull scissors, your teeth, or a butter knife. Once you have your guillotine, hold your cigar at eye level. Make a fast and decisive cut about 1/16 to 1/8 into the cap. Less is more when cutting—remember the goal is to let yourself smoke without causing the cigar to unravel. If you find your cut is too superficial, simply cut down a bit more.

A high quality cutter is a worthy investment, since a dull one will damage the cap and ruin a great cigar. The cost of a few ruined cigars can easily surpass the price of a good guillotine cutter.

HOW TO LIGHT A CIGAR

All new cigar smokers should learn how to light a cigar properly, as cigar lighting techniques would have a direct effect on the taste of your cigar, and the whole smoking experience. Unlike lighting a cigarette, lighting a cigar takes much longer. Take your time and follow the four steps below, and you will be rewarded with the exquisite taste of your fine cigar.

1. First, choose the right lighting device. If possible, light the foot of your cigar with a long cedar match. Unlike paper matches, wood matches do not contain sulfur. Sulfur turns into sulfuric dioxide when brunt, which produces an unpleasant smell. If you prefer to use a lighter, make sure to choose a butane lighter, which allows a clean burn that is colorless and odorless. Do not use regular cigarette lighters--- they produce a nasty odor and can easily taint the foot of your cigar.

2. Hold the foot of your cigar over the flame without touching it. Slowly rotate the cigar in your finger to preheat it, allowing a tiny black ring to form around the wrapper.

3. Place the cigar in your mouth and draw in slowly. Hold the cigar over the flame, about half an inch above it, again without touching. Continue to draw in until the cigar draws the flame. Turn the cigar slowly, spinning it to establish an even burn.

4. Once your cigar is lit, take it out of your mouth and observe the burn you have established. If the burn appears to be uneven, simply blow on the end in the appropriate section to intensify the heat there. Then take one or two draws from the cigar to stabilize and re-establish an even burn.

HOW TO SMOKE A CIGAR

A good cigar is meant to be savored slowly. To appreciate the composition of tobacco flavors and aroma, smoke with little puffs, not deep inhalations. Here are the steps to smoke a cigar:

1. Hold the cigar up to your mouth between your thumb and index finger—not your middle and index finger like a cigarette. Keep the smoke in your mouth for a few seconds to taste it, then let it go. You can also exhale part of the smoke through the nose in order to smell and taste it better.
2. Puff and rotate the cigar every 30 seconds to a minute, and avoid inhaling the toxic cigar smoke.
3. While it is optional, you can remove the band of the cigar after a few minutes of smoke, or about twelve puffs or so. The heat will loosen the gum on the band, and make it easier to remove without tearing the wrapper.
4. Extinguish the cigar after you are done smoking. It is recommended that you leave at least two inches to your cigar. Even the finest cigars will tend to get bitter if you let it burn all the way down.

To put a cigar off, gently blow through the cigar to chase out the cold smoke. Doing so will prevent the cigar from acquiring the taste of the cold smoke up to about two hours, but the time will depend on how long your cigar is and how much of it is left when you put it off.

Do not remove the ash by tapping as you would with a cigarette---it is considered amateurish to do so. Instead, just let it rest in the ashtray and allow it to extinguish itself.

If the goes out but is still warm, you can relight it and continue puffing. But you should never relight a cigar after the two-hour period, as doing so results in a strong, bitter taste.

Note that when smoking, it is not necessary to make the ash fall prematurely by shaking the cigar, nor is there a need to try to keep it as long as possible. In fact, too much ash will obstruct the airflow and intervene with regular combustion.

Lastly, you can also enhance the smoking experience by pairing your cigar with an alcoholic beverage such as port, cognac, bourbon or scotch.

ENJOYING CIGARS: DRAWING AND PUFFING

Unlike some non-smokers believe, cigar aficionados do not burn cigars for a quick fix or to take the edge off. Rather, it is a delicate experience appealing to many of our most tangible senses – sight, smell, and taste. Cigar smoking brings the much needed relaxation and enjoyment by creating a ‘slow down’ moment in our busy lives. Just like any hobby, there is no strict rules for enjoying a cigar, and the tips that we have provided here (and more to come!) are only ways to help you receive optimum results each time you light up, guide your exploration through the wealth of cigar flavors that appeal to your senses, and further enhance your smoking experience. Let us begin by discussing the draw and puff of cigar smoking.

The Draw

The draw of a cigar is vital for maximum cigar enjoyment. If the draw is too tight, the level of flavor your taste buds receive will be hindered because not enough smoke will be able to reach the palate. The amount of aroma noticed will also suffer, since the less smoke one pulls in with each puff, the less smoke one exhales. Being surrounded in a cloud of exquisite tobacco aroma from a fine cigar is definitely a pleasure worth learning about.

What causes a tight draw? Sometimes, a tight draw is the result of excessive moisture in the cigar, which causes the filler leaves to expand and restrict airflow. For this reason, storing cigars should be stored at a humidity level slightly lower than 70% (see more under the Cigar Storage section). To correct, one can massage and pinch the cut end of the cigar to work out some of the ‘knots’, or use a draw poker to open larger airways through the body by loosening the filler. On the opposite end, a draw can be too loose. The most common cause of this is a poor roll, which also results in less smoke hitting the palate.

The 1-2-3 Method of Puffing

Used by many enthusiasts, this way of smoking simply suggests you puff on the cigar three times with each draw. The first two puffs are quick, but strong puffs to get the cigar going. The third puff is long and slow, filling the entire palate with smoke. Before slowly exhaling, keep the smoke in your mouth, and roll the smoke around a bit. You might notice the smoke clings to the different areas of your palate, allowing you to savour a more satisfying and longer-lasting aftertaste.

However, be aware that puffing on a cigar too furiously can cause the oils inside to heat up and run through the cigar body from foot to head. This causes the cigar to burn too quickly, making it hot and harsh. The best way to minimize the chances of a cigar turning harsh is to blow into the cigar every now and then, pushing the oils and any residue out through the foot.

Another excellent tip to fully appreciate the wonderful taste of your cigar is using your nose. You might be surprised that the mouth is mostly responsible for only elements like balance and sweetness, and most of your taste receptors are located in your sinuses. By exhaling through your nose, you can pinpoint a greater variety of flavors and odors. This is how many connoisseurs detect fragrance of wood, spice, coffee, fruit, chocolate, etc. While it is harder to exhale through your nose, you only have to exhale about 10% of the smoke this way, and only from time to time. Try this way sometimes--- you will most definitely find that your old favorites never tasted (and smelled) so good!

HOW TO BLOW SMOKE RINGS WITH YOUR CIGAR

Do you yearn to blow smoke rings with your cigar like a pro? Stogie aficionados often speak of the ceremony-like deliberateness of smoking a good cigar. Blowing smoke rings is the mark of a smoker who enjoys the smooth and relaxing effects of smoking, and for bonus, it is definitely an attention grabber at the fancy dinner party. Some argue that smoking rings is a skill that cannot be taught—that it will simply come to you with time and practice. Regardless, here are the steps for blowing the much-honored smoke rings:

1. Veteran smokers note that in order to blow a good smoke ring, you will need to create dense smoke. Draw a deep, dense smoke puff into your mouth.
2. Hold the smoke in your throat, not just in your mouth. Be careful with this step as it may cause you to cough when you first try it.
3. Move your tongue back and keep it down toward the bottom of your mouth. You should feel the smoke moves away from your lips.
4. Next, open your mouth slowly and deliberately, shaping your lips into a rounded 'O' shape (as you were making an "ooo" sound). Make the O shape as big as possible, but still leave some room for movement.
5. Pull your tongue back as you expel the smoke in small amount. As you contract your glottis and push the air through your lips, the exhale sound may be similar to a gentle choke. Note that your vocal chords should not be used, nor should your lower jaw be moved.

Always remember to hold your tongue far back in your mouth, and keep your lips steady as you are pushing the air out in small bits. As instructed in the first step, you need to draw deeply to begin with so you will have enough smoke to form a ring, and sufficient breath to push the

smoke out. Also, note that this maneuver will not work if there is even a slight breeze in the air. Make sure you try it in a location with still air.

Still can't seem to get the smoke ring right? Don't stress, here are two simple short cuts for you to practice before mastering the traditional way.

1. Blow smoke rings by tapping your cheek.

The first few steps are basically the same---gather smoke in your mouth (without inhaling!) and form your lips into an "O" shape. Then, as you blow the smoke out slowly, tap your cheek repeatedly in a steady rhythm. Each tap of the cheek will get you a mini smoke ring!

2. Pushing the smoke out without blowing.

Instead of an "O" shape, you will make an upside down "U" shape with your tongue for this method. Curl your tongue back toward your throat while letting the tip rest on the bottom of the mouth. Keeping the upside down U shape intact, move the tip of your tongue across the bottom of your mouth. Use the flat surface of the tongue to quickly push the smoke out. This is a very easy way to make small rings, but they last much shorter than regular smoke rings.



ALL ABOUT CIGAR ASH

Do you know that you can tell the difference between a fine cigar from an inferior product by checking the ashes produced? Indeed, the ashes left behind can speak volumes about the quality of your cigar. Here is how you can tell:

First, note how fast your cigar burns. A low-quality cigar usually burns very quickly, disposes ashes that break apart easily in loose, messy pieces. Also, check the color of the ashes. If the ash color seems to change, the tobacco leaf mix may be of poorer quality.

The highest quality cigars, those that are well-packed, will burn very slowly and create stiff ashes. The 'stiff ash' can remain intact up to two to three inches long, and remain on the cigar without breaking apart. A high quality cigar can be burned down to the nub, although the taste may be a little off---that is, you may notice the taste changes from smooth to bitter, and produces an unpleasant after taste that is hard to ignore. Usually, you can 'burn past' these tar spots by letting the cigar burn on its own in an ashtray for three to five minutes. Resume smoking to test the cigar---you may be surprised to find the flavor is as satisfying as your first puff!

Recall that you do not ash a cigar by repeatedly tapping it like you would for a cigarette. Wait until the ash is about an inch long, or until a crack begins to develop before disposing it in your ashtray. To ash, rest your cigar against the side of the ashtray, and while turning the cigar slowly, gently press it down. Be careful not to press too hard, as doing so can extinguish your cigar. You want the ash to fall off as evenly as possible.

CHOOSING THE BEST ASHTRAY

For a cigar smoker, an ashtray is a necessary accessory. Unlike regular cigarettes, cigars need their own special space to support their girth and ashes. Many cigar aficionados take great pleasure in finding the proper place to hold their cigars and ashes.

So what are the characteristics of a good ashtray? First of course, make sure the ashtray you buy is big enough to hold your cigars. Cigars come in varying sizes, so you will want an ashtray that can accommodate the single of your choice. Next, consider your personal style of smoking. Do you produce a lot of ash? Do you let your cigar rest for extended periods of time? These are all important considerations when choosing your ashtray.

Look for ashtrays made of metal, heavy glass, or ceramics. Ideally, you will want the ashtray to be big enough to hold the ashes for two or three cigars, as the enjoyment of fine cigars is often done in the company of others. Ashtrays that are too shallow will cause the resting cigar to contact the debris and ruin the lit cigar.

The notch, or the holder of the cigar, should be long enough to balance your cigar. You do not want your cigar tip to fill into the ashtray or roll off to the side! That said, the groove of the notch should not be too long either. The purpose of the notch is to let the cigar sits for a few moments before you resume smoking. If the lit cigar end touches the groove, the burn ring will be damaged and the airflow will be obstructed. This will damage the tobacco and compromise the wonderful taste you expect from your fine cigar.

Lastly, you want your ashtray to be easy to clean and empty. Avoid the lead crystal ones with very long cigar holder, as they get dirty quickly. In contrast, a polished stainless steel ashtray can usually be wiped clean.

Where can you find the best ashtrays for your cigars? Many cigar aficionados prefer antique ashtrays. Search out flea markets and antique stores for good deals. Tobacco shops, mail order catalogues, and online stores are also useful sources.

HOW TO PAIR CIGARS AND ALCOHOL

Cigar smoking has long been viewed as a luxury of the rich and powerful. Images of well-to-do men puffing on a stogie and swirling a glass of good brandy have been well documented and memorialized in films and TV. While cigars have been democratized, liquor remains a supplemental pleasure to them. Equipped with the knowledge of choosing and smoking a premium cigar, you are now ready to pick the right average that will enhance the whole experience.

Traditionally, the cigar has been paired with a strong drink. Popular spirits include rum, brandy, or whiskey. Some argue that a good cigar should always be paired with a strong beverage that has a hint of sweetness. Indeed, cigar smokers have long enjoyed these popular pairings. For years, the idea of pairing cigars with beer has gone overlooked. But why pass a good old beer? Recently, the trend has been to pair cigars with wide varieties of beer. It seems that as cigars have entered the mainstream, they have been democratized and popularized. What better ways to enjoy a puff of this newly celebrated treat than to pair it with beer?

Enjoying a high quality cigar with a good beer is not an easy feat, but when accomplished, it is well worth the effort. Much of the pairing has to do with your experience level. If you are a novice, you will probably need help in finding the perfect beer for your specific cigar. If you have a more experienced palate, and you know what you like, you can probably play around a bit and experiment different combinations. It goes without saying that your own taste buds are the final arbiter of what is right on your table.

Because cigars are so strong and flavorful, one of the challenges in pairing is to find a beer that complements the intensity of most cigars. A good barely wine or a single malt scotch will usually do the job. If your cigar can be described as woody, spicy, with hints of cedar, try pairing

it with a barley wine that has a fruity hint. The combination of a spicy cigar with a slightly fruity beer can create an overall creaminess that enhances the flavors of each significantly.

If you have no clue as to what flavor combinations might work, experiment. First, find a cigar that you enjoy. Try to identify the characteristics that you love about it. Then, find a beer that will 'match' or complement the relative flavor and weight of the cigar. Keep in mind however, this rule is more useful for avoiding mistakes than for discovering sublime new marriages of drink and cigar. Truly great pairings come when complex flavors within a cigar and a spirit create synergy. Many incredible discoveries have been made in much the same way.

CIGAR STORAGE



THE HUMIDOR

As a proud owner of fine cigars, you want to store and protect your cigars so that they are kept at their peak flavor. Since the level of humidity in which cigars are stored has a significant effect on their taste, they should be kept in a humidor. The humidor will keep a cigar at a constant temperature, somewhere between 68 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and about 70-72% relative humidity (RH). A strong cigar should be stored at a slightly lower RH than 70%.

You can check the humidity level by checking the hygrometer that comes with it. Two common types of hygrometers are analog and digital hygrometer. While the former is cheaper, the latter is more accurate and thus recommended.

Many cigar aficionados claim that the ideal temperature for storing cigars is 70 degree F. Any lower will tend to age the cigar, rather than keep it at a constant level. Other than preserving their integrity, flavor, and color, humidors can also be used for aging the cigars.

What should you look for when purchasing a humidor? The good humidor should have a tight fitting lid with smooth seams, but not so much that it becomes completely sealed. Your prized cigars will become moldy in a moist yet airtight container. Most humidifying elements, such as the traditional sponges and clays, work passively, releasing stored humidity through evaporation and diffusion. It is recommended that you use a 50/50 solution of propylene glycol and distilled water to fill the humidifying element, as it has a buffer effect on air humidity, as well as mild antibacterial properties.

The material used for the interior lining of the humidor is also important: cedar, especially Spanish cedar, is generally the ideal pick, as it possesses the following desirable characteristics for cigar storage:

1. Spanish cedar holds more moisture than most woods, which helps to maintain the humid environment.
2. The pleasant cedar aroma can be transmitted to the stored cigars with the passage of time. In fact, this is the reason that some cigars are wrapped in Spanish-cedar sheets and sold for a more premium price.
3. Spanish-cedar wood can repel tobacco beetles, the most dreaded pests for cigar manufactures and owners. These pinhead-sized beetles eat the tobacco and lay eggs, causing further infestation that can be easily overlooked. Since the beetle eggs usually only hatch at around 25 °C (77 °F), they can be discouraged by ensuring the temperature of the humidor does not get over 20 °C (68 °F). However, the most effective prevention method is to keep the humidity within the desired storing range.
4. The wood properties can withstand high humidity without "warping" or "cupping."

Above all else, make sure that the humidor of your choice can accommodate the amount of cigars you wish to store. Two problems may occur if you overfill your humidor. First, a overcrowded environment will obstruct air circulation, which means not all of your cigars will receive the proper amount of humidity--- some cigars will receive too much moisture, and others not enough. Second, many units humidification devices are only designed for a certain number of cigars. Thus, you may find your stash beginning to dry out entirely. As a general rule of thumb, only fill your humidor to about three-quarter capacity, as this will allow for ample circulation and humidification.

MAINTAINING AND SEASONING YOUR HUMIDOR

Now you have invested on a humidor, it is time to season it. Each humidor has to be seasoned after being bought or having been out of use for a while. The purpose of seasoning is to bring the wood inside the humidor to the right relative humidity level (typically 70-72%) for storing the cigars. An unseasoned humidor will absorb humidity from the closed environment, which in turn will reduce the humidity of the cigars to the point of drying them out.

To season your humidor, follow the four steps below:

1. Wet a new, unscented sponge with distilled water. Wipe down the interior, including any trays, dividers, and lid. Do not use a towel or cloth they will leave a paper trail on the wood.
2. Squirt the sponge with more distilled water, and place it inside a plastic bag (to avoid direct contact with the wood) before leaving it inside the humidor. Close the lid and leave the damp sponge inside overnight.
3. Check the sponge on the second day. If it is fairly dry, add more distilled water. Otherwise, just leave it alone for another night.
4. On the third day, remove the sponge and plastic bag. The wood of the humidor have now been moistened to the desire level, and is ready to safely store your cigars.

Some important notes:

1. Be sure to only use distilled water. Tap water has chemicals and minerals that you do not want in contact with your cigars as they age. Also tap water contains organics and is prone to developing mold.

2. There is no absolute golden rule when it comes to RH humidity. In fact, every cigar is different. Some will be best at 68%, while other less tightly rolled cigars will burn better at 72%. It is also a matter of preference: people who like their cigars drier will choose to set their humidor at the lower rather than the higher end.
3. Temperature control is not nearly as critical as the humidity. However, be aware that the aging process will be slower at a lower temperature, while the risk of the hatching of tobacco beetles is higher at a higher temperature.
4. Always keep your humidor out of the sunlight, and away from your TV set or electronic system. Large amount of external heat will drastically escalates the internal temperature within the humidor and damage your precious cigars.
5. Note that the relative humidity of air (that we have been talking about) depends not only on temperature, but also on the pressure of the humidifying system. Therefore, you do not need to make daily adjustment as temperature changes.

HOW TO CALIBRATE YOUR HYGROMETER

If your new humidifier comes with an analog hygrometer (which shows the reading on a round dial), you will need to calibrate it before use, and re-calibrate every six months to ensure its accuracy.

So how do you calibrate the hygrometer? The most common way is to apply the Salt Test. You probably know that salt and water (NaCl and H₂O) are in a saturated solution at equilibrium, which has a resultant humidity of 75%. This is the reference point for hygrometer calibration.

The Salt Test

1. Place one teaspoon of salt in a small shot glass. Add a few drops of water to the salt---just enough to dampen the tiny pile of salt. Do not add too much water that it becomes a solution of salt water.
2. Place the shot glass and the analog hygrometer in a ziploc bag and seal it completely. It is important that the bag is sealed (but make sure you leave some air in the bag) as you do not want any air circulation while the test is going on.)
3. Let it sit for at least six hours.
4. After six hours in the damp salt environment, the humidity level inside the bag will be 75%, and your hygrometer should also read 75%. If not, note the amount and direction that your hygrometer actually reads, and be sure to add or subtract that amount when determining the humidity level. If the hygrometer has a control to adjust it (either the needle or the display), you can set it to 75% immediately after the test.

OLD VS. NEW CIGAR



Is an aged cigar always better? Are you confused about old cigars versus fresh cigars? If you are new to the world of cigar smoking, these terms can be a little perplexing. First, be aware that cigars are never really fresh. That is, you generally cannot purchase a cigar just after it has been produced. Most tobacconists store their cigars at the proper temperature and humidity before they are made available for sale. In addition, the tobacco in most premium cigars is usually aged for about one to two years before it is rolled into a cigar.

Although older cigars are not inherently better than newer cigars, many smokers prefer well-aged vintage cigars. How long can vintage cigars last before they lose flavor and integrity? The answer will depend on how the cigars are stored, a topic that will be introduced shortly. Cigars can last indefinitely if properly stored at a constant temperature of approximately 70 degrees, and about 70% humidity.

HOW TO PROPERLY AGE A CIGAR

Experienced cigar enthusiasts know well the pleasures of a well-aged cigar. The subtle complexity and lingering flavor is indescribably and unforgettable. Like wine, many cigar aficionados believe aging is what sets a great cigar apart from a good one. So how can you attain a well-aged cigar that provides the mellow, complex flavors you crave? You can always fork over a good deal of your money and purchase a box of expensive vintage cigars. But if you have a humidor, you can save the money and experiment with aging on your own. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

First, know that you will have to be patient if you want a properly aged cigar. You will have to age your cigars for about a year in order to achieve the flavors and sophistication of a well-aged cigar. Also, know that in order to achieve the rewards of a well-aged cigar, you must choose a high quality cigar to begin with. If you try to age a lower quality cigar, chances are any amount of aging will not improve their flavor significantly. Many high quality cigars that you find too strong or odorous are perfect candidates for aging. In fact, the flavors of almost all high quality cigars can be improved once aged.

To begin, purchase a good quality humidor. Cigars must be stored in a constant and stable environment. Follow the 70-70 rules. That means the humidity must be at a constant humidity of 70%, and at a temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Any more and your cigars will get moldy; any less and the aging process will be stunted. Maintaining a stable environment for your cigars is key - a constantly fluctuation environment can be disastrous. Swings in temperature and humidity cause cigars to expand and contract, cracking their wrappers and it may disrupt the aging process. Ideally, the space in the humidor should be about twice the volume of cigars. The lining should be cedar - cedar wood is a highly aromatic wood, full of its own oils. With the passage of time, the tobacco oils interact amongst themselves, as well as with the cedar oil of the

wood. The process leads to a mellowing and blending of flavors and eventually results in that subtle complexity you can only get from proper aging.

HOW TO REVIVE A DRY CIGAR

What happens if an old cigar is not stored properly, and begins to dry out? Don't despair, you might be able to revive it to its normal state. Generally, if the wrapper has not cracked and unraveled, it can be restored. This process must be done slowly and with great care to restore the cigar's flavor and consistency. Note that although the cigar can be restored significantly by re-humidifying it, the quality will still suffer slightly. If the wrapper has been damaged however, the cigar should be discarded. A cigar that has completely dried out will fall apart on you regardless what you do.

There are several different techniques for reviving dried cigars.

Technique #1

The most used method is to put the open box of cigars in a large, partially sealed plastic bag (it is essential to have a little air flow). Also put a moist sponge in the bag to maintain a humid environment. Rotate the cigars every few days, be sure to bring cigars from the bottom of the box to the top. The reviving process should take about three weeks or so. It is very much a matter of trial and error, and means that you have to keep a careful eye on things. Keep in mind that since cigars lose moisture slowly, they will need to regain it slowly. Patience is the key, as attempting drastic measures will only ruin the cigars that you meant to revive.

Technique #2

Open the box of dried cigars and place the box in a damp location (such as a cellar) for roughly a week. The process can take longer if your cigars are extra dry. In the mean time, give the cigars a quarter turn every couple of days. After a week or two is up (depending on the severity of the dryness), put the cigars in your humidor at 70% humidity. Continue to rotate the cigars a quarter

turn every few days. The process will be complete after 8 quarter-turns, or a full rotation for at least two times.

Technique #3

If your humidor is not fully charged, you can consider placing the cigars inside for a week.

Never put the dried out cigars into a fully charged humidor, as the drastic change in humidity will damage the delicate cigars. You may start charging the humidor fully after a week, and just let the cigars stay inside before smoking.

PROTECTING YOUR CIGARS FROM TOBACCO BEETLES

Other than the influence of relative humidity, your treasured cigar box may be at risk of a secret predator. Many cigar aficionados have been shocked and repulsed to learn that their treasured cigars were infested with *Lasioderma Serricorne*, also known as tobacco beetles. These dreaded beetle feed on your precious cigars. They don't care if your cigars are drugstore mass-market brands, or imported beauties.

What is the tobacco beetle, and where does it come from? Tobacco beetles exist in all countries where tobacco is produced. They thrive in hot climates, and especially in the warm countries Caribbean countries where much of the world's tobacco is produced. Tobacco beetles lay larvae that are white and up to 4 mm long. When the larvae hatch, they produce moths that proceed to gorge on the tobacco leaves. Unfortunately, the tobacco beetle has been known to survive the process of fermentation and production that is used to make most cigars. Although many countries have made the effort to rid their tobacco crops of this dreaded pest, mostly by spraying crops with gases, the tobacco beetle has proven to be highly resistant.

If the tobacco beetle survives into the finished product, many cigar enthusiasts may open their cigar boxes only to find that their cigars have been eaten through. Sometimes the presence of the tobacco beetle can be detected through the presence of small, puncture-like holes on the wrapper. The holes can make an average cigar resemble a flute.

What can you do if you find your cigars infested with the tobacco beetle? Research has shown that your microwave may be most effective in destroying the tobacco beetle larvae. Before using your microwave, remove and dispose of any infested cigar from your collection. The rest of your cigars can be treated. In order to rid the remaining of your collection of this pest, microwave your cigars together--- never individually--- for about three minutes. After being warmed,

immediately place the cigars into the freezer for 24 hours, then remove them and allow thawing at room temperature. Place them in a humidor after they have thawed completely. This treatment has proven successful in removing the presence of the tobacco beetle. Before removing a cigar from the humidor to be smoked, examine each cigar individually. If the cigar shows no evidence of infestation, it is safe to smoke.

HEALTH AND COURTESY



AN OVERVIEW OF THE HEALTH RISKS OF CIGAR SMOKING

Although cigars have long been lauded for their smooth and complex flavors, they can also pose a great health risk. We have all heard of the adverse health effect associated with smoking cigarettes, but are the risks of smoking cigars just as dangerous, or more so? According to the National Cancer Institute, regular cigar smoking can result in a major health threat. Scientific research has linked cigar smoking with cancers of the larynx, lungs, esophagus, and oral cavity. Newer research also indicates that cigar smoking may be strongly linked to the development of cancer in the pancreas.

The risk of developing lung disease and heart problems appears to increase dramatically in those individuals who smoke regularly and inhale while smoking. To get an idea of how inhalation of smoke relates to health risks, the National Cancer Institute tells us those who smoke five cigars a day and inhales moderately have about the same risk of developing lung cancer as those who smoke one pack of cigarettes (20-25) a day. In addition, someone who smokes three to four cigars a day will be eight times as likely to develop some kind of oral cancer as a non-smoker will. This is the reason that we have stressed that you avoid inhaling cigar smoke throughout the book. While there is still great uncertainty about how little smoking could be considered safe, the risk of dying from all causes is statistically insignificant when compared to non-smokers and greatly reduced compared to heavy cigar smokers. Therefore, aim to smoke no more than three cigars per week.

Many individuals wonder if cigars are as addictive as cigarettes. You may also wonder why, for instance, so many people become addicted to cigarettes, and not cigars? The truth is that any tobacco product can become addictive because it contains nicotine, which is a stimulant that produces a sense of euphoria. Witness the effects of smokeless tobacco products on individuals.

These products, such as chewing tobacco, can become very addictive, simply because they contain tobacco, which in turn contains nicotine.

If nicotine is so addictive, why don't more cigar smokers smoke more often? It appears that more people avoid becoming 'hooked' on cigars for several reasons. The most obvious reason is that the nicotine is inhaled much more superficially than in regular cigarette smoking, causing less nicotine to be absorbed by the body. In addition, cigars are not as readily accessible as cigarettes. They are viewed by most as a luxury item, saved for special occasions and used infrequently. However, when cigars are smoked on a regular basis, they can become addictive.

Remember: the health risks of any kind of smoking increase dramatically as frequency of use increases.

CIGAR VS. CIGARETTES: THE SMOKE

We have just emphasized the fact that the health risks posed by both cigarettes and cigars are strongly linked to the frequency of use. That said, individuals who smoke cigarettes on a daily basis are at a greater risk of developing cancer than people who smoke cigars occasionally. Evidence indicates that cigars contain many more carcinogens than cigarettes. It also appears that cigar smoke is more toxic than second-hand smoke from cigarettes. But why?

Environmental tobacco smoke

All second-hand smoke emitted by tobacco products, including both cigars and cigarettes, are classified as environmental tobacco smoke. Research indicates that the smoke contains similar types of irritants, such as nicotine; as well as carcinogens (cancer-causing agents).

Difference between cigars and cigarettes smokes

Even though both cigars and cigarettes release similarly toxic environmental tobacco smoke, there are some key differences between the two. These differences are related to the very different ways that cigars and cigarettes are manufactured. The production of cigars consists of a long process of fermentation and aging. During the production and fermentation process, large amounts of carcinogens are produced. Once a cigar has been fermented and aged, they are wrapped in a nonporous wrapper that keeps the cigar from burning too quickly. The fermentation process and nonporous wrapper both contribute to the high concentrations of carcinogens in the smoke of all cigars. When a cigar is lit, the carcinogenic compounds produced during the fermentation process are released. The nonporous wrapper also produces to an unclean burn that is high in carcinogens.

Another reason why cigars produce greater amounts of carcinogens is in their girth and length. Cigars are simply bigger than cigarettes. Their size allows them to release much more smoke, and in turn, much higher concentrations of toxins and irritants. Also, cigars are designed to be smoked much more slowly than regular cigarettes, and cigar smokers are encouraged to take their time and enjoy the relaxing experience. This results in longer smoke times, and obviously, the creation of much more smoke. It is advised for all non-smokers to avoid areas where cigars are being smoked. When you smoke cigars, make sure to do so in a well-ventilated area.

So is it okay as long as you do not inhale while smoking?

You might have heard some dedicated cigar enthusiasts argue that cigars are less dangerous than cigarettes because they do not require you to inhale as much toxins. Unfortunately, this is not true. The National Cancer Institute's research indicates that both cigar and cigarette smokers are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke, regardless of whether they inhale or not. Even without inhaling, large amount of carcinogens and nicotine can be absorbed through the lining of smokers' mouths, and damage their tongues, larynxes, and throats. In fact, simply holding an unlit cigar or cigarette between your lips can expose you to carcinogens. Furthermore, when saliva comes in contact with a cigar or cigarette, even momentarily, carcinogens are swallowed. When carcinogens are swallowed, the throat, larynx, and esophagus further become exposed to these toxins and irritants. Cigarette and cigar smokers appear to swallow similar amounts of carcinogens, resulting in approximately the same percentage of risk in developing oral and esophageal cancers.

CIGAR SMOKING ETIQUETTE

Smoking cigars may be a great source of pleasure in your life, but a courteous smoker is aware that not everyone enjoys the taste (or smell!) of a good Cuban. With the fervor of anti-smoking campaigns still in full swing, the importance of enjoying a good stogie while not offending others cannot be stressed enough. Simply remember this while you are smoking a cigar: it can be difficult to gauge the smell that others are experiencing. And don't forget that cigar smokes can leave a mighty strong residue on clothing, furniture, and even the walls! In order to enjoy your stogie without a heavy conscience, learn to become a considerate and courteous cigar smoker.

If you live with non-smokers, try to find a well-ventilated area of your residence where you can smoke comfortably. Although you may be tempted to lock yourself away in an office or bedroom, it is unwise to smoke in an enclosed area, as you are more likely to inhale the toxicants from your own cigar. If possible, smoke in your yard or balcony---pull up a lawn chair; relax on the porch. Get as far away as possible to non-smokers, especially children and the elderly. Remember that cigar smoke contains many carcinogens that can be easily inhaled by non-smokers.

If you must smoke a cigar outside your home, be mindful of the public policies regarding smoking bans. Do not light up in a bar, hotel, or restaurant where smoking is clearly prohibited. If you are with someone who does not smoke, ask his or her permission. If they agree, be considerate about it. Adjust where you stand according to direction of the wind so the smoke is not wafting towards them. Sit near an open window or space, and make sure the air conditioner or current is moving the smoke away from other non-smokers. Also, make sure no one around you is eating. The second-hand smoke from an ignorant smoker is a sure-fire way to ruin a meal.

A courteous cigar smoker will also be aware of their ashes. If you must smoke outside your home, make certain to dispose of your ashes in a safe and appropriate container. Don't forget that ashes can easily blow away, especially in lower quality cigars.

Good cigar etiquette is a simple thing, but a little care on your side can make a lot of difference to those around you.