

CIGARS

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The largest producer of cigars in the world, the Dominican Republic (DR) is known to enthusiasts as “Cigar Country.” While Cuban blends are often more recognizable, Dominican varieties are of a far superior quality overall. With products that offer an array of aromas, colors and price tags, visitors won’t be able to resist sampling and returning home with a local stogie.

Providing the ideal growing environment, the majority of cigars are produced in the central island’s Santiago and Cibao Valley regions. In fact, the country boasts more than 600,000 acres of tobacco plants. It is because of Dominicans’ careful cultivation and management of tobacco crops that the country is able to produce cigars that are truly distinctive and of impeccable quality.

Cigar-making is a very involved process that takes anywhere from two to three years from start to finish, depending on the type and manufacturer.

Cigar-Making Process

After a seed is planted it takes four months before the plant is ready for harvesting, or removal of the mature, ripe leaves. The tobacco leaves are picked in six stages, from the bottom of the plant to the top. These stages include libra de pie (the base), uno y medio (section directly above the base), centro ligero (center of plant with thinnest leaves), centro fino (center of plant with mid-sized leaves), centro gordo (center of plant with thickest leaves) and corona (top of plant or crown).

Following the harvest, several steps are completed before the leaves are ready for the cigar factory.

Step 1: Aging & Curing

Tobacco must be dried immediately following the harvest. Therefore, leaves are hung inside for six to eight weeks.

Step 2: First Fermentation

Once the leaves are dry they are placed in piles and covered with burlap. This allows the remaining moisture to initiate the fermentation process, giving the leaves their brown color while lowering the tar and nicotine levels.

Step 3: Sorting

Following the fermentation process, the leaves are sorted according to color, size and texture. They are also flattened and moistened, with any broken leaves discarded and used for cigarettes.

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Step 4: Second Fermentation

After leaves are sorted, a second two-month fermentation process occurs, allowing leaves to reach ideal temperature and humidity.

Following the final fermentation the leaves arrive at the cigar factory where they can age for up to two years, depending on the cigar type.

In addition to the cigar-making process, it is important to be familiar with the basic components of a cigar. Visitors to the DR who know this information will have a much more pleasurable time shopping around.

Cigar Anatomy

Wrapper

Responsible for aroma and appearance, the wrapper is a high quality tobacco leaf that encloses the binder and filler. The leaf should ideally feel thick and oily. The darker the color of the wrapper, the sweeter and stronger the flavor and the greater the oil and sugar content will be.

Light wrappers include *Connecticut*, *Natural* and *Colorado Claro*. Popular varieties of dark include *Colorado*, *Colorado Maduro*, *Maduro* and *Oscuro*.

Filler

The filler is a unique blend of tobacco leaves rolled into the center of the cigar. Originating at the middle section or base of the tobacco plant, the leaves partially determine how strong the cigar will taste and how distinctive the flavor. The two types of fillers include the long, which is an entire leaf rolled into the cigar, and a short, consisting of a variety of tobacco leaf scraps.

Binder

The binder is a leaf that holds the filler, which is then enclosed into the wrapper. It originates from the top of the tobacco plant where the extra sun exposure creates a strong flavor. Depending on the manufacturer, some use the binder as a filler to increase the flavor intensity of the cigar.

It is this unique blend of wrappers, binders and fillers that determine the overall flavor of the cigar. Those made in the DR are considered an art form and include such world recognized brands as *Arturo Fuente*, *Carbonell*, *Juan Clemente*, *La Aurora*, *Leon Jimenez*, *Montecristo*, *Romeo y Julietas* and *Thiriet Mercedes*.

Popular Brands

Arturo Fuente

Arturo Fuente cigars are family-made with high quality tobaccos. Described as a "heavy-weight" cigar, they are made with Cameroon wrappers, except the Chateau Fuente

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selection which uses a Connecticut wrapper. It should be noted that Fuente cigars are produced in a “free trade zone” and are therefore shipped directly from the factory for exportation. For this reason, these cigars are not available for purchase in the DR and the factories are not open for tours.

- La Aurora** La Aurora possesses a mild to medium taste and includes a blend of Dominican tobaccos. It is wrapped in African Cameroon leaves.
- Leon Jimenez** Containing a Dominican filler and binder, Leon Jimenez is a medium taste cigar with a Connecticut wrapper.
- Carbonell** Carbonell is a very mild cigar that has no aftertaste, so it will not cling to breath, clothes or hair.
- Cojimar** A personal favorite of celebrity Rosie Perez, Cojimar is a sugar-tipped cigar made with Dominican tobacco. Tourists are encouraged to try all seven flavors, including amaretto and vanilla.
- Juan Clemente** Juan Clemente is a smooth cigar with a full-bodied taste. The filling and binder are from local Dominican agricultural areas. It contains a Connecticut wrapper.
- Montecristo** The recipe for this famous cigar originated in Cuba, but the DR has manufactured its own version since 1995. Montecristo has a medium-to-heavy taste and uses a Connecticut wrapper with a Cuban filler and binder.
- Romeo y Julieta** Favored by Jack Nicholson, Romeo y Julieta provides a smooth, mellow taste and is made with a Dominican filler and binder. The wrapper used is grown in Indonesia.
- Thiriet Mercedes** Thiriet Mercedes encompasses a mild-to-medium taste and has a Dominican long filler and binder with a Connecticut wrapper.

Tourists who desire a flavorful and unique Dominican cigar for their own pleasure or as a souvenir will find a variety of gift shops, factories or museums throughout the DR. Listed below are several places to visit while in “Cigar Country.”

Shops and Markets

- Cigar King** This specialty shop provides the best Dominican and Cuban cigars, in addition to humidors and other accoutrements.
Location: El Conde 458, Zona Colonial, Santo Domingo
Telephone: (809) 689-2565
- La Casa del Cigarro** This store offers a variety of Dominican cigars, which can be hand-rolled on request.
Location: Calle las Damas, Santo Domingo

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Cigar Factory Tours in Santiago

- E Leon Jimenez Tobacco Company** Founded in 1985, E Leon Jimenez is an international and multinational tobacco factory that offers tours to the public and includes a factory store.
Telephone: (809) 535-5555
- Fabrica Anilo de Oro** Located in Tamboril, one of the most famous tobacco and cigar towns in the world, Fabrica Anilo de Oro is a small cigar producer that offers a tour along with a gratis, fresh rolled cigar at the end.
Location: Calle Real 85, Tamboril Hours: Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Telephone: (809) 580-5808
- Lost Maestros** This factory is small and family-owned. Visitors are advised to call ahead for a tour.
Location: Tamboril
Telephone: (809) 299-1702
- Tabaclera Jacagua** Tabaclera Jacagua gives visitors a great sense of the cigar-rolling craft. Like Fabrica Anilo de Oro, guests will be offered a gratis, fresh rolled cigar following the tour.
Location: Cappelán 13, Tamboril Hours: Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Telephone: (809) 580-6600
- Pinar del Rio Tabaclero** This small factory grants guests the opportunity to learn the art of cigar-rolling from professionals. Following the tour, a distinctive gift shop awaits.
Location: Villa Gonzalez (northwest of Santiago)
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 2 to 4 p.m.
- Tubano's** This factory is quite popular with tourists, who will see the cigar-rolling process and visit an exclusive gift shop.
Location: Villa Gonzalez (northwest of Santiago)
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 2 to 4 p.m.
- Museums**
- Museo del Tabaco** Housed in an old Victorian tobacco warehouse, this distinctive museum displays a collection of authentic tools, unique art and old photographs related to the tobacco industry. Exhibits cover crop usage dating back to the Taino times. There is also a mock cigar room where guests can observe how some of the finest tobacco in the world is processed and rolled.
Location: Santiago
Hours: Tuesday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 2 to 5:30 p.m.

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