

## [Great Cigars of Honduras, Italy, Mexico and Nicaragua](#)

As we take a closer look at premium cigars from all over the world - those coming from both likely and unlikely regions - we pass on to Honduras, Italy, Mexico and Nicaragua. That's two world-class cigar-making regions that every smoker knows about - and two regions many cigar aficionados don't. But once upon a time the cigars of Honduras and Nicaragua were similarly eclipsed by the great fame of nearby Cuba - until the 1959 revolution, when many legendary Cuban cigar makers quit the island for countries like Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. What regions will emerge as the cigar powerhouses of tomorrow? We don't know - but that's why it pays to keep an open mind.

Of course, a resource guide like this one can only supplement, not substitute for, your own personal taste and experience. Sometimes there's nothing like simply visiting a top-shelf cigar emporium and following your instincts. But for those times when you don't feel like flying blind, here are some suggestions.

### Honduras

This fascinating Latin American nation, sections of which were once home to the Mayan Empire, remains desperately poor after several centuries of colonial and postcolonial exploitation. Its great crop, the banana, has been the cause of resource wars and power struggles, and the people of Honduras rarely see many of the profits brought in by this lucrative (and nutritious) trade item - which is why you sometimes read about activists leading banana boycotts.

However, Honduras has long been home to another crop - tobacco, which has been cultivated in the area for centuries. For this reason among others, Honduras was one of the countries chosen by many members of the Castro-era cigar-making diaspora to begin building a new home and business. A history of cooperation between the government of Honduras and that of Castro also aided the Hondurans in learning tobacco cultivation from the experts (some of whom then decided to remain in country permanently!). Today Honduran cigars represent the second-highest sellers in the US, after the Dominican Republic.

As writer Helmut Rome reports, a recent tasting panel held by staff members at the European Cigar Cult Journal confirmed that Honduran cigars are as distinctive as they are popular. The oaky-yet-silky La Fontana Mona Lisa received a score of 3.5 (out of 5 possible points) for its "very good draw" (smooth-burning properties) and "distinguished aromas." The woody-with-a-hint-of-chocolate La Libertad Lonsdale earned a whopping 4.5, while the more intense Camacho Corojo commanded a four-point score for its "aromas of cedar and leather." Other 100% Honduran-made cigars that scored 3.5 points or above included Carlos Torano's Honduras Selection (Churchill Crystal) and the limited-edition Camacho SLR Toro (4.5 points).

### Italy

A country associated in the popular mind with every other sensual indulgence - with what favorite-son filmmaker Federico Fellini called, in his eponymous 1960 film, *La Dolce Vita* (the good life) - this capital of amor, food, wine, grand opera, and visual rapture (both natural and manmade) is not known for its cigars.

But at least two small companies are trying to rectify this oversight. Recent cigars from Toscano and Romano have won praise from some cigar aficionados as, if not yet world-class smokes, at least good everyday cigars. Their availability in the US has been spotty, but hopefully the recent sale of Toscano will lead to improved distribution. Italy's reputation as a Mecca for the senses deserves no less.

### Mexico

Mexico's cigars have, as writer David Savona reports, an "image crisis." After all (as he goes on to mention), the country has been growing tobacco for centuries, but until recently its cigars were considered declassé the cigar equivalent of, say, Rolling Rock, if not Schlitz. Te-Amo cigars were popular mid-price cigars for many years, but with the cigar boom of the 1990s, they suffered from a problem for which it's hard to think of a parallel - their prices were too low. After all, the point for many of the '90s new cigar smokers was to enjoy a unique and irreplaceable taste, in moderation - not to chain-smoke any old cigar that came to hand, missing the taste and flirting with mouth and throat cancer in the process. Suddenly those low price tags were a liability.

There's a legal reason for all this: for many years, Mexican cigars were puros, made using only Mexican tobacco for the fillers, binders and wrappers. This meant that they couldn't compete, in complexity and richness, with smokes from other countries, which blended many tobaccos for an artful taste collage. The lifting of trade restrictions in the mid-90s made it possible for Mexican cigar makers to experiment with new flavors.

The Turrent family, longtime makers of those Te Amos, has taken advantage of this freedom to create the Te Amo Aniversario, a taste breakthrough mixing Nicaraguan, Dominican and Mexican filler for a richer, more complex taste. Now the country that has provided tobacco for so many other countries' cigars (including Macanudo, the most popular cigar in America) may well find itself in the spotlight for its own cigars as well.

## Nicaragua

Nicaragua, like Honduras and the Dominican Republic, became a cigar powerhouse after 1959, when great cigar powerhouses left the newly Castroized Cuba for what they hoped would be greener pastures. With encouragement from the economically shrewd but often barbaric Somoza dictatorship, the cigar industry flowered in Nicaragua, creating some of the most popular cigars in the world - until 1979, when Somoza lost power in an election that saw nearly 80% of the country voting for the socialist Sandinista party.

The Sandinistas redirected the region's tobacco growers toward the production of inferior cigarette tobacco. (To be fair, they also achieved widespread literacy, reductions in malnutrition and infant mortality, a somewhat freer press, and a lessening of - though not an end to - the human rights violations that had been endemic under Somoza.) The brutal civil war that followed - with the US-backed but fascistic Contras and the embattled Sandinistas duking it out and ordinary Nicaraguans paying the price once again - couldn't have rendered conditions much more propitious for cigar makers, or anyone else.

The Nicaraguan cigar industry returned to prominence after the election of Violeta Chamorro, who changed the government's tobacco policy, but then came Hurricane Mitch in 1998 - a disaster of truly unimaginable proportions which left around thirty percent of the country's physical infrastructure intact.

Under these circumstances, the continued survival of Nicaraguan cigar makers is inspiring. That its tobacco is used in some of the most-loved cigars in the world, and that its home-rolled cigars continue to compete with those of even the Dominican Republic in popularity, is astonishing. But they do. A complete list of good Nicaraguan cigars would be hard to make, but some of the best-regarded include CAO (a regular winner of best-of-the-year laurels), Perdomo, Padron, and the various cigars of Don Pepin Garcia and of Drew Estate.

## About the Author

[CigarFox](#) provides the finest cigars that include cigar brands like cohiba, gurkha and many more. Other cigar products include cigar humidors, cigar boxes, and cigar accessories like Zippo Lighters.

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