



INTERNATIONAL CIGAR EXPO 2019 DEBUTS IN SHENZHEN, CHINA

December 3, 2019 | Samuel Spurr

[Cigar Industry](#) [Cigar News](#) [Cigar Scene](#)

The gleaming city of Shenzhen hosted the inaugural International Cigar Expo 2019 (ICE) from 21-22 November, organised by China Tobacco. Over 4000 members of China's cigar industry, from executives to retailers and cigar lounge owners attended the non-trading event.

China Tobacco's 4 cigar companies, Great Wall Cigars, Mount Tai Cigars, Huanghelou, and Wangguan, were featured in distinct pavilion style booths, while Chinese cigar accessory manufacturers exhibited alongside Habanos S.A. distributor Infifon H.K. and many new world cigar brands which were represented by Asian distributors or hosted independently.

Over two days, exhibitors and guests had the opportunity to attend presentations that explored the Chinese cigar market. Global and local cigar market insight was presented by China Tobacco, Oettinger Davidoff, Infifon H.K., and Cigar Journal. Tasting sessions that explored Dominican Republic and Chinese cigars with tea and rum pairing activities were highlights of the expo and very well attended.

A number of memorandums were signed at ICE, including a Technical Cooperation Memorandum for 2020 between Agio Cigars and China Tobacco Sichuan. Signed by Agio Cigars representative Hans Rijfkoogel, the agreement sees both entities continue to work together on cigar production training, sales and marketing, and product development.

The Dominican Republic was ICE's Guest Country of Honour and featured numerous cigar brand owners at their booth including Litto Gomez, Abe Flores, Radhames Rodriguez, and Cezar Bronner. Carlito Fuente and Jeremiah Meerapfel also spent time at the Expo after hosting events in Beijing. The Dominican Republic began official diplomatic relations with China in May 2018 with the opening of their embassy in Beijing. One of 20 initial Memorandums of Understanding signed between the two countries was regarding cigars and tobacco. "Our participation was about getting key Chinese decision makers to know our brands and the people behind the brands," said Carlino González, the Dominican Republic's Head Counsellor for the Commercial and Economic Section in China. "Since we don't have authority yet to sell directly into China, attending this expo was about formalising the entrance of Dominican Republic cigars into China and we expect a decision to be made in a short-term period."

"For a first show, it was better than most first shows," said Abe Flores, owner of PDR Cigars. "The booths are on par with other international tradeshows and expos and in coming years I expect many more people will come." The hospitality was excellent, and the different activities and events were attractive, according to Jochy Blanco, CEO of Tabacalera Palma. "Shenzhen is an impressive city with quality restaurants and attractions."

Representatives of Kuiyi, a Hong Kong based company representing Vega Fina, Plasencia, and Don Diego in Asia, saw ICE 2019 as a good opportunity to meet members of the Chinese cigar industry. "In the region we don't have opportunities like this compared to IPCPR and InterTabac," said Ophelia Wong, Kuiyi's Marketing Director. "I think they should do it every year."

Eric Piras, whose distribution company Cigraal is based in Hong Kong, stated he was keen to return next time. "We wanted to see how the first event went. We see value in coming and will be back with a bigger booth in future. I noticed the brands we represent such as Flor De Selva, Ashton, and Joya De Nicaragua already have good name recognition and guests were asking a lot of questions."

Despite a well set up outdoor smoking space which hosted the Opening Party, the Sino-Dominican Friendship Party, and tasting seminars, smoking was prohibited on the expo floor. This was an issue many exhibitors noted as a challenge for future expos. "For a cigar show, the venue must be a smoking venue," said Eric Piras. According to Radhames Rodriguez, owner of Tabacalera El Artista, the lack of smoking on the show floor was an issue, while the language barrier necessitated a lot of translators. "Despite this I think it was a very positive experience to understand the Chinese cigar culture and I expect ICE to grow and become an event for all of Asia," said Rodriguez.

