

# Cigar Insider

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## FEATURED CIGAR

### H. UPMANN

#### ROYAL ROBUSTO

CUBA ■ PRICE: £17.40 ■ BODY: MEDIUM

*For a full tasting, see page three.*

93 POINTS

## BEST CIGARS THIS ISSUE

H. Upmann Royal Robusto	Cuba	93
Four Kicks Corona Gorda	Dom. Rep.	91
Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Belicoso No. 1	Dom. Rep.	90
Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Eclipse	Dom. Rep.	90
Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Pegasus	Dom. Rep.	90
Four Kicks Piramide	Dom. Rep.	90
Four Kicks Robusto	Dom. Rep.	90



## BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR

**IT'S COMING—THE BEST CIGARS OF 2011 WILL BE REVEALED** in less than one

month on [www.cigaraficionado.com](http://www.cigaraficionado.com). To find the best of the best, we smoked more than 700 cigars, resmoked the top 60, then resmoked the dozen that rose to the top. See page eight for the schedule.



## CUBA'S CIGAR FACTORIES—NO VISITORS ALLOWED

### CUBA HAS LONG ALLOWED TOURIST VISITS TO CIGAR FACTORIES,

including the iconic Partagás Factory (shown at left), H. Upmann and La Corona factories in Havana, as well as the Francisco Donatien Factory in Pinar del Río, where Trinidades are made. But recently Tabacuba, the governing agency for Cuba's cigar factories, eliminated the tours. No one is certain if the policy will become permanent or only temporary, but the tours brought in hard currency to the Cuban government, as each visitor had to pay a fee of 10 Cuban convertible pesos (equal to \$10, not including exchange fees) for the right to visit. For the story, turn to page four.

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## TASTING REPORT

### ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN

#### VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

**Country:** Dominican Republic

**Maker:** Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia.

**Distributor:** Ashton Distributors Inc.

**Filler:** Dom. Rep.

**Binder:** Dom. Rep.

**Wrapper:** Ecuador

**Purchase Date:** Various

#### BELICOSO NO. 1

90 POINTS ■ 5 1/4" x 52 ■ \$10.05

The draw is firm on this belicoso but it still delivers plenty of oaky, woody intonations before a sudden café au lait sweetness emerges on the palate.

**Body:** Medium

#### ECLIPSE

90 POINTS ■ 6" x 52 ■ \$12.00

A woody and wheaty cigar with hints of earth and coconut. It builds to refreshing tobacco notes with an overall richness.

**Body:** Medium

#### PEGASUS

90 POINTS ■ 5" x 54 ■ \$10.25

An oily robusto whose dark wrapper hints at the cigar's bold earth, roasted espresso bean and stout-like flavors. Sweet, dried fruit notes linger on the palate.

**Body:** Medium to Full

#### CORONA GORDA

89 POINTS ■ 5 3/4" x 46 ■ \$9.80

A very dark and oily cigar that smokes evenly. It starts out a bit slow but warms to show a woody and leathery character with a sweetness reminiscent of apple.

**Body:** Medium to Full

#### ENCHANTMENT

89 POINTS ■ 4 3/8" x 60 ■ \$11.80

This semi-pressed perfecto burns unevenly at first but corrects itself. It's nutty, toasty and earthy, with a touch of acidity on the finish.

**Body:** Medium to Full

#### TORPEDO

89 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 55 ■ \$12.05

Lots of cedar flavor and dried orange peel notes come out of this dark, box-pressed torpedo, which leaves a fruity tobacco aftertaste on the palate.

**Body:** Medium to Full

#### TRES MYSTIQUE

89 POINTS ■ 4 3/8" x 44 ■ \$8.80

A dark little cigar that draws well and burns evenly. Simple cedar and citrus notes are medium bodied from beginning to end.

**Body:** Medium

#### WIZARD 37

89 POINTS ■ 6" x 56 ■ \$12.80

This thick, oily cigar draws evenly, starting out woody and spicy, but opening up to show some dried fruit notes and a touch of spice on the palate.

**Body:** Medium

#### SPELLBOUND

88 POINTS ■ 7 1/2" x 54 ■ \$13.80

There are some soft spots on this squarely pressed double corona, whose flavors begin with black tea notes and citrus before building to licorice and cinnamon.

**Body:** Medium

#### ILLUSION

87 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 44 ■ \$9.80

Slightly pressed, this lonsdale is covered in a dark, oily wrapper with a few prominent veins. It begins cedary and toasty, maintaining the flavors throughout.

**Body:** Medium

## 100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic ■ 90-94: Outstanding ■ 80-89: Very good to excellent ■ 70-79: Average to good commercial quality  
Below 70: Don't waste your money ■ N/A: Not Available *Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

## ROBUSTO

87 POINTS ■ 5 1/2" x 50 ■ \$10.05

Some sweetness comes through the first puffs of this cigar. Espresso notes follow, but flavors turn a bit tarry, especially on the finish.

**Body:** Medium to Full

## SORCERER

87 POINTS ■ 7" x 49 ■ \$10.60

This dark, pressed cigar is dominated by notes of hearty wood, but oily flavors and a flinty finish throw it off balance.

**Body:** Medium to Full

**BRAND SUMMARY:** When the Ashton Virgin Sun Grown line was released in 1999, there were only six sizes. Twelve years later, the line has doubled, becoming a very versatile portfolio with myriad shapes and vitolas. The tremendously popular smokes are made by the Fuentes in the Dominican Republic using dark, oily, high-priming wrappers grown in Ecuador by Oliva Tobacco Co. The brand did very well in this tasting, and of the dozen sizes, three scored 90 points: The Belicoso No. 1, which was part of the original release; the Eclipse, which comes in a tube and came out in 2010; and the Pegasus, the newest size of the line, which hit the market this year.

**Average Rating:** 88.7 points

## H. UPMANN

### NEW SIZE

**Country:** Cuba

**Maker:** N/A

**Distributor:** Habanos S.A.

**Filler:** Cuba

**Binder:** Cuba

**Wrapper:** Cuba

**Box Date:** May 2011

## ROYAL ROBUSTO

93 POINTS ■ 5 3/8" x 52 ■ £17.40 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

The draw on this well-rolled cigar is substantial and lush with earth, coffee bean and concentrated minerals that intensify before a long, oaky, woody finish.

**Body:** Medium

## FOUR KICKS

### NEW RELEASE

**Country:** Dominican Republic

**Maker:** Tabacalera La Alianza S.A.

**Distributor:** Crowned Heads LLC

**Filler:** Nicaragua

**Binder:** Nicaragua

**Wrapper:** Ecuador

**Release Date:** November 2011

## CORONA GORDA

91 POINTS ■ 5 5/8" x 46 ■ \$6.95 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

There is a significant earthy character to this smoke, balanced by a sweet and spicy component and a black pepper finish.

**Body:** Medium to Full

## PIRAMIDE

90 POINTS ■ 6 1/8" x 52 ■ \$8.65

A handsome torpedo with a medium-claro wrapper. The first puffs are floral and sweet, with sweet-and-sour undertones and touches of salt on the palate.

**Body:** Medium

## ROBUSTO

90 POINTS ■ 5" x 50 ■ \$7.60

Covered in a dark wrapper and finished with a three-seam cap. The draw is a bit airy, but full of sweetness that ranges from licorice to salted caramel.

**Body:** Medium to Full

## SUBLIME

88 POINTS ■ 6" x 54 ■ \$8.40

A lush draw and even burn amount to an earthy smoke that picks up some spicy, woody notes and some dry nutty flavor.

**Body:** Medium to Full

**BRAND SUMMARY:** Four Kicks is the first cigar from Crowned Heads LLC, a group formed in February by former executives from C.A.O. International Inc. Made under contract by Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, the brand performed quite well in this first tasting, especially the 91-point Corona Gorda.

**Average Rating:** 89.8 points

100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic ■ 90-94: Outstanding ■ 80-89: Very good to excellent ■ 70-79: Average to good commercial quality  
Below 70: Don't waste your money ■ N/A: Not Available *Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

## CIGAR NEWS

### CUBAN CIGAR FACTORIES CLOSED TO VISITORS

BY GORDON MOTT

Cuba's cigar factories have been closed to tourist visits. According to Habanos S.A., the exporter of all Cuban cigars, the decision was made by Tabacuba, the governing agency for Cuba's cigar factories.

Previously the Partagás, La Corona and H. Upmann cigar factories in Havana and the Francisco Donatien Factory in Pinar del Río were open to tourists who paid a fee of 10 CUC (\$10) for a tour.

The policy is being reviewed. There's no indication the policy will be revised, but Habanos has acknowledged that a Cuban cigar factory is one of the highlights of many casual tourists' visits to the island. So, expect to see some kind of accommodation in the future.

Those going to Cuba's Habanos Festival in February, as well as accredited journalists, are still allowed to visit, but such trips are by appointment only and must be arranged in advance. ■



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### FUENTE CUTTING CIGAR PRODUCTION

BY DAVID SAVONA

The August fire that consumed two Dominican tobacco warehouses owned by Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia. is having a direct effect on the company's production. Fuente will make only 30 million cigars this coming year, about two million (or six percent) fewer than it is expected to make in 2011.



The fire, which broke out on August 23 as Hurricane Irene was spinning just off the northern coast of the Dominican Republic, claimed thousands of bales of aged tobacco.

"It's a major setback," said Carlos Fuente Jr., the president of Fuente, which makes all of its cigars in the Dominican Republic, including Arturo Fuente, Fuente Fuente OpusX, Ashton and Diamond Crown. "It's a major setback that we lost so much tobacco that you could just not replace. All the money in the world could not replace it, and you can't wait another 30, 40 years for that tobacco."

The fire took place the year before the company's 100th anniversary, and some of the leaf that was lost was slated to be rolled into celebratory cigars for the occasion. Fuente said he would go ahead and create special cigars for the anniversary, but the blends would have to be changed to account for the lost tobacco. "If we can't make it with salt," he said, "we'll make it with pepper."

Fuente said the production cuts were necessary to maintain the quality of production of Fuente cigars.

For much more on Fuente, see the January issue of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, on sale next month. ■



## MONTECRISTO GRAN RESERVA ON WAY TO STORES

BY DAVID SAVONA

The **Montecristo Gran Reserva**, an ultra-aged, ultra-expensive version of a Montecristo No. 2, is expected to appear in many cigar shops around the world before Christmas. The cigar, which was presented to retailers and fans of Cuban cigars in grand fashion at the final dinner of the 2011 Habanos Festival in Cuba last February, will be released in numbered boxes, each containing 15 cigars. There will be 5,000 boxes released, for a total production run of 75,000 cigars.



While most retailers contacted said prices have not been set, Montecristo No. 2 Gran Reservas certainly won't be cheap. In Germany, the price for a box has been set at 850 euros (\$1,143) per box, or 57 euros (\$77) per cigar. That's more than twice the price of a **Cohiba Behike BHK 52**, which retails for 27 euros (\$36) but cheaper than the **Cohiba Siglo VI Gran Reserva**, which sold in Germany for 85 euros (\$114) per cigar.

"Ours are coming in the next days," said Christoph Wolters, proprietor of the Casa del Habano in Hamburg, Germany. When asked if people were asking for the cigars, Wolters said there has been "outstanding demand" for the smokes.

Marc Melanson, who runs the Casa del Habano in Montreal, agreed that aficionados were eager to get their hands on these new cigars. "The limited quantity we anticipate receiving have already been reserved or sold," he said. He expected the cigars in two to three weeks, and said that Habanos had promised arrival of the cigars before the Christmas holiday.

The Montecristo No. 2 Gran Reserva is the same size as a regular Monte 2, 6 1/8 inches by 52 ring. But the Gran Reserva is made with older tobaccos than those in a traditional Monte. Habanos says the tobacco to make the cigars was culled from the 2005 harvest and then aged for at least five years prior to rolling into cigars. The Montecristo Gran Reservas come with secondary bands in black and

gold, with a scripted and intertwined GR. The boxes are slim and elegant, with a piano lacquer finish, gold stripe on the left hand side and gold type on the front.

This is the second Gran Reserva from Cuba. The first, a **Cohiba Siglo VI Gran Reserva**, came out in 2009. We compared a Siglo VI Gran Reserva to a pair of regular production Siglo VI cigars and found them quite similar in all but price. The **Cohiba Gran Reserva Siglo VI** scored 92 points, the Siglo VI tubo scored 91 and the untubed Siglo VI scored 90. ■

## DAVIDOFF OPENS FLAGSHIP STORE IN ZURICH AIRPORT

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Last Thursday the Geneva-based Oettinger Davidoff Group opened a new flagship store in Zurich's redesigned Airside Center, and with it, a new modernized concept in cigar retail.

Warm Caribbean colors, iPad apps and, of course, cigars aim to create a calming ambiance for weary world travelers passing through Zurich. This confluence of design elements and modern technology is the new vision conceived for Davidoff by French retail agency Stories.

"By implementing this new retail store concept in one of the most important duty-free destinations we also underscore the great strategic importance of the duty free and travel retail channel for the Oettinger Davidoff Group," said Davidoff CEO Hans-Kristian Hoejsgaard.

The retail space is about 645 square feet, with half the square footage dedicated to a walk-in humidor that houses the entire range of **Davidoff** cigars, including **Avo**, **Room 101** and **Camacho**. An extensive range of Cuban brands are sold there as well.



“We have moved from a branded house to a house of brands,” Hoejsgaard said of the cigar variety. If the cigar selection is too daunting, an in-store iPad (a first for Davidoff shops) will help customers evaluate their favorite smokes by asking questions that range from taste to personal smoking habits. Data can then be sent to email accounts, Twitter accounts or Facebook pages.

Smoking is not allowed in the store, but the iPad has an app that Davidoff says can point a smoker to a cigar-friendly lounge. Furthermore, educational tobacco-related films and company history timelines are also available for viewing on the store’s iPad.

The opening of the new Zurich flagship store coincides with Davidoff’s 100 year anniversary.

“We are crowning the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the first Davidoff store opened in Geneva with the introduction of a 21st Century retail concept,” explained Hoejsgaard.

Appearing under the Davidoff of Geneva sign will now be the words “Since 1911.” The addition, according to Hoejsgaard, “signals the return to our proud roots as the multi-brand tobacco specialist.”

For the grand-opening ceremony, Davidoff brought in a cigar roller who was crafting cigars on a table right in the shop.

“This is very unusual in an airport environment,” said Hoejsgaard, “but it really tied together the concept of traditional cigar craftsmanship, savoir fair and modern technology. We hope to have more rollers come in the future.”

Davidoff has plans to further implement this new flagship store concept to more cities around the world, including Basel, Palm Beach, Tokyo and Shanghai. ■

## ROCKY PATEL RELEASING NEW WINTER COLLECTION

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER

Rocky Patel is warming up the winter months with a new seasonal release, slated to hit retail shelves in early December.

The **Rocky Patel Winter Collection 2012** will come in three styles: the Robusto at 5 1/2 inches by 50 ring gauge, the Toro at 6 1/2 by 52, and the Torpedo at 6 1/8 by 52. The suggested retail prices are \$7.55 for the Robusto, \$8.55 for the Toro, and \$8.80 for the Torpedo.

The folks at Rocky Patel are billing this as a full-bodied smoke, with Nicaraguan and Panamanian filler tobacco, leaves from Costa Rica and Mexico for the binder, and a habano wrapper from Ecuador. They say the flavor profile

will have spice, chocolate, and hints of espresso.

This limited-edition release will total 60,000 boxes across the three sizes. And each size comes in boxes of 20, and the box is a classy black accented with silver and purple that fits the holiday spirit well.

This release is one in a tradition of seasonal blends that last hit shelves in 2009. In the past, Rocky Patel seasonals have scored between 89 and 90 points in *Cigar Aficionado* and *Cigar Insider* ratings. ■

## TATUAJE BRAND NOW DISTRIBUTED IN THE U.K.

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

The **Tatuaje** brown label cigar, the original Tatuaje, is now available in the United Kingdom through cigar distributor TOR Imports Ltd.

“Over the past few years, TOR has embarked on what we have coined the ‘New World’ cigar strategy to promote handmade cigars from outside Cuba,” said Scott Vines, managing director for TOR, which also distributes other non-Cuban brands such as **Ashton, Dunhill, Oliva and Padrón**. “The TOR strategy is based on working closely with brand owners to build distribution and awareness through consistent promotion.”

Brand owner Pete Johnson will be in England this week for the official U.K. launch of the cigar. As of now, TOR is starting only with the brown, a line consisting of eight sizes that will retail for £9 to £12 (\$14 to \$19) per cigar.

Unlike other Tatuaje brown-label cigars, which are made in Miami at El Rey de los Habanos Inc., British market Tatuajes will be rolled at the My Father Cigars S.A. factory in Nicaragua. Both factories are owned and operated by the Garcia family. Johnson said that while the factory is different, the blend is the same: Ecuadoran wrappers, Nicaraguan binders and Nicaraguan filler tobaccos.

“TOR approached us this year in Dortmund, Germany, and we set up a launch plan,” said Johnson. “With the international sales avenue that Jaime [Garcia] and I created, we are able to ship to any country that wants the product. It would be nice to do well in the U.K. market, as the smokers are still very focused on Cuban cigars.” ■



## NEW YORK CONTINUES WAR ON FLAVORED SMOKES

BY ANDREW NAGY

Thanks to a recent ruling by a federal judge, the sale of flavored tobacco products has once again been banned in New York City.

On November 15, U.S. District Judge Colleen McMahon rejected a lawsuit that challenged New York City's controversial 2009 ban prohibiting the sale of some flavored tobacco products, including cigars, chewing tobacco and pipe tobacco. She rejected the suit that claimed the flavored tobacco ban is preempted by the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, the law that gave the Food & Drug Administration regulatory control over the U.S. tobacco industry. The suit was filed by the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Manufacturing Company and U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Brands, both entities of Altria Group Inc.

McMahon wrote in her ruling that "the ordinance does not prevent plaintiffs from making a flavored smokeless tobacco, or from performing that fabrication in whatever way they wish—as long as they do so consistently with federal standards. It simply prohibits plaintiffs from selling those products in New York City anyplace except a tobacco bar."

Although the Altria companies have vowed to appeal the decision, it appears the ban will indeed go into effect for a second time. In 2009, after Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed the ban into law, the lawsuit McMahon ruled upon was filed and the flavored ban was essentially delayed until the suit was settled. Retailers that originally pulled stock of flavored tobacco products were allowed to sell during the interim period.

With McMahon's ruling, however, sales of flavored tobacco products that have a taste or aroma relating to any fruit, chocolate, vanilla, honey, candy, cocoa, dessert, alcoholic beverage, herb or spice are now officially banned. (Menthol, mint or wintergreen flavors are still legal.)

It's unclear, though, what businesses will be affected and how the ban will be enforced.

"There's a lot of uncertainty until they get to the final court decision," said Ron Melendi, general manager of De la Concha in New York City and the president of the New York Tobacco-nist's Association.

The ruling allows flavored tobacco to be sold at New York City's "tobacco bars," of

which there are only about a dozen left.

In New York City, a tobacco bar is an establishment where "10 percent or more of its annual gross income from the on-site sale of tobacco products and the rental of on-site humidors, not including any sales from vending machines, and is registered with the department of health and mental hygiene in accordance with the rules of such agency." These bars, which must renew their license each year, were grandfathered in as exemptions to Bloomberg's infamous bar and restaurant smoking ban of 2003.

Most of the city's professional tobacconists believe the law is intended to halt sales of flavored tobacco in convenience stores, and don't necessarily fear they will have to deal with inspectors. However, according to Melendi, the NYTA still plans to lobby members of city council to try and change the law's language so that professional tobacconists are exempted. ■

## IMPERIAL TOBACCO FORMS NEW SALES, DISTRIBUTION COMPANY

BY ANDREW NAGY

In an effort to boost sales coverage and provide more products to customers, Imperial Tobacco PLC, the world's largest cigar company, has announced it is merging two of its mass-market, machine-made cigar and cigarette companies into one.

Altadis U.S.A. Inc. is to be merged with Commonwealth Brands Inc., the maker of such machine-made cigar brands as Phillies, Dutch Masters, Backwoods and White Cat. The new company will be called Commonwealth-Altadis Inc., or CAI.

Commonwealth's Kentucky operations will be moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where Altadis is located. The move has already begun. Once finished, the enlarged Fort Lauderdale offices will headquarter CAI's sales and marketing management teams.

According to Janelle Rosenfeld, vice president of premium cigar marketing and communications for Altadis U.S.A., the move does not in any way affect the separate premium cigar division that was formed earlier this year. In February, Altadis created a new premium cigar division in the United States that was separate from the company's mass-market division. The companies have separate sales forces but share human resources and information technology assets.

Altadis U.S.A.'s premium cigar division, which makes such cigar brands as **Montecristo** and **Romeo y Julieta**, is run by Javier Estades. ■





## HOLIDAY LA GLORIA OBELISCO

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER

General Cigar Co. has released a five-pack of its box-pressed, obelisk-shaped **La Gloria Cubana** Artesanos de Obelisco for the holidays. The third installment of the La Gloria Cubana Artesanos series, the Obelisco debuted in the summer of 2010, and has since been sold in unique, fan-shaped boxes of 25. The design is inspired by the Monument to the Heroes of the Restoration high atop the center of Santiago in the Dominican Republic.

The oddly-shaped cigars, which scored 90 points in the last issue of *Cigar Insider*, now come in a more convenient package, and with a suggested retail of \$45.

The cigars measure 5 inches by 57 ring at their widest, tapering to just 44 ring at the pointed head. They are made with Ecuadoran Sumatra wrappers, Dominican and Nicaraguan fillers, and Connecticut Broadleaf binders. ■

## GARY SHEFFIELD CIGAR

BY DAVID SAVONA

Rocky Patel Premium Cigars is working with former major league baseball star Gary Sheffield on a cigar brand. Sheffield, who played from 1988 to 2009, spent time with the New York Yankees, Milwaukee Brewers, San Diego Padres, Los Angeles Dodgers, Atlanta Braves, Detroit Tigers and New York Mets, and he won the World Series while playing with the Florida Marlins. Known for his vicious, energetic swing, Sheffield is a nine-time All-Star who hit 509 home runs in his career.

Sheffield was with Rocky Patel at *Cigar Aficionado's* New York Big Smoke. During a brief interview, he told *Cigar Insider* that he is a lifelong cigar lover.

The brand is in the works. Look for more information in an upcoming *Cigar Insider*. ■

## BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR COMING SOON

The year is nearing its end, and so it's almost time for the annual unveiling of *Cigar Aficionado's* Top 25 Cigars of the Year list.

*Cigar Aficionado's* top cigars will be unveiled first at [www.cigaraficionado.com](http://www.cigaraficionado.com). Here is the schedule of how they will be released:

Tuesday, January 3: Cigars No. 10, 9 and 8  
 Wednesday, January 4: Cigars No. 7, 6 and 5  
 Thursday, January 5: Cigars No. 4, 3 and 2  
 Friday, January 6: Cigar of the Year  
 Monday, January 9: Remainder of the Top 25  
 Tuesday, January 10: Best Bargain Cigars of 2011

## CORRECTIONS:

The rating on the **Padrón Family Reserve No. 85** in the November 22 *Cigar Insider* was correct on the cover but incorrect on page two. The cigar scored 91 points.

The price on the **Nat Sherman Timeless Collection Churchill** is \$7.50 per cigar. ■

## IN THE NEXT CIGAR INSIDER

It's our year in review, with a year's worth of ratings in one issue, along with detailed analysis. It's the ultimate buying guide to cigars, and you'll only find it in *Cigar Insider*.

➤ Your Next CIGAR INSIDER Arrives on Tuesday, Dec. 20.

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