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Michael's Club Celebrity Cruises

Attempting to complement yet another sumptuous four-course dinner, I make my way over to Michael's Club -- as tasteful and welcoming a cigar lounge as one is ever likely to find. Its dark, cherry wood walls, rich Oriental carpets, plush chairs and couches, and the colorful mural depicting an historical seaport create an immensely elegant and enchanting atmosphere.



Taking a seat facing the room's faux fireplace, I'm greeted by several patrons whom I had met there the night before. "Welcome back," chimes Mira, the club's hostess, in her appealing Russian accent. "What can I get for you this evening?" A Hemingway Signature Series fits my mood and as she fires up my selection with a cedar stick, I decide to take advantage of what makes Michael's Club special and unique. "Mira, we dock in Aruba tomorrow. Where can I find the best deal on Cuban Montecristo No. 2s?"

That's right. Michael's Club is located on a cruise ship -- and Celebrity Cruises was the only line to offer a cigar lounge on each of its ships. Named for the brother of Celebrity's founder, Michael's Club initially brought the world of premium cigar smoking to the high seas aboard the Century, in 1995. It became such a hit that Celebrity expanded the concept to its entire fleet -- except the Millennium. Celebrity recently decided to test-market an alternate, nonsmoking lounge on that ship. No longer relegated to the windswept upper deck, cruising cigar enthusiasts can now enjoy their pastime in the comfort of a world class lounge, complete with top-notch air filtration and live harp music.



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"Celebrity Cruises pioneered the concept of a cigar lounge on a cruise ship, believing that guests would appreciate the warm, intimate space for relaxing and enjoying a hand-rolled cigar and quiet conversation while sipping

fine liqueurs," explains Celebrity representative Elizabeth Jakeway.

Set amidst the ship's bustling casino, theater and disco, the cigar lounge is an oasis of civility. Gentle music plays in the background as passengers share tales of their day's adventures. Beyond the sitting room, bottles of single-malt Scotch, Bourbon, vodka, brandy and fine wines sparkle like colorful jewels behind the bar. A Martini man, I order a Belvedere, which is poured generously and expertly mixed.

The extensive cigar menu includes, among other selections, Arturo Fuentes (\$11 to \$32), Cuesta-Reys (\$10.65 to \$15.50), Davidoffs (\$8 to \$28.75), Dominican Montecristos (\$12 to \$22) and Dominican Partagas (\$9.25 to \$25), all of which are on display in the club's cabinet humidor. The lounge even offers its own signature cigar, the Michael's Club Reserve. All of the cigars can also be purchased by the box, though in the cashless world of a cruise ship, a room pass and signature are the only method of payment.

One of the best features of Michael's Club is that most of Celebrity's ports of call are outside the United States, allowing individuals to purchase Cuban cigars while ashore, a treat for many American cigar smokers.

"By law, the cruise line cannot sell Cuban cigars on board, nor store guests' own Cuban cigars in shipboard humidors," notes Jakeway. "However, a guest who brings a Cuban cigar on board to smoke within the club is free to do so."

My Hemingway and Martini both nearing their respective end, I say my farewells to the rest of the Michael's Club congregants, and assure them of my return the next evening. As I head toward the casino for some pre-bedtime blackjack, I review tomorrow's

itinerary: sun, beaches, souvenir shopping and, of course, a stop at Michael's Club with my cigar finds from port. Ah ... the cruising life.

Adam Lloyd, 33, is a freelance travel writer and editor of GimpontheGo.com, a disability travel resource site.

Michael's Club
Celebrity Cruises
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