



Chocolate Choice

By Annette Lang, Expat Kitchen

It's been said that the way to most women's hearts is through a heart-shaped box of chocolates. As a woman, I can tell you few things make our hearts race faster than the appearance of a large diamond or a new knock-out dress, but that a pricey brown or white temple of cacao runs a close second.

Legend has it that chocolate was a gift from the gods. The Aztec god, Quetzalcoatl, supposedly brought the cacao tree to mankind. Hot chocolate has been called the "elixir of love" as chocolate contains high levels of a substance called phenethylamine which promotes feelings of euphoria and causes one to react in much the same way as when one is in love. A highly probable reason as to why chocolates make a great gift on Valentine's Day!

So where do you get your chocolate fix in Singapore? The biggest concentration of imported chocolate brands can be found in the basement food hall of Takashimaya Department Store. Take your pick...

ROYCE

This chocolate is the ultimate sin. From Japan, these chocolates are famous for the Nama/Rare chocolate range - a creamy mousse-like moist chocolate made from chocolate couverture with fresh cream and a dash of liqueur; extremely smooth and

very rich. They have high cocoa butter content and literally melt in your mouth. The tiny boxes contain about 30 squares. But don't buy too many, as they require refrigeration and tend to harden after a few weeks. Fresh is best.

NEUHAUS

Neuhaus chocolates are, quite simply, chocolate heaven and worth every penny. Individually hand-crafted, exquisite Belgian chocolates - caramels, truffles, milk, white and dark - each delicately infused with a range of tantalizing and indulgent fillings.

GODIVA

Godiva is superior quality and all-out indulgence. The couverture coating snaps with every bite. Their range includes truffles, pralines and more - all divine! Godiva stores also offer chocolate beverages and chocolate dipped strawberries.

LEONIDAS

If you love pralines, ganache and fillings like nuts, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios as well as cream and butter, than try Leonidas. Be prepared to be transported to another place and time as you savor each bite. Scrumptious fillings include smooth raspberry, custard-tart praline and cappuccino. Leonidas opened here in 1998,

the first outlet in Asia for the well-known Belgian brand. Earlier this year, it was sold to the local company Chocz.

CHOCZ

Formulated for a connoisseur's palate, Singapore brand Chocz, is the largest retailer of gourmet chocolates on the island. They produce chocolate that is equal in quality to the imports. Using wonderful local recipes and ingredients (chili, durian, lemongrass) in the European style, to produce the finest handmade chocolates. Chocz chocolates are available in stores all over Singapore.

TEUSCHER

Chocolates of Switzerland - a gift fit for royalty! They are known for their famous champagne truffles - a delicate blend of fresh cream, butter and dark chocolate, a champagne cream center surrounded by a dark chocolate ganache, enrobed in dark chocolate and dusted with chocolate powder - you will leave their shop with a very big smile on your face. Each piece is handmade and all Teuscher chocolates are flown in from Zurich. There is a Teuscher counter at Tangs and Palais Renaissance.

PRESTAT

Fresh, natural ingredients create chocolate magic. Prestat is English, with each piece handmade in London. The chocolates are pricey but trust me, they're worth it. Think rose crême, brandy cherry and the highly recommended Napoleon III, a hand-rolled, dark-dusted truffle filled with delicious, decadent ganache.

CANELE

Offering a unique selection of chocolates using high-quality cacao to produce unusual and curious flavors, such as a black sesame

pralines, ganaches and fillings. Chocolates are more French in style.

THOS S.B. RAFFLES

This is the gourmet store run by Raffles Hotel. Chocolatier Chui Foong is creating handmade chocolates in the French style, but infused with Asian flavors like pandan, kaya, lemongrass, jasmine tea and coconut.

AKINOISE

Askinoise Chocolate, named for its founder Shawn Askinoise, has opened with excitement among discerning chocolate lovers. It is a small batch chocolate manufacturer located in Missouri, who source all their cocoa beans directly from farmers in Mexico and Ecuador. They are famous for really, really good, intense, dark chocolate with the most exceptional packaging. In addition, the company shares a percentage of its profits with the farmers. So, Askinoise Chocolate is a chocolate maker with a heart and a health-conscience as well; they use only pure sugar cane, organic cocoa beans and no additives or pesticides. Located at Great World City.

GREEN & BLACK'S CHOCOLATE

Great tasting chocolate. Every step from bean to bar is equally important - whether it's sourcing and using the finest organically grown cocoa beans or taking extra time and care to bring out the distinct flavor that has become a household name. Available at Cold Storage, Marketplace and Jasons, as well as health food stores.

What better way to end a meal than with a bit of chocolate; be it gourmet, imported, French, Belgium, local or any variety that tickles your fancy. These luscious nuggets will always bring a sweet, satisfying finish...

Valentine's Day Green Report

By Lya Badgley, American Women's Association Environmental Committee

I have been surprised by how difficult it is to be socially responsible and environmentally friendly on Valentine's Day and have focused here on the big three gifts: cards, chocolate and flowers. But I encourage you to be creative and find other ways which fit your life and green conscience!

CARDS

According to the Treehugger website, Esther Howland is responsible for our love affair with card giving on Valentine's Day. She produced the first commercial American valentines in the 1840s, and sold a then mind-boggling \$5,000 in cards during her first year of business.

Today, each year over a billion Valentine cards are sent in the U.S. alone - a lot of paper! When you are card hunting, look for cards which are made from recycled paper. Or, even better, let loose your inner child, get out the glue and scissors and cut and paste a memorable message for your loved ones! Use newspaper, magazines or other old greeting cards. **FYI**, the AWA office will be accepting old greeting cards to be recycled into gift boxes for charity - just drop them off at the office.

CHOCOLATE

Let me start by saying that like most

people, I really like chocolate! So, I was sad to learn that the truth about chocolate is not so tasty. It is estimated that 43% of the world's cocoa (chocolate) comes from the Ivory Coast in Africa. Various UN and other agency reports state that child slavery is common there and working conditions are completely unregulated. A few companies control the entire industry so they can dictate policies.

I was sad to learn that the truth about chocolate is not so tasty.

In July 2005, International Labor Rights Fund filed suit against Nestlé on behalf of a class of children who were trafficked from Mali into the Ivory Coast and forced to work twelve hours a day with no pay, little food or sleep and frequent beatings. What was Nestlé's response to court questioning? "We are only buyers of a product."

What's a chocolate lover to do? Carrefour carries organic chocolate bars (organic section), and Fair Trade chocolate bars (chocolate section). Cold Storage also carries organic chocolate bars. But, as for fancy, gift giving chocolates, ask for Fair



Trade chocolate and educate retailers when they don't know what you mean - lah!

FLOWERS

There are quite a few websites offering environmentally friendly flowers (e.g., ArenaFlowers.com or OrganicBouquet.com); unfortunately, they are located in the U.S. and Europe and don't ship to Singapore. Whenever possible buy flowers with VeriFlora certification, an international standard that promotes environmentally and socially responsible flower production.

The favorite long-stem roses are shipped via carbon-spewing airplanes from faraway continents. So how about buying your love some locally grown orchids? Singapore has a 15% share of the world cut-orchid market, although none grown here are organic. And if you simply have to have those red roses - take just one and slide the stem through a lovely antique (recycled) ring or watch band - you'll make your point!

Where you born in a Year of the Tiger?

January 26, 1914 - February 13, 1915
Wood Tiger

February 13, 1926 - February 1, 1927
Fire Tiger

January 31, 1938 - February 18, 1939
Earth Tiger

February 17, 1950 - February 5, 1951
Metal Tiger

February 5, 1962 - January 24, 1963
Water Tiger

January 23, 1974 - February 10, 1975
Wood Tiger

February 9, 1986 - January 28, 1987
Fire Tiger

January 28, 1998 - February 15, 1999
Earth Tiger

February 14, 2010 - February 2, 2011
Metal Tiger

January and February babies may be surprised to learn that you were born under a different animal sign than the one indicated by menus at American Chinese restaurants! Since the Chinese Lunar New Year occurs on a different date in January or February each year, a new animal sign doesn't begin on January 1.

Any child born through February 13 of 2010, will be considered an Ox, not a Tiger. For years I thought I was married to a Horse, but turns out he's a Snake!