

## Import of Narghiles in Brazil Grows Almost Six Fold

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The diffusion of the use of the narghile in Brazil is boosting imports of the product from the Arab countries. Whereas between January and July last year, Brazilian purchases of Arab narghiles totaled US\$ 18,800, in the same months of this year, imports reached US\$ 125,000.

The narghile is a traditional device for smoking in the Arab world, and enters Brazil under the denomination of pipe or holder. The figures point to a 564% rise in purchases of these products during the period.

"Tourism in the Arab countries has been increasing. Westerners end up becoming acquainted with the habits of the Arabs, and when they return to their countries, they seek those products," said the special advisor at the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, Ely Dawly.

He also calls attention to the fact that the Internet made it easier for non-Arab countries to get in touch with Arab tradition. In Brazil, the narghile can be found both in bars and restaurants, where it is usually rented by the customers for smoking, and can also be acquired at gift stores and tobacco shops.

Arab narghiles bought by Brazil this year came from Egypt, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon. Egypt was the leading supplier, at US\$ 80,000. Syria came in second at US\$ 26,000, the Emirates came in third, at US\$ 17,400, and Lebanon in fourth, at US\$ 1,400. Among the Egyptians, the narghile is known as shisha. This year, imports have already surpassed those of the entire last year, which totaled US\$ 80,000.

Many consumers, according to the businessman Radwan Raad, owner of Império Árabe, an importer of Arab products based in the southern Brazilian state of Paraná, buy the device for decorative purposes. "They want some Arab object," says Raad.

Usually decorated, the shishas have a bowl, usually made of glass, for keeping water. The upper part - which holds the smoke, which comes in many different flavors, and the coal - is made of metal. To smoke, one inhales from a pipe that makes the smoke pass through the water, and what gets to the mouth looks like cold vapor, only it has flavor.

The businessman confirms that the demand for the narghile is growing in Brazil. According to him, the habit of gathering up friends to smoke narghile has already spread among Brazilians. "People take the narghile to the beach, to the bars, they get their friends together to talk and smoke," Raad explains.

Bil Rajab, one of the owners of the Alibabar bars, which are decorated in Arab style, also mentions the high demand for

the product. The Alibabar, which has units in the Vila Olímpia neighborhood and in the North Side, in the southeastern Brazilian city of São Paulo, allows customers to bring their narghiles from home to smoke.

Rajab claims that when he established the first Alibabar, in the North Side, five years ago, he had not heard of any other place that offered the product. Presently, many bars, some not even in Arab style, rent the narghile for their customers to smoke.

At Alibabar, the rent for one device and two pieces of coal is 19 Brazilian reais (US\$ 9.5). If the customer brings his narghile from home, then he pays 10 reais (US\$ 5) to enter the bar with it. When he established Alibabar, Rajab even sold narghiles, which were rare items in Brazil. But he quit the business. "Nowadays, in every corner you find a narghile to buy," he says.

According to the importer Radwan, prices vary a lot, but the most sought after narghiles, in Brazil, are the imported ones sold for prices ranging from US\$ 10 to US\$ 15. In the Arab countries, according to the businessman, half the narghiles are handmade, in family production style. The other half is manufactured in small-sized plants.

The Chinese, though, have already discovered the narghile and are manufacturing the product to export and sell, even to the Arabs themselves. Brazil imports Chinese narghiles.

In the first seven months of last year, taking into account all Brazilian imports of the product - and not only those from the Arab world - Egypt was the leading supplier, but China ranked second. Brazil imported from China US\$ 33,000 in pipes and holders between January and July 2007. In the first seven months of this year, Brazil imported a total of US\$ 175,000 in these products, from various parts of the world.

Although the figures are not yet too high, purchases of narghiles from the Arab countries are increasing each year in Brazil. In 2004, for example, they stood at US\$ 13,400. Imports rose to US\$ 44,300 in 2005, and then up to US\$ 80,000 in 2006.

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