

THE CHOCO LUXE GUIDE

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Imagine that someone asked you to write the definitive guide to the world's best chocolate. Like a bonbon in the sun, the initial euphoria ("Does life get any better than this?") soon melts into something approaching panic ("How could I possibly find it all?"). I thought I knew my stuff, having just returned from a self-guided tour of some of the best chocolatiers in Paris. But I quickly learned that chocolate, like wine, has almost infinite depth and variation, not to mention its own cast of superstars, villains, and rabid fans—a world that's part *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, part *Sideways*, with a dash of *Fitzcarraldo*.

Forget about your basic milk, white, and dark distinctions. True experts debate the merits of beans from São Tomé, Madagascar, and even Cuba. When Pierre Marcolini hears of a particularly rare crop, he buys the next five years' production to guarantee an exclusive. And at Christian Constant's Left Bank shop, single-origin bars made with criollo beans sell out immediately. I knew zilch about criollo until a few months ago, including how to pronounce it (*cree-oh-yo*), but now seek it out like a melting grail.

After months of devouring chocolate bars and bonbons from all over the world, my taste began to change. Originally a lover of sweet dark chocolate, curious about trendy-flavored ganaches, and a fan