

Coming Attractions?

Top 10 products/trends from Asia you might see here in 2004:

Asian countries always seem so ahead of the curve, even ahead of U.S. hipsters. Here are their latest contributions to the trend deficit.

1. Cellphone TV

In Japan, taking pictures and full-motion video with a cell phone is so yesterday. Japanese now use their phones to watch TV programs, such as soccer matches and quiz shows, using a built-in TV tuner. The new phones can also save images from TV shows to memory and input video from a VCR.

2. Amino acid drinks

Japan's beverage market is inundated with fast-selling amino acid health drinks, such as Ajinomoto's Amino Vital, that claim to burn fat, restore muscles after a workout, and even curb a hangover. The next craze, starting with Kao's Healthya, will be teas fortified with catechin, also thought to help reduce body fat.

3. Ionic hair straightening

Developed in Japan, ionic hair straightening has taken Asian hairdressers by storm. The system permanently straightens hair by capturing the energy of natural ions. "The results are amazing if the hairdresser does it well," says Eva Ng, a regional planner at Saatchi & Saatchi, Hong Kong, who now has very straight hair.

4. Electronic payment cards

Asian cities are turning into cashless societies with electronic cards, like NETS in Singapore and Octopus in Hong Kong. A single card can be used to pay for public transport, groceries, highway tolls, vending machines, parking meters, and even school cafeteria meals. They are easily topped up with more "cash" at retail sites, such as 7-Elevens.

5. Chinese beer

We're not talking Tsingtao, a staple of strip-mall Chinese restaurants. Shanghai Export Beer (a brand, not a category)

is fast becoming very cool in hip London bars. Other brands growing in popularity include Reeb (beer spelled backwards) and Yang Jing. "Chinese brands have the quality and potential to grab interest and attention," said George Singleton, Publicis' regional strategy director in Hong Kong.

6. Wrist gadgets

Asians are snapping on Dick Tracy-style wrist gadgets like walkie talkies and miniature phone handsets to stay in contact at sprawling outdoor markets, shopping malls, on hiking trips, and for other group activities. Hong Kong consumers can even buy an Octo-phone by Nokia or an Octopus watch, which include embedded chips for Octopus, an electronic payment system.

7. Designer pets

First came Sony's robot dog, AIBO. Now a Singaporean university has enhanced zebra fish with a sea anemone gene to make them glow fluorescent red. This hip home accessory will be marketed in the U.S. next year.

8. Guo dong (fruit jelly shots)

Not the kind found at frat parties, these confectionary novelties are sold to school kids in China and Hong Kong in small containers about the size of a single milk serving. Some have fruit, others just gelatin. The shots have taken off in suburban Sydney because Western kids obviously link them to adult bar shots.

9. Playstation 3

Sony's Playstation 3 won't hit store shelves until at least 2005, but it's already on game players' most wanted list over Nintendo's GameCube and Microsoft's Xbox. Meanwhile Japan's console king will take on Game Boy and Nokia's N-Gage with a new handheld Playstation Portable, featuring stereo sound and state-of-the-art video, due out next year.

10. Mortgages for luxury goods

Still saving for the newest Prada handbag? Cash-poor shoppers in South Korea are taking out mortgages on luxury goods. Interest rates are between 2.5% and 5% for "luxury pawn banking" plans. [CPM](#)

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