SUMMER OF HEDONISM | MAY 27, 2021

Unsolicited Advice: Drink Medalla Light All Summer Long

By Chris Crowley

A proper amount of Medalla Light. Photo: John Taggart/Bloomberg via Getty Images

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Some things simply taste better when it's so humid you want to lie in a tub of ice for several hours. One of those is Medalla Light, the Puerto Rican beer that is, as its name implies, very light and extremely refreshing. Sometimes referred to as "Puerto Rico's beer of choice," it's the island's best-selling beer, and with good reason. Medalla is pretty much engineered for easy drinking during hot summer days, and now, thankfully, it's available across New York City and on Long Island.

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While the beer has been imported to New York City since September — long overdue for the state's 1 million strong Puerto Rican community — it's only now hitting peak Medalla season. The first time I had it was on a frigid December night at the Ridgewood bar Aunt Ginny's. This was not ideal Medalla weather, but in the months since, I've heard rumbles of excitement about the beer's growing availability; one Nuyorican bartender replied succinctly when I asked if she was a fan, "I'm Puerto Rican, so, naturally." When I saw that it might hit 90 this past Sunday, I knew exactly what to do. And with Memorial Day nearly upon us, I suspect I'll be needing to cram some cans into my backpack and pray they don't explode with some regularity.

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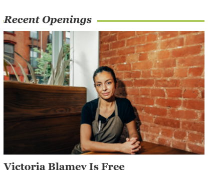

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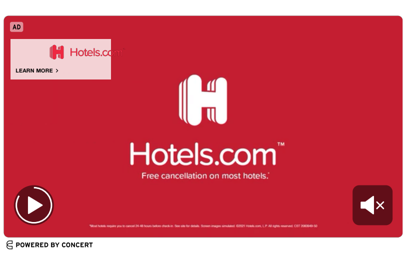

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In New York City (one of its nine markets), Medalla is being distributed by Williamsburg-based Union Beer Distributors. Its producer, Cervecera de Puerto Rico, has reportedly increased production at its brewery to fuel an expansion tear and has spared no expense in getting the word out. This year, Medalla's broader arrival in the States was trumpeted by an ad campaign featuring the sound of the coqui — a small, irresistibly adorable frog that's a symbol of the island — intended to tap the Puerto Rican diaspora's sense of nostalgia. In New York, the company took out an eye-popping yellow billboard in Times Square to broadcast the beer's arrival.

To find it, I've mostly been popping into random delis and grocery stores, but there's a comprehensive map of New York stores that sell the beer on the Medalla Light website. Restaurants and bars around the city have also started carrying it, including Arthur Avenue's Bronx Beer Hall — which was opened by two Nuyorican brothers — where it's offered alongside a menu of mostly local craft beers. Elsewhere, it's available at Travesias in Throgs Neck; La Fonda Boricua in Harlem; Firefly in Sunnyside; and at the bar Turtles All the Way Down in Bed-Stuy. (The owners of the Freakin Rican in Astoria say they will serve it as soon as their still-pending liquor license is approved.)

Will I drink other beers this summer? Probably. Should I? I'm not sure. Definitely not when I'm fighting for towel space in the Rockaways. Drinking Medalla on a humid afternoon tastes like how it feels to dunk your head in the ocean during a heat wave. Plus, it goes down smooth like Coors, if Coors tasted good, or Corona without the skunk. Good thing it comes in those cute ten-ounce cans.

Medalla, it has been noted in the past, didn't have a ton of competition on its home turf. (The United States' extractive relationship with Puerto Rico has made it so that the island depends on imports and agricultural sovereignty.) In recent years, a crop of new Puerto Rican craft breweries have popped up, which I hope to try soon, but for now, I'm happy to finally have the king of Puerto Rican beers in my backpack all summer long.

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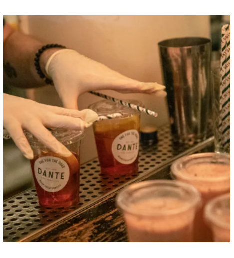

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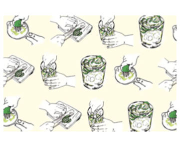

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