

Simple sandals from Havaianas 'Slim' range.

CREDIT: HAVAIANAS



Brazilian brands make a mark in China

Footwear brands from Brazil are making inroads into the burgeoning domestic Chinese market like one of the country's gifted footballers dribbling his way towards goal.

With fewer of China's home-produced shoes going for export now, it's clear China's own population wants to have a greater choice than ever before over the shoes it wears. Society there is becoming increasingly affluent, which means well designed, well made shoes from overseas have a good chance of selling well alongside local collections, even if the imported footwear is more expensive.

Around a dozen Brazilian brands took part in Fashion

Access event in Hong Kong in October, showing off their creations for summer 2009 and with the market on the mainland firmly in their sights. The brands involved included the ironically named Territorio Nacional (as it's clearly aiming to become international), Stephanie Classic, Dilly, Pegada, Bibi, Paralelo, by GVP, Piccadilly and Biondini. They hoped to emulate the success another Brazilian footwear brand, Havaianas, enjoyed at the China International Footwear Fair (CIFF) in Shanghai in September.

What can we say about Havaianas? Well, perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is that the company appears to

be beating the Chinese at their own game. They are non-leather shoes with foam soles and a fairly simple construction, but they have quietly become the most fashionable flip-flops on the planet.

This type of footwear is what China has become famous for in so many overseas markets, but Havaianas is, famously, the original flip-flop and its manufacturers are confident of expanding the presence it already has in a small number of department stores in shopping malls in Shanghai, Beijing, Qingdao and Guangzhou. Judging by the crowds at its stand at CIFF, there appears to be popular support for this idea.

The company behind Havaianas started out just over 100 years ago, making alpargatas (a canvas and rope sole shoe) for people working on Brazil's coffee harvest. Almost 50 years on, inspired by Japanese Zori sandals, it decided to produce a very Brazilian version, using local rubber in a "secret recipe" to give what it calls a durable and flexible product that was, above all, cheap.

By 1965, the name Havaianas was established and the company was selling 1,000 pairs a day. By the turn of the century, celebrities had begun wearing the distinctive sandals, exports took off and the move to transform what is still a simple product into a luxury item had begun. The brand's iconic status may have been secured for ever when a huge



The Brazilian brand grew out of an operation that manufactured alpargatas for country people to wear while working on the country's coffee harvest. CREDIT: HAVAIANAS

street art gable-painting of a Havaianas sandal appeared on a building between Mulberry Street and Prince Street in New York City.

According to Trisha Yeh, who works in the Havaianas office in Hong Kong—which, for five years, has been its distribution base in this part of the world—this notion of the sandals being a luxury product is what will allow it to make headway in China. "People in China read all the fashion magazines," she says, "and they are very keen on fashionable, trendy products." She says expansion into more of China's main cities now is very much part of the plan.

There is one collection a year—a flip-flop offers the foot the same amount of

protection all year round, whether your summer season lasts for 12 months or 12 minutes—but Ms Yeh says there are plenty of retailers who want to hold a permanent stock of Havaianas.

In top retail outlets, such as the Grand Gateway shopping mall in Shanghai's Xujiahui district, Chinese consumers will pay between €20 and 30 for a pair of Havaianas in a basic colour. But there are also sandals in the current range that offer real touches of luxury such as Swarovski crystals. For these, the price will rise to around €90.

The brand feels that China is ready for this level of spend on fashion footwear, and that Havaianas is on the verge of great success there. 🌟



Swarovski crystals add a touch of class and support the brand's argument that a simple flip-flop can be regarded as a luxury product. CREDIT: HAVAIANAS