

LEARNING MADE EASY



Coffee

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Discover the ins and outs
of coffee's history

—
Make espresso drinks at home
like a barista

—
Recognize how roasting
affects flavor

Major Cohen

*Authorized Specialty Coffee
Association Trainer*

*Former Senior Project Manager,
Starbucks*



Coffee

by Major Cohen

for
dummies
A Wiley Brand

Coffee For Dummies®

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Introduction

Coffee has been around a long time, but the past 50 years have witnessed a monumental transition. I've spent most of my life drinking coffee, instructing others photography, and teaching coffee. I've lived through this dramatic change as specialty coffee has made drinking coffee so much more nuanced.

You may have encountered a virtually foreign language, extensive paraphernalia, and an often occurring, kind of know-it-all arrogance by some people when you're buying beans and beverages. Trying to navigate and understand the world of coffee doesn't seem to get any easier.

Yes, coffee can include not only cream and sugar, but also confusion, a multitude of questions, and even misleading marketing to name just a few, and that's a shame. But with a bit of curiosity and minimal effort, you can start to increase your coffee confidence and feel better about the ordering language, the broad and remote world where coffee comes from, and even your own at-home barista skills.

As soon as you realize and embrace it, the wonderful world of coffee can make for joyous discovery and endless enjoyment. That world — growing it, processing it, roasting it, brewing it, and on and on — is always changing, growing, and adapting. Get ready for a ride that will help you fully appreciate this miraculous thing called coffee.

About This Book

Coffee For Dummies covers a wide range of the ever-changing and broad world of coffee and what I think is important to know. I cover some of these topics within these pages:

- » **The history of coffee:** You can find out when and where coffee began and what has happened in its centuries of existence. The history of coffee is rich with intrigue, romance, and innovation.
- » **Sourcing coffee:** Coffee comes from quite a few interesting places in the world and where you're living probably isn't one of them. Growers and buyers meet up in some remote parts of the world as they begin the process of supplying coffee. Understanding what they do can help explain a lot about why coffee tastes a certain way or why you may like one coffee over another.
- » **Roasting coffee:** Sourcing delivers the green coffee bean into a roaster's hands. Without those roasters you'd just have a hard green coffee bean. The roaster is the scientist and artist whose skill is transforming that green bean into what can be ground, brewed, and enjoyed. Knowing about roasting explains a lot about your coffee likes and dislikes.
- » **Preparing coffee and espresso:** The final moments for the roasted coffee beans are most important. Although it sometimes seems that a great deal goes into making the end product in the best way — one that highlights all that the coffee has to offer — it's really rather a simple process.
- » **Looking at coffee today:** Some intriguing and courageous people have helped build the foundation of today's coffee world and getting to know a few of them helps to explain that world and can also help you make

your decisions about coffee. If your curiosity is piqued and that coffee world is increasingly intriguing, you can read about ideas where you might turn next.

This book intends to share just what you need to know about coffee so you can appreciate it more. The bottom line is to help you make an even greater tasting coffee than you're creating today and to share some additional information pathways for you to explore. I clarify the coffee jargon and explain the terms baristas and coffee aficionados use so you can understand them. I've based the content on my experiences as a coffee lover and consumer, and on my experiences I've had as a coffee teacher.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume you're exploring this book for at least one of these reasons:

- » You don't know too much about coffee, but you want to find out more.
- » You do know something about coffee, perhaps more than most people, but you recognize there is so much more, and you want to understand some of that other stuff.
- » You want to figure out how to brew the perfect cup of coffee or shot of espresso to share with your friends and family.
- » You're well-informed about coffee, but you've recognized you could discover more.

Icons Used in This Book

The pictures in the margins of this book are called icons, and they point out different types of information.



TIP

This icon points out text that can enhance either your knowledge, skill, or craftsmanship.



REMEMBER

This icon marks those helpful tidbits of info you can ponder again and again as your coffee knowledge expands.



WARNING

I've been shocked (yes, real electricity shocked) and burned, and I call out a risk or two to help you avoid the same mistakes I've made. Keep an eye out for this symbol, especially in brewing.



**ON THE
WEB**

This icon points out interesting chunks of information you can find online about different aspects of coffee.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

This world of coffee can be intensely complex, but sometimes the line between knowing and geeking out needs a bit of clarification. This icon notes info that may be super interesting, but it's not essential to understand what you need to know about everything coffee.

Where to Go from Here

This book is an easy-to-use reference. You don't have to read it from cover to cover for it to make sense and be useful to you. Simply turn to the chapter or section that interests you and dig in. If you want an overview of all things coffee, start with [Chapter 1](#), so you're grounded in the big picture.

If a new café or coffee shop in your neighborhood is an imminent destination and the drink names have been a stumbling block, turn to [Chapter 12](#). If you have an upcoming trip scheduled and coffee touring might be possible in the city in which you're headed, check out [Chapter 16](#) to see if your destination is on my list. Or, if you want to brew your own coffee or espresso, go to [Part 5](#). If you're not sure where to begin, scan the Table of Contents or index, find a topic that piques your interest, and start there. If you simply have an insatiable curiosity about some aspect of coffee beyond all the others, dive in anywhere you want.

For additional information online, check out www.dummies.com and search for the "Coffee For Dummies Cheat Sheet" to find a resource you can refer to again and again.

Part 1
**Getting Started with
Coffee**

IN THIS PART ...

Understand the basics of coffee, including where coffee beans are grown, how coffee is roasted, how you can make a great cup of coffee, and more.

Satisfy some of your most pressing questions about coffee's taste and where it comes from.

Travel to a coffee farm and encounter a by-product of processing that isn't coffee but reveals a key element important in modern coffee farming.

Clarify some of those coffee shop terms that may have confused you so you can simplify buying coffee.

Chapter 1

Demystifying Coffee: Just the Basics

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Discovering the characteristics of coffee**
 - » **Grasping a process that includes sourcing, processing, roasting, and brewing**
 - » **Exploring the links that exist between coffee's early history and the coffee world today**
 - » **Seeing coffee as an agricultural product**
-

Coffee and all that its world encompasses today can be confusing. I toss the word *coffee* around rather cavalierly and use it to define quite a few things — a drink, a bean, a crop, an industry. It used to be far easier, and if you're old enough, you probably remember the biggest decision was whether you wanted cream and sugar or black. The story is quite different today as the industry has exploded and, in that growth, it has become immensely confusing. I want to make it easier so you just might start to understand it better, gain a bit more confidence with it, and in the end, enjoy that coffee experience way more.

This chapter serves as your jumping-off point into the world of coffee. Whether you like it with cream and sugar, with just a little cream, with steamed milk, with some syrup and whipped cream, or just black, you can find the basics in this chapter and then dive into the rest

of this book for more details in your search of the perfect cup.

Understanding What Coffee Is (and Isn't)

Coffee is right up near the top of the list of the most consumed beverages in the world. (It actually ranks third behind water and tea.) But before it gets to your cup, it's a significant, globally grown agricultural crop that represents a livelihood to millions of people around the world.

Coffee is all the following:

- » A seed (the bean), well protected in a layered fruit (the cherry).
- » Put through one of a number of distinct processes in order to get to the seed at the center. Whichever process is used plays a big part in its eventual taste. (Refer to [Chapter 2](#) for more about the different processes and how they can affect the taste of coffee.)
- » An annual crop — and, like wine, a different crop every year, even if it's from the same place. (The chapters in [Part 3](#) look at the different places in the world where coffee is grown.)
- » Significantly impacted by environmental conditions, such as temperature, rainfall, and where it grows. Refer to [Chapter 2](#) for more info on coffee growing and the impact the environment has on it.

Coffee isn't any of the following:

- » Easy to grow.

» Easy to harvest and process.

[Chapter 2](#) explains in greater detail how coffee is grown, harvested, and processed to show you how delicate the multiple steps are that get the bean from inside the cherry.

Appreciating Coffee – from Its Past to Today

To better understand coffee today, it's useful to look at where it came from. With a history spanning across centuries as well as the globe, coffee is more easily understood when you know some of its historical background. That history has witnessed romance, revolution, discovery, and turbulent change, all of which have led to coffee being what it is today. The following sections give you a snapshot of important historical developments that have led the coffee industry to its present state.

A world of farms and fickle crops

At its most basic, coffee is a precious miracle of nature. Although it's scientifically classified in a rather confusing hierarchy of names, here I focus on two types of coffee crops:

» **Arabica:** Represents about 70 percent of what is grown and consumed around the world and is the type seen most prominently in the gourmet or specialty coffee business. Arabica is difficult to grow because it needs elevation and is easily impacted by insects and disease. Even if everything goes perfectly in a crop year, the yield with Arabica is limited. Arabica is the

type that has the best taste though, with complexities and flavors that are unrivaled.

- » **Robusta:** This would be the ideal type of coffee because it has greater yield per tree than Arabica, isn't as susceptible to insects or disease, and grows at any elevation. Unfortunately, it's known for its harsh taste characteristics, and even though a significant quantity is grown, processed, and consumed, it isn't considered specialty or gourmet.

[Chapter 2](#) digs in to the specifics of the fruit and delves deeper into the differences between Arabica and Robusta.

The cherry is picked annually, and it yields seeds. About 95 to 97 percent of the time, each fruit has two seeds; 3 to 5 percent of the time, it has a peaberry. A *peaberry* is the seed of a cherry that has only grown one inside. Multiple decisions regarding growing, often driven by long-standing practices, availability of water, and technology, determine how the trees are raised, how their fruit is collected, and finally how the seed inside that fruit, the coffee bean, is handled. These factors all have a significant impact on the taste of the coffee when it gets to you, the consumer.

Going back to coffee's roots

An almost inadvertent discovery by some goats and their herdsman might just have started it all. Whether this story is truth or fable, the centuries that followed that discovery certainly saw coffee rise as a brewed beverage that inspired passionate interest and dialog.

Religious leaders, politicians, and artists played a part in the development of the beverage's refinement and a burgeoning café society. Cultures across time and the globe seem to have been imbued with coffee and its side

effects. Furthermore, industrial and cultural revolutions, coupled with the growth of coffee consumption across all demographics, put coffee at the forefront of change. An industry sprang up from those changes as entrepreneurs recognized a wide-open frontier and major opportunities. [Chapter 3](#) examines the history of coffee — where people started drinking it and how the business of coffee started.

Examining coffee and roasting today

Coffee in modern times really began with a vision and a dream in the late 1960s. A transition occurred that involved a small group of entrepreneurs taking a different approach. Specifically they began focusing on origin (where the coffee is grown), quality, craft roasting, and taste as fundamental to their coffee work. Like many entrepreneurial adventures, that of coffee is wonderfully woven into a kind of art and science, and roasting coffee is central to and representative of that. I discuss how coffee roasting has evolved in [Chapters 9](#) and [10](#).

Traveling Worldwide — Where Coffee Is Grown

I realized early in my journey with coffee that I was challenged by global geography. The equator and the continents were easy to recognize, but the names and locations of countries, borders, mountains, lakes, and streams quickly became overwhelming as I learned more about coffee. I also found that geography established connections to the perceived quality and inherent characteristics linked to taste.

Add to all that the crucial environmental elements, because growing coffee requires Mother Nature's

cooperation. The following are important aspects of climate:

- » Temperature
- » Rainfall
- » Soil conditions
- » Sun, shade, and wind

I survey these aspects in greater detail in [Chapter 5](#). Meanwhile, the following sections look at where coffee is grown in the world to help you understand how many places coffee comes from.

Visiting the Western Hemisphere

In the Americas, coffee has been grown successfully in several countries, both large and small. [Chapter 6](#) provides more in-depth information about these places.

Central America

Some of these smaller countries feature a few of the most noteworthy coffees and coffee success stories of the last century:

- » **Costa Rica:** Known as the Switzerland of Central America, Costa Rica offers a perfect environment for growing coffee. Peace and neutrality have allowed for the development and growth of an envied coffee infrastructure. [Figure 1-1](#) shows a Costa Rican coffee farm.
- » **El Salvador:** Societal development, the coffee industry, and cultural growth in El Salvador both benefited and suffered together over the past 25 years, and a solid but still not fully realized coffee opportunity exists there.

- » **Guatemala:** This country is the source of some of the most exquisite and treasured coffees in the world.
- » **Honduras:** This country has a burgeoning coffee industry and an increasing premium crop production.
- » **Mexico:** One of the world's top ten coffee producers, Mexico features diverse, mountainous terrain and an equally diverse range of potential flavor profiles.
- » **Nicaragua:** Although coffee is a principal crop in Nicaragua, an opportunity remains for both increased output and better quality.
- » **Panama:** The famed Boquete Valley, and an interest and investment in producing the Geisha varietal, have cemented Panama's reputation for amazing coffees.



Photo by Major Cohen

FIGURE 1-1: Costa Rica has great coffee farms.

South America

An almost perfect coffee-growing climate and vast land made South America a prime spot for cultivating a relatively new crop all the way back in the 1700s. Today it's home to Brazil and Colombia, the top coffee producers in the world for annual production. Here are countries in South America known for coffee production:

- » **Bolivia:** A forest called the Yungas in the Andes Mountains is home to some strikingly beautiful, high-elevation coffee farms. Despite Bolivia having a past reputation for lower-quality output, the industry is watching and waiting to see what the future holds.
- » **Brazil:** The largest coffee producer hasn't always been the best, but Brazil has focused on fine-tuning its crops; some prodigious infrastructure efforts and a significant goal to be a top premium coffee source have spurred a resurgence.
- » **Colombia:** Famous thanks to stellar marketing and some beautiful coffees, Colombia is thought by many to be "the most coffee" of coffees when it comes to flavor in the cup.
- » **Ecuador:** Small farms in the Andes are producing limited quantities, but there's currently hope for infrastructure investment, because coffee in Ecuador has considerable potential.
- » **Peru:** A diversity of growing regions in this country has resulted in a wide variety of intriguing flavor profiles.
- » **Venezuela:** At one time, Venezuela had a coffee output that was comparable to its high-production neighbors. However, Venezuela's diminishing output has really taken away from the country's coffee

exports, and so most of the interesting and good-quality crop is consumed in country.

The Islands

With striking mountainous regions and situated perfectly in the tropical climate of the equatorial belt, these islands have history and heritage in coffee. Three are in the Caribbean Sea and one is in the Pacific Ocean, but all continue to have tremendous potential and some considerable pedigree as coffee growing origins:

- » **Cuba:** Although Cuba has been growing coffee since the mid-18th century, the political situation has all but eliminated any output from what is a coffee-growing environment with true potential.
- » **Dominican Republic:** This is another country with a long-established history of coffee farming and recognized potential for investment and renewed effort.
- » **Hawaii:** These islands host some of the most beautiful coffee farms and celebrate production of some of the most favored and pricey coffees in the world.
- » **Jamaica:** The famed Blue Mountains, which are located in the eastern third of the island, are home to coffee farms with a heritage that dates back to 1723 and French King Louis XV. King Louis sent three plants as a gift to Martinique, and five years later the governor of Martinique gave one of those as a gift to Jamaica's governor.

Heading to Africa

Home to the birthplace of coffee, and centuries later some of the most powerful stories of human perseverance and resilience, Africa today is an important frontier for innovation and growth in the coffee industry.