

# How Coffee Became One of the World's Favorite Drinks

This is the story of the all-consuming, centuries-spanning romance we have enjoyed with a simple cup of water infused with the seeds of a fruit from Africa.

The topic of coffee has been explored extensively over the past few decades. Coffee shops selling specialty beans with provenance have proliferated through urban centers worldwide, while coffee-plantation tourism has taken off in coffee-producing countries. But while the understanding and appreciation of coffee have burgeoned, the focus is often quite narrow: on coffee's scientific aspects, origin stories, specialty coffee, or on espresso-led coffee culture.

Yet, as this espresso-led coffee culture has increasingly taken center stage, many stories of other rich, vibrant coffee cultures have often struggled to be told. Espresso coffee is often viewed as the epitome of quality, but there are many other coffee styles that are equally delicious, skillfully made, specialized, and culturally significant. In Ethiopia, people sit together around an open fire, while a woman ceremonially roasts fresh green coffee beans to release their aroma; coffee shops near spice and coffee plantations in India grind fresh cardamom pods into local coffee before they brew.

Societies and foodscapes around the world have been shaped by the introduction of coffee, with local people adopting and nurturing the ingredient until it is an inextricable part of their culinary culture. Everything from brewing styles, beans used, and recipes developed are influenced by cultural, climatic, political, and agricultural aspects. Through the sharing of recipes for coffee, the story of a society unfolds.

While coffee may look different in Vietnam than it does in Yemen, it has the same unmistakable taste beloved worldwide, which helps bind us together. Coffee can act as a common denominator when learning about cultures or time periods that are not our own—a familiar thread through the unfamiliar.

Coffee has also changed our relationship with the dark: the stimulating effect of caffeine allows us to claim more hours of the day as our own. Drinking coffee helped Sufis in Yemen stay awake for night time devotions, and today caffeine fuels the endeavors of busy workers and students. In sixteenth-century Istanbul, coffeehouses promoted nocturnal activities and entertainment. Consumption of coffee has led to increased consumption of the night.

Coffeehouses have also been the backbone of resistance movements through times of political turmoil, from Cairo, to London, to Seoul. Colonialism, imperialism, conquest, and tourism have spread the cultivation of the crop and culture, too (witness the Parisian-style cafés in Hà Nội, Vietnam). Wars were fought, societies were shaped, people were enslaved and taken around the world to work on plantations, their descendants' storylines changed forever. Families emigrated to try their luck farming coffee, while entire cities were built around the ports that supported a bustling coffee trade—cities that still exist today.

It is important to note the ways in which coffee has had a detrimental impact on societies and environments, too, either through its introduction or its →

