

Ethiopian Coffee

If you're looking for the world's best coffee, skip Italy or Colombia and head straight to Ethiopia. Coffee is without a doubt the heartbeat of Ethiopia's agricultural economy. Ethiopia is the fifth largest coffee producer in the world, producing 3-5% of the world's coffee each year. In addition to an estimated 15 million Ethiopians relying on the coffee industry for their livelihood, the globally adored beverage has become a central part of Ethiopia's culture.

History of Ethiopian Coffee

Ethiopia is the birthplace of *Coffea arabica*, the coffee plant. Legend says a 9th-century goat herder observed his energized goats nibble on the beans. This legend has two different endings: One ending explains how the goat herder simply tried the beans himself and experienced a glorious jolt of energy. Another version says the goat herder took the beans to a local religious leader who threw them in the fire, dismissing the beans as the devil's work. But, after smelling the sweet aroma of the roasting coffee beans decided coffee must not be so bad after all. Either way, we have an Ethiopian goat herder to thank for our morning cup of coffee.

Ethiopian Coffee Culture

The humble cup of coffee has been elevated to important cultural significance in Ethiopia. There are ceremonial ways to prepare, serve, and drink coffee here. The coffee ceremony typically follows a large feast. Coffee beans are roasted in front of guests as the ceremony leader wafts smoke throughout the room. A jebena—a clay coffee pot—is used to make the coffee before it is served with sugar or salt, depending on the region of Ethiopia. Popcorn is often served with coffee and the traditional coffee ceremony also includes burning frankincense.

Truly traditional Ethiopian coffee is served in local "jebena bets". Many of these jebena bets are small huts with tin roofs where coffee is brewed in clay pots. Although it is interesting to see coffee roasted by hand in the traditional way, the quality of jebena bets varies widely. To sip the best brews in Addis Ababa, look for spots that are packed with locals or check out our coffee suggestions listed below.