

COFFEE JAVA CUP OF MUD

By Willard Robinson

Ecuador was the original banana republic, but today we're talking COFFEE. It was introduced to the country in the early 19th century, and today coffee is traded second on the world commodities market only behind petroleum. Often called "*pepa de oro,*" or seeds of gold.

Tiny Ecuador is a major coffee producing nation and this product is in high demand internationally. Most people wouldn't recognize coffee in its natural state because coffee plants are grown far away from the end user. 98% of Ecuador's coffee is grown in the mountainous coastal farms and in some of the warm valleys in the high lands. These large farms produce the mother lode, but there are numerous small farms that produce a few pounds of this hand picked product during the months of December through March.

On average a mature bush will produce a pound of roasted coffee beans per year. Coffee plants reach maturity five years after they sprout their first leaf, and produce a red fruit called a coffee berry.

Coffee berries will usually contain two coffee beans. If the berry contains only one bean it is called a pea berry. However, it is considered a sign of good luck if the berry has three beans in it.

Coffee is processed in either the dry or wet method. Dry method, or natural method, produces coffee that is heavy in body, sweet, smooth, and complex. You may see the husked beans drying along concrete patches of the road, or on concrete sidewalks. When you stumble on one of these little farms drying coffee, stop, and buy a pound. If the farmer doesn't have any cured beans, then see if he will sell you some of the ones he is drying. You can complete the toasting process in your oven when you return home in the evening.

Place the beans on a baking sheet, and pop them in a 350degree oven for about 15 to 20 minutes, stirring often. When cool, grind the toasted beans and prepare a sumptuous treat with a cup of good, fresh coffee.

The wet process is a relatively new method of removing four layers surrounding the coffee bean. This process results in a coffee that is cleaner, brighter, and fruitier. Coffee valued for its perceived acidity will often use this wet process.

There are two types of beans...Arabica and robust.

Bourbon variety of Arabica gets its name from the island of Bourbon, north of Esmeraldas, where it was first cultivated, and grows best in warm humid climates between 4000 and 6000 feet. This produces the wonderfully flavored and aromatic beans consumed around the world.

Robusta beans are just as their name implies, more “robust,” resilient to climate changes, and grow best at sea level and up to 2500 feet.

One of the little coffee stands my wife, Isabelita, and I visited on a trip to Vilcabamba served mugs of fresh hot coffee mixed with scorched sugar cane syrup. Deliciously different!

Mindo has a small coffee farm, El Vivero De Mindo (The Nursery of Mindo).

On the coastal highway heading south from Manta, it’s not unusual to find coffee beans drying along the concrete shoulder of the road or on sidewalks in the little pueblo of El Aromo.

A co-op buys coffee from neighboring towns, mixes and processes the beans, then grinds it and sells the dark product in paper bags at a stand at the bus station in Jipijapa (Hippy Hoppa).

Huge plantations in the mountainous area north of Salinas are a major growing area in Ecuador. When you visit the new properties that *ECUADOR REAL ESTATE* is developing in Salinas, buy some of the local-grown coffee and do a taster test. Notice the difference in fresh coffee here compared with what you purchase back home.

Well to do families and upper-class hotels in Ecuador prefer to serve *essencia*. Freshly ground coffee is placed in a filtering pot, appropriately called a *filtro*. One teaspoon of coffee for each cup of coffee desired. Then hot water is poured in a circular motion over the fresh grounds. When the water filters through the grounds, take the inky liquid and pour over the grounds for a second purchase, which results in a stronger base. Pour a couple of spoonfuls on *essencia* in your cup, dilute with hot water to taste. Welcome to paradise.

Millions of people around the world wake up and drink coffee before they do anything else. In recent times there have been numerous national and international coffee franchises opening up to provide this drink to morning commuters. Even the fast food chains are offering gourmet coffee to their customers.

Many coffee enthusiasts point out that drinking coffee started out as a medicinal pursuit. There is some medicinal value to drinking coffee; it contains large quantities of antioxidants. These antioxidants have been shown to help battle numerous diseases.

These coffee facts are mostly trivia, but interesting for the coffee enthusiast. With coffee cup in hand, read more coffee facts that you can find in a variety of sources both online

and offline. There are numerous sources on both the benefits and harmful effects that coffee may have on the body's systems. Do yourself a favor and be more informed about your favorite drink.