

# JAVA QUEST

Searching for the world's greatest coffees takes devoted sippers to every corner of the planet.

BY CATHY SENECA

A pair of giraffes loped across the savannah, seemingly in slow motion, amid a backdrop of acacia trees glowing in the pink blues of dusk. I was aboard a night train to Mombasa with aromatic Kenyan coffee in hand.

"This is the best coffee I've ever had," I said to a friend who has tired of hearing me say this in Costa Rica, in Greece, in Tanzania, or wherever we've travelled over our 30-year friendship.

Like billions around the world, I love coffee. Yet, I am not one to expertly discern between arabica and robusta, and I'll leave the coffee cupping – or scoring – to connoisseurs, who rate coffee on flavour, acidity, aroma and such. For me, an experiential moment, such as the one in Kenya mentioned above, can also enhance a cup of coffee, making it extraordinary.

Let's start at the ground level with highlights of what to order and where to help you have the best travel experience.

## ETHIOPIA

Coffee has come a long way since the jasmine-scented plant was discovered in Ethiopia's Kaffa region in the 9th century, if popular local legend is to be believed.

Ethiopians perform rituals lasting up to two hours for roasting, brewing and pouring coffee, and may include the burning of incense. Water with extremely finely ground coffee and sugar is brought to a near boil three times, then filtered, or left to allow the grounds to settle before drinking, typically without milk.

**TRY:** In Addis Ababa, order a macchiato, strong or medium, at one of six Tomoca coffee shops. The family-run business started in 1953 and specializes in Italian coffee made with Ethiopian arabica beans.

## BRAZIL

Brazilians are very proud that their country is the world's largest coffee producer. Yet despite the availability of espressos and the like, Brazilians drink *cafezinho*, hot black coffee with quite a bit of unrefined sugar, or *rapadura*, at home or at work.

Once back from chasing fat capybaras (a type of South American rodent) on the Pantanal, my favourite coffee sipping milieu was among Pelourinho's wildly colourful centre, which had me at *oi*, or hello, in Brazilian Portuguese.

**TRY:** In this country, the biggest notch along the earth's coffee belt, order a cappuccino Colombo in one of the most beautiful cafés in the world, Confeitaria Colombo in Rio.

## ENGLAND

When a Turk brought coffee to Oxford in 1637, it quickly became popular among its students and teachers, who created the Oxford Coffee Club.

By the mid-17th century, London's coffeehouses were plentiful and called "penny universities." One penny got patrons much more than coffee. Being surrounded in stimulating conversation promised intellectual jolts from the writers, artists and philosophers who hung out there.





## AROUND THE WORLD



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Traditional coffee ceremony in Ethiopia  
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Perpetuating London's coffeehouse tradition;  
Farmer collecting coffee beans; Coffee prepared in the classic Vietnamese style

**TRY:** Though tea is still England's top hot beverage, lattes and cappuccinos are all the rage. Order the same as you would in North America, grab a chair and chat with locals – a tradition that began with English coffeehouses of the 17th and 18th centuries. They served as gathering places and a place for informal education.

### VIETNAM

It shouldn't come as a surprise that the world's second largest coffee producer has creations now being adapted everywhere.

Egg coffee sounds wrong, perhaps, but aficionados worldwide are adapting from the original, created in Hanoi. A yolk is beaten with sweetened condensed milk and the cloud-like mixture is poured over espresso or iced coffee.

**TRY:** Sip on an original version of *cà phê trung* at one of three Café Giang locations in Hanoi, then take note of the Metropole Hanoi, where, in the 1940s when milk was scarce, ingenious bartender Nguyen Giang dreamt up egg coffee and eventually opened his namesake cafés.

### ITALY

In Italy, you may mark yourself an outsider if you order a milky coffee after 11 a.m. or after a meal.

Locals pair a pastry with a milky coffee in the morning while sitting, then a *caffè macchiato* as an afternoon pick-me-up, followed by an espresso later in the day while standing.

Espresso is everywhere, but each of Italy's regions has its own unique regional twist. Cappuccino is equal parts espresso, steamed milk and foamed milk. *Caffè latte* is espresso with more steamed milk and less foam. *Latte macchiato* is steamed milk with a splash of espresso.

**TRY:** After a late dinner, order an espresso *al banco*, or standing at the bar. Toss it back like a 20-something downing shooters at a party.

### AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

While immigrants from Italy went to both the U.S. and Australia, Australia's wave didn't happen until the 1940s and 50s. Italians brought piston-driven espresso machines with them, giving rise to cafés.

Right behind the long black, the drink of choice is a flat white, micro-foamed milk poured over a single or double espresso, creating a velvety textured coffee. Even though espresso was not popular in New Zealand until the 1990s, Kiwis believe their own Derek Townsend, who could crush coffee beans with his fists, "invented" the flat white. Australians flatly disagree, claiming Fraser McInnes was first to describe a cappuccino with weak froth as a flat white.

Speaking of crushing, I recall a memorable coffee with a nimble Kiwi after a long climb up no-flat Tongariro Volcano through snow and howling wind.

**TRY:** Order a flat white post hike in either country but don't ask who invented it first. ☺

