

Guatemala

Guatemala is a country in Central America bordered by Mexico to the north and west, the Pacific Ocean to the southwest, Belize and the Caribbean to the northeast, and Honduras and El Salvador to the southeast.

The first evidence of human settlers in Guatemala goes back to at least 12,000 BC.

This relatively small country boasts one of the most climatically diverse regions in the world. The soil, rainfall, humidity, altitude, and temperature are varied enough to produce seven distinct types of Guatemala Arabica coffee.

Coffee was introduced in 1760 by European settlers, but was not cultivated until forty years later. In the early 1800s, Guatemala's indigo plantations were devastated by locusts, and fifty years later, the invention of chemical dyes in Europe made indigo production in Guatemala unprofitable. The government began at this time to provide economic incentives to encourage the production of coffee as a commercial good, and in 1859 approximately 400 quintales (quintal=100lb.) of coffee were exported to Europe. In 1860, coffee exports nearly tripled to 1100 quintales, and in 1868 the government instated a program that distributed more than one million seedlings to rural farmers.

In the 1870s, president Justo Rufino Barrios enacted a number of policies aimed at making coffee the primary good of the Guatemalan economy, and in 1880, coffee sales made up ninety percent of Guatemala's exports.

The coffee harvest depends on a massive, seasonal influx of migrant workers who travel to supplement the meagre income generated by their small plots of land in the highlands. Seasonal and sometimes daily contract labourers, instead of permanent employees, represent significant savings for growers by not demanding year round wages and benefits. This arrangement also tends to lower wages in general, and makes access to food (and the land to grow it on), housing, medical care and schooling more difficult. In general, a season's worth of work will only generate 1/3 of a family's corn and bean calorie requirements.

About the same size as the state of Ohio, Guatemala ranks second in the world (after Colombia) in the amount of high grade coffee it produces, and it has the highest percentage of its crop classified as high quality. Over half its coffee is exported to the US, representing 1/8 of the country's GNP and generating about 1/3 of Guatemala's foreign exchange.

Guatemala produces 5% of the world's coffee, of which nearly half, 42%, is gourmet quality

Guatemala Antigua

Guatemala = country of origin

Antigua = region of origin

The Antigua valley is one of Guatemala's oldest and best-known coffee-growing regions. Its volcanoes and shallow water table help create the dry microclimate, with low humidity, lots of sun, and cool nights.

The coffee region of Antigua is an enclosed valley formed by three volcanoes: Agua, Acatenango and Fuego. Its terrain is flat and gently sloping, unlike the other volcanic coffee regions, which are more rugged. Most of the coffee trees are planted on the valley floor, already at 5,000 feet; and, some farmers also cultivate the slopes of the volcanoes up to 5,600 feet. The high pumice content in Antigua's soil (from the active Fuego volcano) keeps the relative humidity steady at 65 percent year round, unlike the other coffee regions, where humidity varies significantly between dry and rainy seasons.

Rich volcanic soil, low humidity, lots of sun and cool nights characterize the Antigua region. The valley is dominated by the magnificent Agua, Acatenango and Fuego volcanoes. Every once in a while, Fuego –one of Guatemala's three active volcanoes– adds a fresh dusting of mineral rich ash to Antigua's soil. Volcanic pumice in the soil retains moisture, which helps offset Antigua's low rainfall, the lowest of Guatemala's eight coffee regions. Like all of Guatemala's specialty coffee, Antigua Coffee is cultivated under shade. In Antigua, shade is especially dense to protect the coffee trees from the region's occasional frost during the chilly nights from December to February. The dense shade, combined with the region's shallow water table, produces a distinct microclimate within the coffee fields.

The Antigua region produces the best coffee Guatemala has to offer. Steeped in tradition and nestled among three volcanoes, the horticultural knowledge and passion for great coffee in this area yield some of the finest Central American coffees.

1870: coffee is first planted in Antigua Region

1915: a farm from Antigua coffee obtains the world prize for quality in San Francisco

1939: first registration of Antigua coffee name through a trade mark

Tasting

Aroma:	Sweet Hint of cocoa Touch of spice
Slurp:	Hint of sweetness on tip of tongue. Really nice round feel, very dusty
Taste:	An elegant, complex coffee with great depth, subtle cocoa-powder texture and soft spice flavours
Body:	Medium body
Acidity:	low to medium refined acidity
Food Pairing:	This is a favorite coffee to enjoy alongside a chocolate croissant or chocolate-dipped biscotti. Caramel and apples highlight Guatemala Antigua's subtleties.
Personal note:	When tasting Guatemala, discover its depths and complexities by allowing it to cool a bit, which will allow you to let it linger a bit longer on your tongue.