

Coffee Expo

Wednesday, 06 June 2007

On Saturday in Terramall, Trés Rios, there was a familiar smell in the air, one of freshly brewed coffee. It was the day of the 4th annual coffee barista's competition, organised by Asociacion de Cafés Finos (Specialty Coffee Association of Costa Rica).

The usual suspects were there – MacDonald's representing their McCafé brand, Spoon showing off their Grao brand, Icafé, and others such as Grupo Capresso, La Marzocco, and Café Quetzal. Most were offering their finest espresso to tempt the crowd, while others were displaying an assortment of machines, or for those with a sweet tooth, complementary cakes. Competing in the event were 6 baristas who were tasked with making their finest espresso, cappuccino, and a gourmet coffee of their choice. The coffees were judged on aroma, acidity, presentation, and for the final round, creativity.

Costa Rica is world-renowned for its coffee. In the last decade of the 18th Century Coffee was brought to this country, where it slowly spread in the highlands of the central valley. Within a few decades the number of farms had spread enough for Costa Rica to be the first Central American country to establish coffee as an industry. Exporting to Colombia and Chile soon led to exports directly to London. Soon it was possible for intellectuals in Costa Rica to further their studies in London, and return as doctors or entrepreneurs. The growth and commercialization of the coffee industry changed the country dramatically and influenced the culture, providing the freedom of expression that gave birth to the National Theatre in 1890.

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According to the Instituto del Café de Costa Rica, there are health benefits to drinking 4 or more cups of coffee per day. People who drink 4 or more cups per day reduce the risk of contracting cancer of the colon or rectum. It stimulates your metabolism and reduces cholesterol.

How to make the perfect Espresso:

Pour cold, clear water into the reservoir of your espresso machine. Make sure the boiler cap is screwed on tightly. Freshly grind some coffee to a very fine, but not powdery texture. You will need about 1 ounce per shot of espresso.

Place the ground coffee into the filter basket and pack it down lightly.

Brush off any spilled coffee from around the filter and secure the holder into the machine.

Place an espresso cup under the spout of the machine and turn it on. The machine will heat the water and when a suitable pressure is reached it will force steam through the coffee.

Watch as the coffee flows into the cup. As the coffee appears it will have a foam on the top. Observe the foam and remove the cup when the foam turns almost white. This is the signal that all the best coffee has been dispensed.

Add sugar to suit your palate and enjoy in the company of friends, maybe with a slice of cake or a chocolate truffle.