



Navigating Origins

B U R U N D I



BURUNDI FACTS

Name Republic of Burundi

Location Central Africa, east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Area 25,650 square kilometers, slightly smaller than Maryland

Capital Bujumbura

Language Kirundi (official), French (official), Swahili

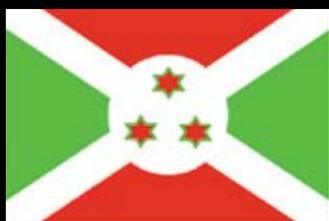
Monetary Unit Burundi franc (BIF)

Population 8,090,068

Terrain Hilly and mountainous, with a plateau in the east

Climate Moderate, with two wet seasons (February to May and September to November), and two dry seasons (June to August and December to January)

Agricultural Exports Coffee, cotton, tea, corn, sorghum, sweet potatoes, bananas, beef and milk



OFTEN CALLED the Heart of Africa, Burundi is a small country surrounded by great coffee countries, and borders Tanzania and Rwanda. Despite its location, and the fact that coffee is both the main agricultural resource and the largest source of export revenue, Burundi has yet to make a name for itself in the specialty industry.

There are a number of reasons for this: the country's civil war has displaced many farmers, forcing them into Tanzania. In addition, the country has struggled with both disease and drought. These elements combined have made it difficult to grow and process the volume and quality of coffee that could meet the needs of the specialty coffee.

Another reason that Burundi is not well-known in the specialty coffee world has more to do with world relations than coffee. The land-locked country has struggled to maintain good relations with neighboring countries. After the 1996 coup by President Buyoya, Burundi was under economic embargo, not only from its neighbors, but from the U.S. In addition, the U.S. suspended all but humanitarian aid. In 1999, the embargos were lifted, and the country is now in better standing with its neighbors, as well as with other countries. Despite the political unrest and tribal rivalries, the coffee industry in Burundi has managed to survive. "The coffee industry is probably one of the rare sectors of the economy that did not suffer that much from the tumultuous past years," says Steve Ndabambalire, president of BK traders, LLC. "The reason is probably because coffee growing is so important to Burundian families that it inspired respect and consideration from war protagonists.



Despite past turmoil, we have had excellent crops over the past decade except random incidents due to weather conditions like last year."

Coffee

Coffee has been in the country since the early 1900s—it is believed that Belgian missionaries brought coffee into Burundi as early as 1904. Currently, the majority of the coffee is arabica, although some robusta is also grown. Coffee is planted on hills and mountains throughout the country at altitudes of 1,000–2,000 meters. The main growing regions are Mumirwa, Buyenzi and Kirimiro. Most of the estimated 800,000 smallholder coffee farms are small, less than one hectare, bringing the total acreage to approximately 60,000 hectares.

Despite the prominence of some coffee diseases, most farmers use little, if any, non-organic fertilizers or pesticides. "This coffee is almost organic, as growers don't have enough means to pay for pesticides and chemical fertilizers" says Emmanuel Nkengurutse, economics director for the Coffee Board of Burundi (OCIBU). "They rely on using organic fertilizers and natural means against pests." These means include natural mulch to preserve moisture and enhance the soil, as well as mixed crops to help reduce pests and diseases.

The coffee is typically washed or fully washed, and the country has a number of processing stations located in the growing regions. The fully washed processing is well-regulated, with the Societies Managing Coffee Washing Stations (Sogestals) being responsible for purchasing, pulping and washing cherries.



After wet-processing and fermentation, the beans are sent to one of the milling manufacturers, where they are sorted and graded. Once this is complete, the coffee is stored in warehouses. The washed, or semi-washed, beans are typically depulped, washed and dried by the growers, who then send the beans directly to the mills. Exportation is by three routes, all of which take around a week.

Future

Much of the progress Burundi has made, especially in terms of quality processing, comes from the assistance of OCIBU. The board's main mission is to coordinate the coffee sector in



Burundi, as well as to define and promote coffee quality standards. It is made up of representatives of many segments of the industry, including coffee farmers and associations of farmers, exporters, the financial sector and research institutes.

Burundian farmers have also started organizing into associations, another key asset for the improvement of the industry. "Through the growers' representatives on these boards, there is now an effective sharing of interests and concerns between the growers, the coffee board, the Sogestals and the exporters," says Ndabambalire. "The customer's voice can now be heard throughout the chain up to the farmer and adjustments made accordingly."

In addition, all coffee exports are quality tested by OCIBU to achieve the highest level of quality possible. This is done at two coffee-quality laboratories located in Bujumbura and Gitega, both of which regulate the coffee from harvest to export.

"The coffee industry is in the liberalization and privatization process," says Nkengurutse. "Coffee prices to the growers have been liberalized and stakeholders are free to organize their business as they want. And, in the coming three

years, all washing stations and milling plants belonging to the state will be sold to private business men, allowing OCIBU to be transformed into a regulatory body in the true sense of the word."

These quality improvements, and the ones set for the future, have allowed the true flavors of Burundi coffee to come forward. When lightly roasted, Burundis offer a wild, fruity acidity with a pungent, bittersweet note. The hope is that the country will continue to have increased civil and economic sustainability, and thus increased quality and consistency in the cup.



BURUNDI COFFEE AT A GLANCE

Coffee Nearly all of the coffee is Arabica (96 percent). Varieties include Jackson Bourbon and Mibirisi.

Flavor Full-bodied, with bright acidity and a sweet flavor. Often has the wild note typical of East African coffees.

Main Growing Regions Buyenzi, Kirimiro and Mumirwa

Elevation 1,000–2,000 meters

Farms Average size is less than one hectare

Flowering Sept.–Nov.

Harvest Feb.–June

Shipping Sept.–May

Processing Fully washed and washed

Main Buyers Germany, Belgium, U.S., Japan, Australia, Switzerland