

# I N D I A



## INDIA FACTS

**Name** Republic of India

**Capital City** New Delhi

**Location** Southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, between Burma and Pakistan

**Area** 3,287,590 sq. km., or slightly more than one-third the size of the U.S.

**Languages** Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30 percent of the people; there are 21 other official languages

**Currency** Indian rupee (INR)

**Population** 1,147,995,898

**Climate** Varies from tropical monsoon in south to temperate in north

**Terrain** Upland plain in south, flat to rolling plain along the Ganges, deserts in west, Himalayas in north

INDIA MIGHT BE known as a wild and exotic place—after all, it plays host to the Ganges River, wild animals of all kinds, and exquisite buildings and palaces—but it's not known for its wild and exotic coffees. At least not in the U.S., where beverage consumers tend to think of India in terms of tea, if they think of India at all. Yet, India is the sixth largest producer of coffee in the world, behind leaders like Brazil, Vietnam and Colombia. According to the India Coffee Board, the estimated crop forecast for the 2008-09 season is nearly 300,000 metric tons. In light of this large amount of production and an essentially open market in the U.S., India is working hard to change its perception among U.S. coffee drinkers through increased quality and better marketing.

## History

The story goes that coffee came to India as early as the 1600s AD, due to the travels of saint Baba Budan. Budan was on his pilgrimage to Mecca when he traveled through the seaport of Mocha, Yemen and discovered coffee. He smuggled coffee beans out of Arabia and planted them in the hills of the Chikkamagaluru region, which are now named Baba Budan Hills in his honor.

The cuttings were spread by the Dutch, who occupied parts of India in the 17th century, and the coffee cultivation was continued by the British, who began establishing plantations through southern India. In 1905, the India Coffee Board was established to help increase the quality and promotion of Indian coffee through cupping labs, research and education.

Throughout much of its history, the Indian coffee industry was tightly regulated by the government, namely via the Coffee Board. This has recently changed, with the deregulation of the industry, and many growers are now branding their coffees as estate-grown, which is helping to increase the quality.



## Production

The majority of India's coffee is grown in the three southern states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Nearly 65 percent of the total production comes from Karnataka, while Tamil Nadu contributes approximately 15 percent and Kerala makes up around 20 percent. It's estimated that there are more than 210,000 coffee producers in India, the majority of which are farming plots of around two hectares each.

Coffee is typically grown under a two-tier mixed shade canopy of more than 50 different types of shade trees, namely evergreen leguminous trees. Nearly 50 different types of shade trees are found on coffee plantations. In addition, coffee farmers often grow products other than coffee—spices and fruits, such as vanilla, pepper, bananas and oranges, are often planted alongside the coffee trees. These additional crops not only offer additional income and security to the farmers, they also lend a



unique taste and aroma to the coffee itself. Arabica coffee plantations are usually at elevations of between 3,000 and 6,000 feet, while Robusta plantations are lower, around 1,000 feet. Some farmers also grow high-quality robusta at more than 2,500 feet.

Growing coffee in India is unique in many ways, but perhaps no more so than the rainy season. Coffee regions in India receive up to 120 inches of rain each year, either in a single monsoon or spread between two. Such heavy rain means that water often just runs off the slopes, thus quickly creating drought issues shortly after the monsoon season. To counter this, many farmers now harvest the rain fall in large pools or tanks to use for irrigation, pulping and fermentation during the dry months.

Processing varies by region and varietal—dry processing, wet processing and monsooning all play a role. Wet processed arabica is typically called “plantation arabica,” while wet-processed robusta is called “parchment robusta.” Monsooned coffees are something unique to India; believed to simulate the conditions that prevailed in the wooden sailing ships that originally



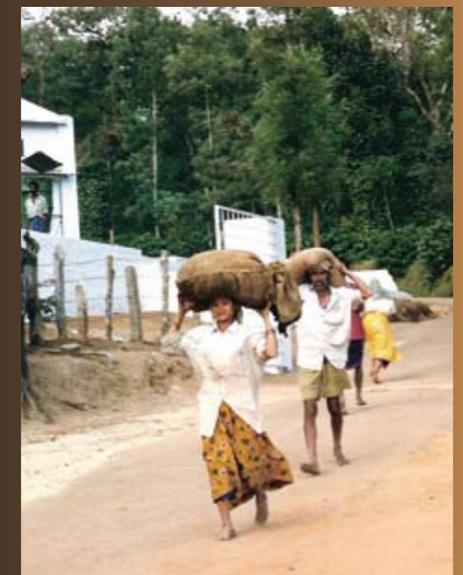
carried Indian coffee around the world, monsooned coffees are not accidentally created, but put through a special process to gain their unique flavor. Unwashed coffee beans—either arabica or robusta—are spread in four- to six-inch thick layers in open-walled, roofed warehouses to expose them to the moist monsoon winds. During the 12-16 week process, the beans absorb moisture, nearly doubling in size, and turn white or golden in color. They also shed their new-crop acidity.

The flavor profile of Indian coffees varies a great deal, depending on quality, location, production process and varietal. Most often, the coffees carry a pronounced body, low acidity and subtle spicy notes. Monsooned coffees have their own unique flavor as well, ranging from a pungent wildness to a deep, mustiness, with their prevailing feature being a distinct lack of acidity.

## Future

As more and more growers take the reins to produce single-estate coffees of high quality, India looks to be growing from a big producer who's been under the U.S. radar to a big producer who's on cupping tables and

in pound-bags around the country. With help from the Coffee Board—which now offers a postgraduate degree in coffee quality management—the quality of Indian coffee can only continue to rise. And that's good news not just for India, but for countries like the U.S., which will soon be looking to origin countries that can produce large amounts of high-quality coffees.



## INDIA COFFEE AT A GLANCE

**Coffee** Arabica and robusta

**Altitude** Arabica is grown at 3,000 and 6,000 feet, whereas Robusta is grown above 1,000 feet

**Growing Regions** Karnataka, Kerala, Tamilnadu

**Harvest** November and February

**Processing** Wet and dry processing as well as moonsooned

