

# What's So Good About Coffee?

by Sharon Carter

Our Texas ancestors were known to drink up to 20 cups of coffee a day according to Randolph Campbell's history: *Gone To Texas*. Cattle drives depended on an ample supply of the piping hot black brew for cowboys. I imagine coffee was a stimulating source of energy in settling the wild west. However, along with its history, this beverage has endured an encumbering bias as an unhealthy habit, and was once commonly referred to as the "devil's brew."

Yet our ancestors were on to something. . .

Conversely, in the new millennium, extensive studies over the last ten years have indicated that when a moderate amount (1-4 cups) of coffee is consumed throughout the day, it can be a positively healthy, healing, and disease-preventive beverage! Very good news for 54% of Americans who are habitual drinkers.

Health benefits stem from the coffee bean, itself, with its significant caffeine content and powerful antioxidant activity. Without expounding a wealth of clinical study details in this article, evidence proffers this astonishing merit list to date:

*\*Reduces the risk of Parkinson's disease, asthma attacks, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, Dementia, Cirrhosis, prostate cancer, and colon cancer.*

*\*Reduces the effects of diabetes.*

*\*Treatment for migraine headaches.*

*\*Improved reaction time and short term memory function, selecting information faster and processing it better.*

*\*Helps prevent dental cavities.*

*Kona veterinarian, Dr. Ota, picks coffee*



*\*Keeps drivers alert, reducing accidents.*

*\*Protects against the development of cataracts and gallstones.*

*\*Improves mood, increasing self-confidence, motivation, and contentedness, increasing dopamine formation in the brain.*

*\*Quells appetite*

*\*Aids bowel movement*

*\*Aids recovery from "jet lag" fatigue  
Remedy for "post lunch dip" when circadian rhythm hits 2:00pm low.*

*\*Increases enduring muscular performance capacity in physical exercise.*

*\*Morning jump start hydration.*

*\*Provides Niacin, fights pellagra.*

*\*Stimulates our central nervous system, heart and circulation.*

Most impressive is that coffee is America's number one source of antioxidants. We get more from coffee than anything else we eat or drink, boosting the immune system, promoting

# What's So Good About Coffee?

wellness, and generally contributing to suppressing causes for death, allowing for a longer life.

Antioxidants are powerful components found in natural foods, particularly coffee berries or cherries, that counteract and reduce the harmful effects free radicals have on the body. Free radicals are disruptive molecular byproducts in our bodies which significantly damage our cells.

The roasting process has a positive impact on the antioxidant output of the coffee beans. Medium to dark roasts, ten minutes or longer, spark the highest level of antioxidant activity. Similar benefits are found in both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee.

Another surprising discovery is that coffee, which has long been thought to be detrimental in sustaining hydration, has proved to have no greater diuretic effect than water. We can count it as a plus toward our daily intake of fluids.

Ironically, most of coffee's virtues were unearthed while investigating the potential for coffee to produce adverse effects on human health. So far, nothing negative has been substantiated, with the exception of individual tolerance. As things stand, you probably know whether you can tolerate this drink: Heartburn? Jitters? Stomach ache? Allergy? Sleeping problems? Too much cream & sugar? Pregnant? Doctor's advice?

However, many of us might be motivated to put coffeemakers on our gift list, and spend a little more time visiting the coffee houses of Wimberley with our friends, where the only risk appears to be the recent global spike in coffee prices.

Our parents may have had a quick bitter cup of "instant" to perk up their morning, but since the 1970s, the trend toward "gourmet coffee" has taken a firm hold on consumers.

"Gourmet" describes a discerning palate, and "cup character" refers to the aroma, fragrance, acidity, body, sweetness, aftertaste, and freshness of a delicious cup of coffee made from particular beans.

These selective types of coffees are offered in our village by SHEPHERD'S CUP, RAFIKI, and MAUI WOWIE. Their choice of beans may come from tropical estates and plantations in approximately twenty-five countries located in Africa, South America, Central America, Mexico, Caribbean Islands, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Dominican Republic/Haiti, Costa Rica, and the United States.

The only "Made-in-America" beans come from Hawaiian farms, where Kona coffee trees have been cultivated on the slopes of Moana Loa volcano for nearly 125 years.

Kona farmers take great pride in their beans, so I interviewed a remarkable couple who graciously provided me with a "taste" of what makes their coffee so "gourmet", and the process it goes through to reach our homes, shops, and coffee houses.

The farmers are Bob and Cea Smith of Smithfarms, who have grown their crop for twenty-two years, on a small five acre family estate, the way Kona farmers have done it for well over a century. At 1,800 feet elevation, the *Coffea Arabica* trees grow slow and produce bigger berries--or cherries. Each cherry has two beans, and certain "peaberries" have one. *Coffea Arabica* is the world's earliest cultivated tree and bears 70% of the global market.

The trees are carefully monitored and cared for with deliberate personal attention. They flourish in sunny mornings and cloudy moist afternoons along with macadamia nut trees, banana, avocado and citrus. Machinery has never invaded this hillside farm.

*Kona coffee cherries*

# What's So Good About Coffee?

Over several winter months, as the green coffee cherries each independently reach a deep ripe shade of red, they are



hand-picked, placed into “waist” baskets, and then poured into 100 lb. burlap bags to be taken to a small coffee mill along the Kona Coast.

At the mill, the cherries go into the hopper to be soaked in volcanic aquifer water, where the pulper sloshes and scrubs away the fruit pulp. From there the green beans which are covered by a silvery smooth skin, go into a fermenting tank of water for up to a day, before being laid out and raked on racks to dry in the tropical sun.

The beans may be preserved in their parchment skins, or go to the green mill to have the chaff removed.

It is now ready to be shipped or roasted. Bob is dedicated to the welfare of his orchard, while wife, Cea, markets

100% Pure Kona Coffee directly, like many Kona farms, on her colorful website brimming with personality, [www.smithfarms.com](http://www.smithfarms.com).

DuAnne Redus, who opened her MAUI WOWIE coffee house in 2006, supports authentic Hawaiian coffee. Her vision, after her husband passed away, was to create a community gathering place with the warm atmosphere of an “ohana” (family), along with a bit of Hawaiian-style fantasy and “aloha” spirit. A plentiful array of local business cards also garnish the tropics decor of the premises. Redus is sincerely devoted to serving the community, but admits the risks of succeeding with a new small town business challenge her. For this reason, she has a small photocopy of a woman standing on the edge of a cliff tacked onto her office wall.

To benefit Wimberley’s youth, Redus holds Thursday night open mike performances, and this past month showcased twelve performers amid standing room only. Her business also runs a concession stand at WHS tournaments offering healthy lo-fat smoothies, donating 25% cash income back to the school.

Maui Wowie specializes in offering Hawaiian coffee, both 100% pure, and blends which are 10% Hawaiian beans mixed with 90% from other countries. They use pure Kona coffee in their popular espressos, and take pride in their nutritious smoothies, such as the “Wistful Waikiki”, best served with a slice of Judy’s quiche.

The RAFIKI, next to City Hall, is a fairly new small & cozy coffee house operated by local resident Nancy Adams. A year ago, when her husband suffered a stroke, she sold their “Hill Country Kitchen” in Dripping Springs and took



# What's So Good About Coffee?

over the South River restaurant whose name means "Friend" in Swahili.

She loves her regular customers, and envisions the same sort of gathering spot for folks to visit, use wi-fi, and plan their day, attracting both the church crowd and city officials. Mayor Flocke often stops by for his cup of their delicious Nicaraguan roast. She also offers smoothies and grinds, including specialty soups.

Her coffee supply comes from Barrett's Coffee, an Austin roaster of Free Trade Organic gourmet beans committed to the bona fide taste of the freshest coffee. Barrett's testifies that truly fresh roasted beans sport a strong aroma even before brewing. And a bitter cup of coffee can be avoided by not grinding the beans too fine, and by using plenty per cup.

It was over six years ago that Bruce and Katherine Neal bought THE SHEPHERD'S CUP coffee shop. After a spell of experimenting with popcorn air poppers, they invested in their own roaster and currently roast green beans into oily brunette buds, serving up fresh brew each day. They call it JGC, or "Just Good Coffee".

Their regular customers and tourists, alike, can also choose from the assortment of multi-flavored roasts on display in glass jugs, which are delivered by various specialty suppliers. Flavors were sprayed onto these beans while still hot from the roast. Blueberry Cobbler is the runaway best seller. Iced Guatemalan & Sumatra coffees, coupled with chunk of yummy fudge are also a popular pick.

Katherine tells how her Louisiana ancestors and relatives always purchased their coffee beans, green in their parchment skins (which preserves freshness), from a burlap sack at the country store. They would pour a single layer of the beans into a large cast iron skillet and shake it over the fire until the skins chaffed off, and the beans turned

deep dark brown. Her father put his brew in a thermos to accompany him throughout the day, sipping espresso-sized cups every thirty minutes. If any coffee was leftover after two and a half hours, it was tossed away. Three hours is the limit on a fresh cup of coffee.

This story excited me, because now I can conceive of how early Texans could possibly drink twenty cups of coffee a day! I have come full circle in my mission to explore "what's so good about coffee?"

I can also imagine the legendary John Coffee Hays (whose name distinguishes our county) bravely commanding his company of Texas Rangers throughout the dangerous hill country, spurred on by an invigorating hot "cup of Joe."

*photos (c) 2010 Cea Smith  
story (c)9/2010 Sharon Carter*

#### Sources:

CNN HEALTH 2010 report  
POSITIVELY COFFEE.ORG  
MEDICINENET.COM  
Dr. JOE VINSON, prof of biochemistry, Univ. of Scranton  
NATIONAL COFFEE ASSOCIATION 2008 report  
CLINTON ALLRED, assist prof., Dept. of Nutrition & Food Science, TEXAS A&M  
KRISTA TANNAHILL, Canadian writer, coffee specialist. 2009  
ICO, INTERNATIONAL COFFEE ORGANIZATION 2009  
Prof LAWRENCE ARMSTRONG, PhD Environmental Physiology, Univ. of Conn; coffee science.org 2004  
NY ACADEMY OF SCIENCE: Coffee & Your health 2004  
JOHN HAYS, TEXAS STATE HISTORICAL ASSOC. (THSA)  
HISTORY OF TEXAS TRAIL DRIVES, fortumbleweed.net  
SMITH FARMS, KONA, HAWAII  
KONA COFFEE FARMERS ASSOCIATION 2010  
BARRETT'S COFFEE of Austin (Darren, mgr.)  
KATHERINE NEAL, THE SHEPHERD'S CUP, WIMBERLEY, TX  
NANCY ADAMS, RAFIKI, WIMBERLEY, TX  
DuANNE REDUS, MAUI WOWIE, WIMBERLEY, TX