

Hey, brew!

In the last few years, some crafty entrepreneurs have added cappuccinos and cortados to corn and cattle as staples of central South Africa

Bloemfontein isn't necessarily the first, third or even fifth city you'll think of when you crave a good cuppa. The best coffee you've had there is most likely the one you bought at a franchised café on the way to a meeting, and it was only good enough because you needed that shot of caffeine. Next time, though, take a minute (or 10) and indulge in a coffee shop, because the City of Roses now has a coffee culture that delivers.

"There is still room for improvement but our coffee culture continues to grow – it's an exciting time." – James Kilbourn, Stereo Cafe

In the past five years, five coffee roasters have opened in Bloemfontein and choosing where to go sip on a trendy beverage is now worthy of debate.

In 2011, James Kilbourn became involved in the coffee industry as a sideline business, but after he opened Stereo Café in 2014, he hasn't felt the need to keep coffee on the side anymore. "I love the social interaction and sense of community that coffee has. It's a people-driven business and has allowed me to connect with many interesting people and form new relationships – all of which started over a cup of coffee."

At Stereo Café, Kilbourn is personally involved in every roasted bean. "Every new coffee I choose to roast offers its own unique challenges based on its unique characteristics. From the varietal of coffee to where and how it was grown and processed, it all affects the way you roast the specific coffee which will, in turn, determine the ultimate flavour of the coffee. It's a dynamic product." Stereo Café also has a particularly special coffee on offer, he says, "It is from Finca Las Mercedes, a farm owned by Roger Mairena and his wife Isabel in the Matagalpa region of Nicaragua. The coffee is named Don Roger's Tropical Fruit Symphony, and has a wonderful aroma when ground and sweet, tropical fruit-like flavours, with hints of caramel and chocolate in the aftertaste." And that's a far cry from your typical franchise coffee.

The winner's cup

Recently, Bloemfontein hosted the Central Region Coffee Competition. The event, endorsed by the Speciality Coffee Association of Southern Africa (SCASA), offers



the local coffee community a competition that tests their abilities according to strict international rules and score sheets. This year, Kilbourn won the Cup Taster's competition, which involves eight sets of three cups of coffee – the winner is the one who can identify the odd one out of each set using their visual, olfactory and gustatory senses.

At the same competition, Stevo Kühn from Urban Brew won the barista competition, while Tsepho Modiakgotla of Royal Roastery walked away as the latte art winner.



Kühn fell in love with coffee brewing while teaching at a primary school, but traded his day job to train baristas and disadvantaged people with the aim of getting them employment in the industry, as well as to offer certified training courses by SCASA. Ruan Immelman from Royal Roastery started out in 2015, when he bought his first coffee roaster, and feels that Bloemfontein has much to learn in terms of coffee culture.

Learning curve

Granted, the coffee culture in Bloemfontein is growing slower than in other metropolitans, but according to Kilbourn the slower pace allows the roasters to pioneer something great. "The roasters here are willing to invest

in training for their staff and sourcing good quality roasted coffee. There is still room for improvement but our coffee culture continues to grow – it's an exciting time," he says.

Adriaan and Inge Botha from Bloemfontein Coffee Roasting Co. agree. Their sideline coffee roasting started over weekends and after work in a little flat outside their home – roasting, packing and labelling everything themselves. After the demand for their product became too big for the flat, they opened their roastery in Langenhoven Park.

"Over the last two years, there have been a number of coffee events in Bloemfontein, which have exposed locals to the coffee culture of freshly and specialty

The Cup Taster's competition requires you to utilise your olfactory senses.



While most opt for milky varieties, trends are changing in Bloemfontein.

roasted coffee. Local roasters are showing customers different techniques for brewing coffee and how to play with the different coffees to ensure maximum taste. Coffee appreciations, pairings and tastings are done to educate more and more people," Inge says.

Immelman feels that Bloemfontein is still in baby shoes where speciality coffee is concerned. "We haven't peaked yet, we're still in the starting blocks, and there is a lot that still needs to happen. Here you'll pay between R65 and R85 for a 250g packet of coffee, where the figure can easily be double that in Cape Town or Johannesburg. Our people still need to learn about good coffee and be prepared to pay more for specialty coffees," he explains. Royal Roastery do coffee tastings and pairings which have become quite the outing for those with a nose for coffee.

Marie-Louise Smith, organiser of the Central Region Coffee Competition, says it's important to note that



although Bloemfontein has independent roasteries, there are also others who don't roast their own brand of beans, but have contributed a lot to the coffee community of the city. "We have Stereo Café, Royal Coffee Roastery, Bloemfontein Coffee Roasting Co, Urban Brew, Faba, and Jaru who are independents, but we also have Extraction Coffee Bar, MH Coffee, Home Brew, Snobs Coffee and LEM Coffee who don't have their own-brand coffee, but definitely a share of the market, as most people in Bloemfontein don't know who is roasting their own beans and who just makes a great cup of coffee."

According to most of the roasters, the coffee-drinking population of Bloemfontein can afford to experiment more when it comes to coffee. The older generation still prefer 'normal' filter coffee and the typical coffee orders are those of the milky variety – classic cappuccinos and flat whites. Kilbourn says the trends are changing, with Stereo Café seeing more espresso and cortado orders. "But most people still prefer larger volume drinks, although many are starting to opt for drinks based on flavour and not necessarily on volume."

There is a great number of people who believe that humanity runs on coffee and that's exactly what you'll get in Bloemfontein – coffee and a humbling dose of humanness.

How to get there



Airlink connects Bloemfontein with Johannesburg and Durban. Got to page 75 for flight schedules. www.flyairlink.com

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