

Indonesia and coffee

With about 17,000 islands and some 120 to 130 active volcanoes, Indonesia lies roughly between Australia and the Asian continent. In a lot of ways you could compare "American" Colombia to "Asian" Indonesia: their famous coffees to start with of course, but also their climate, ethnic and bio-diversity. Both Colombia and Indonesia are big specialty Arabica exporting countries as they represent number 1 and 2 worldwide.



But both countries are famous as well for their ethnic diversity (Indonesia consists of hundreds of distinct native ethnic and linguistic groups) and bio-diversity. Forests cover approximately 70% of the country and Indonesia is second only to Australia in terms of total endemic species, with 36% of its 1,531 species of bird and 39% of its 515 species of mammal being endemic.

Both Colombia and Indonesia have the ideal combination of rainfall, fertile soils and temperatures for the cultivation of coffee and both are located in the tropics and on the edge of tectonic plates and thus have past and present volcanic activity (Indonesia contains the most volcanoes of any country in the world). And of course they are definitely worth a visit and a must for coffee lovers.

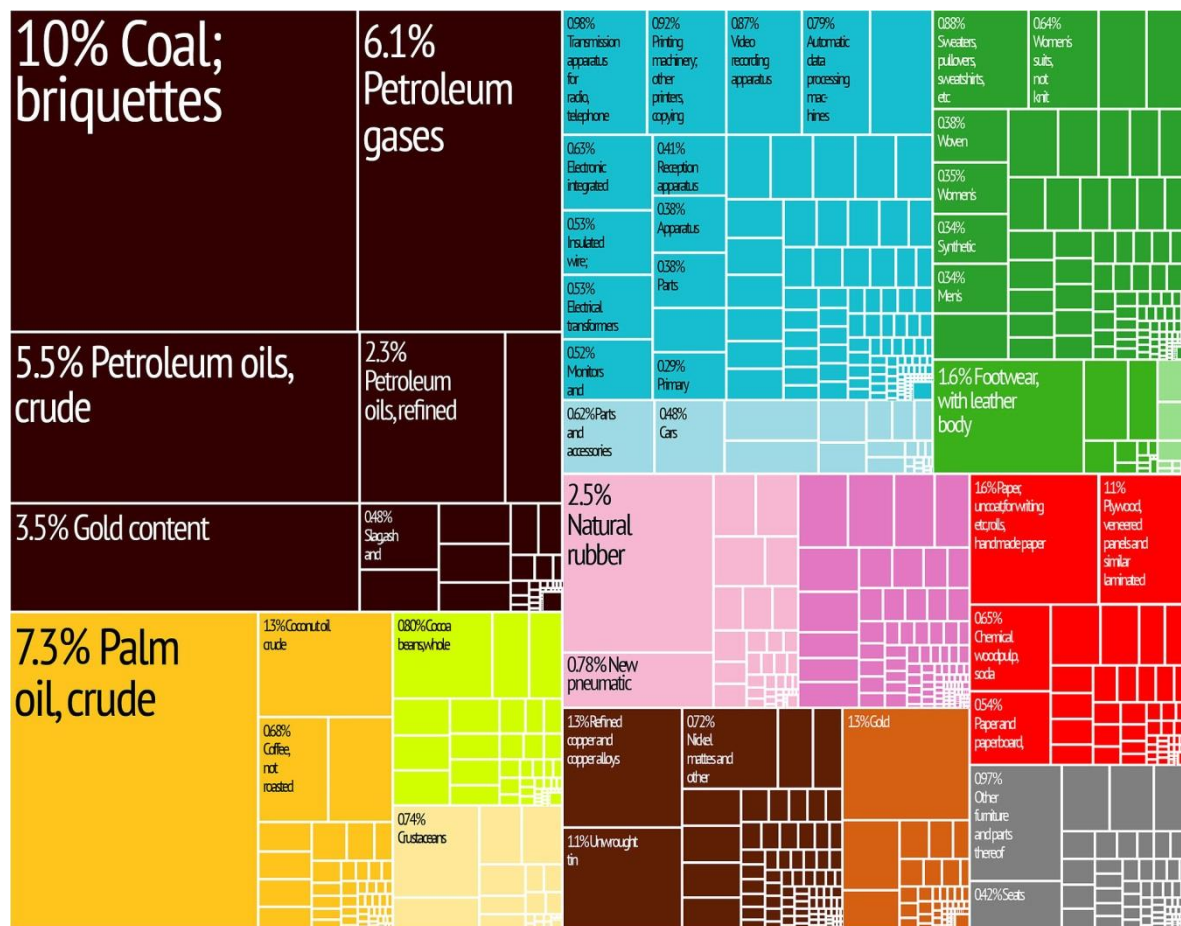
Coffee came early to Indonesia. The first plants arrived at the end of the 17th century when Indonesia was a Dutch colony. In those days coffee was only more widely cultivated in Arabia and Ethiopia and originally all Indonesian coffee came from Yemen (so all of it was Arabica). It is said that nearly 100 genetic varieties of Arabica coffee have been created since those days between them the famous Sumatera Lintong, Sumatera Koerinci, Sumatera Solok Minang, Java Preanger, Java Ijen Raung, Java Estate, Sulawesi Toraja, Papua Wamena, just to name a few. Coffee was a highly profitable business for the Dutch but of course not for the population, that suffered under the colonial rule.

By the mid-1870s the Dutch East Indies expanded Arabica coffee-growing areas from Java to Sumatra, Bali, Sulawesi and Timor. But at that time coffee rust severely affected and almost eliminated most of the Arabica-Typica cultivars and Robusta coffee was widely introduced. Robusta production, mostly from lower altitudes from the island of Sumatra soon overtook Java's production and Sumatra until present days remains the most important producing region by volume today (60 to 75% to Java's 15%). But Java's name was already made and until today it remains a synonym for coffee in several countries throughout the world.

Indonesia is the fourth biggest coffee producing country of the world, but Arabica coffee represents only 25% of its production. Coffee, as in the rest of the world, is mostly produced by small farmers with average holdings of 1-2 hectares, and many of them grow other crops as well in the same areas; in Indonesia mostly bananas, pepper and cacao.

Many coffees from Indonesia are wet-milled at the farms and then directly dry-milled and dried again until it can be stored without starting to rot. This practice is different from most other countries, where the coffee remains in parchment until it is milled just before export. In Indonesia hulling machines are used that can even mill 18% wet parchment coffee, which probably causes a typical blue/green color found in some Indonesian green coffees. This semi-washed method is known commonly as wet-hulling. These practices could well be the cause of the sometimes big differences in quality between separate lots of the same origin of Indonesian green coffees.

Indonesia has the largest economy in Southeast Asia and coffee only represents a small part of its production and exports.



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As you can see, Indonesia counts with abundant natural resources like oil and natural gas, tin, copper and gold as well as agricultural products including rice, palm oil, tea, coffee, cacao, medicinal plants, spices and rubber.