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Sisters, Oregon

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The coffee culture of Sisters

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Sisters must be near the top of the chart when it comes to per capita coffee consumption. With two coffee houses, three coffee kiosks - Bright Spot, Espresso Junction and Outlaw Coffee - and numerous other caffeine fueling stations, there is a brew just right for everyone.

Each vendor has its own special tricks and fills a particular niche.

Sisters Coffee Company is the largest of the local operations and, for many, is an extension of home and office. Coffeenistas gather there for meetings, to work, to savor a cup and to just relax.

Sisters Coffee Company is the only local company that follows the whole coffee making process through locally.

The only thing the business does not do is grow its own coffee beans.

"We are the only company that actually roasts coffee in Sisters. We have been doing it since 1989. In fact, we are one of the oldest roasters in Central Oregon," said Jared Durham, son of Sisters Coffee Company owners Joy and Winfield Durham.

Coffee comes from all over the world, and each has its own unique flavor. Fine coffee is like fine wine; there are many characteristics that form a delicate balance of flavors that combine to make the perfect cup to savor and enjoy. Acidity is an issue for some connoisseurs who have sensitive stomachs.

"Kona has less acidity than any other coffee from around the world because it is grown at high elevation in volcanic soil. The only other coffee that is close to it is pure Blue Mountain Jamaican coffee, but it is hard to get the real thing as Jamaica doesn't have the certification process that Hawaii has. They just don't seem to care. The low acidity can make a big difference for people who get upset stomachs when they drink coffee," said Frank Halverson, owner of Bad Ass Coffee.

Other tricks of the trade are the water that is used.

"The water is really important in making a good cup of coffee. We only use spring water or well water to brew our coffee. The chemicals that the city has to put in the water to satisfy the feds can really affect the taste," said Halverson.

Freshness of the coffee is also a factor.

"We order once a week, and they just roast what we order so that it is always fresh. They roast in Salt Lake City, as coffee comes out better when it is roasted in a high and dry climate," said Halverson.

Sisters Coffee Company agrees that freshness and a high dry climate are important to coffee roasting, which is one of the reasons they located in Sisters.

"We roast five days a week on the average, four to six hours per day. Probably we roast about 35 hours a week. Well over a ton of coffee per week is roasted," said Durham.

The more than a ton of coffee per week is not consumed just in Sisters, as the company has a long history of wholesale coffee sales.

"We started out as purely a wholesale company, and a few years later we began to move into retail. It took a long time, but now our retail is starting to outpace our wholesale," said Durham.

A little known fact is that the caffeine level of coffee is affected by the darkness of the roast.

"The roast is really important to the flavor and also determines the amount of caffeine. Most people don't realize it, but the greener the bean the more caffeine. Darker roasts actually have less caffeine," said Halverson.

The processes used in decaffeinating coffee vary considerably.

"There are two methods of decaffeinating coffee that are used in the United States. One is the Swiss water system, which only uses water. The other uses chemicals and takes much less time, so it is less expensive. I always tell people if you want to drink chemicals, drink regular decaf. You always need to look. It will always say on the bag if it is the Swiss water process. If you want decaf, it is much healthier to drink Swiss water process," said Halverson.

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