

This is followed by a process of cracking and winnowing when the beans are cracked open using a machine and the beans are broken into smaller pieces which are then winnowed to help separate the beans and the nibs. The shells are used to make Chocolate Herbal Tea that smells like hot chocolate and is a speciality here. After this there is another hand process where the women at the factory separate the nibs. The nib is what is used to make the chocolates and along with organic cane sugar it is added to granite grinders.

The granite stones crack the cell wall of the beans and release cacao butter that results in a paste. The chocolate is in the grinder for 3-5 days and a rich chocolate liquor is the final result. The cacao beans are 50 per cent mass and 50 per cent fat. The grinding process develops flavour and fineness of the chocolate. The cacao butter is added back into the chocolate and no other emulsifiers are actually used to soften the chocolate. This chocolate liquor is allowed to age further to develop flavour and is then tempered by hand.

Tempering is an important process that actually gives the chocolate its shine and snap. After the chocolate is cooled it is set in polycarbonate moulds, kept in the refrigerator for 10 minutes and is hand-wrapped and packed in boxes. This happens in the cooler section of the factory where the temperature is correctly monitored.

The chocolates at Mason & Co are single origin which means that the origin is from one particular place. Each batch of chocolate can be traced back to the farm it was sourced from so the company is also a single estate company that can stay true to the origin of the bean over time. Again in artisanal chocolates, the difference in taste largely comes from the bean — how it is processed and it are these subtleties that are sought to be discovered. Being an organic company, only organic cacao beans directly purchased from the farmer



are used. No wonder it tastes better.

The women-run factory is led by Saraswati who is the manager of the factory and was trained by Jane. Saraswati has in turn trained the other women who work here. The chocolates are naturally vegan as no dairy product is used in the process. Interestingly, you will also find a special coffee bar that feels like 'eating' an espresso using a coffee bean from Blue Tokai and cacao butter. The tour lasts about two hours including a tasting session and is one of the best ways to spend an insightful time in Pondicherry. With its heart in the right place, these chocolates reflect that very ethos in their taste.

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