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If you love your coffee, you already know this; what lands in your cup is no accident. The journey from bean to brew is a carefully choreographed process and every decision along the way shapes the flavour, aroma and texture you savour.

The 'farm' start
Coffee's flavour is the result of a chain of decisions that begins at the farm. Plant variety, altitude, soil health, rainfall and shade cover all influence how a coffee cherry develops. At forest-friendly collectives, coffee grows under a multi-layered canopy, which slows cherry maturation and allows sugars and organic acids to develop more evenly. Post-harvest processing then shapes how these compounds express themselves in the cup.

"Fermentation time, oxygen exposure, temperature, and drying speed can significantly influence sweetness, acidity, mouthfeel, and aromatic complexity. When these steps are carefully managed, the coffee tends to taste cleaner, more balanced, and more expressive, often requiring less aggressive roasting or brewing to taste good," says Shruti Ajmera Reddy, CEO of BeWild by Beforest. In other words, long before the roasting drum starts spinning, the groundwork for flavour has already been laid.

Sensory science of a sip

When coffee is brewed with fresh grounds and appropriate extraction parameters, it releases a spectrum of aromas and flavours. But what exactly are we tasting? "These notes reflect our sensory response to volatile and non-volatile chemical compounds rather than the direct identification of the compounds themselves. Terms such as 'citrus', 'chocolate', or 'spice' serve as familiar reference points that translate complex chemistry into everyday language," says Rishina Kuruvilla, Head of Sustainability and CSR, Kelachandra Coffee. In sensory science, the distinctions matter. "Taste" refers strictly to sensations detected on the tongue - sweet, sour, bitter, salty and umami. "Aroma" is olfactory perception. It's both orthonasal (what you smell) and retronasal



MUST-HAVE BEAN!

Bangalore's beloved brew begins with altitude, rainfall & decisions made far beyond city limits



Mr. Sunith Reddy,
CEO Beforest, Lifestyle Solutions



Shruti Ajmera Reddy,
CEO of Bewild and Sunith Reddy, CEO of Beforest - Sorting

(what you perceive while drinking). Flavour is the integrated experience of taste, aroma and mouthfeel combined.

"What we commonly call 'tasting notes' are therefore primarily aromatic and flavour perceptions rather than pure tastes. I've always found it remarkable that altitude, soil composition, and rainfall patterns - factors entirely outside the roasting lab or café - can so profoundly shape what we perceive as brightness, sweetness, or structure," adds Kuruvilla. The science may be complex. The experience? Instinctive.

Making sense of tasting notes

The coffee journey is meticulous. From harvesting ripe cherries to skilled roasting, each stage lays the foundation for a superior cup. Grinding and brewing are the final unlock; the moment craftsmanship translates into character.

"Coffee tasting notes are a way



Rishina Kuruvilla,
at World of Coffee

of translating experience into language. After years in coffee, you begin to recognise patterns in flavour, aroma, texture, and finish. Tasting notes help describe these sensations clearly - what you smell, what you taste, how the coffee feels on the palate, and how it lingers. They are not about fancy terms but about understanding balance,



cleanliness, and whether a coffee truly expresses where it comes from," says Tapaswini, Director, Marketing and Promotions, Harley Coffee; Marketing Head, Speciality Coffee Association of India (SCAI). "I am also particularly fascinated by the interplay between brewing techniques and coffee varieties - how the right technique can elevate the unique characteristics of a coffee," she adds.

Cupping vs tasting

Coffee tasting and cupping are often used interchangeably, but they are not identical. Cupping is formal. Structured. Methodical. It follows a defined protocol with a specific grind size and water temperature.

"In cupping, the coffee is brewed, then the crust of grounds on top is broken to smell the aroma carefully. After removing the grounds, the coffee

is tasted by slurping it with a spoon, like wine tasting. This slurping spreads the coffee across the palate, activating all taste senses, like sweet, salty, and savoury, at once. In short, cupping is a precise and detailed way to analyse coffee, while coffee tasting can be more casual and focused on personal preference," explains Tapaswini.

Sreeram Gangadharan, co-founder of Maverick and Farmer and director of administration and marketing at SCAI, underscores the rigour. "Coffee cupping is a systematic evaluation of coffee's quality, involving a taste test of sorts. Experts assess the coffee's aroma, flavour, acidity, and body. Typically, three cups of the same coffee are prepared under uniform conditions to ensure consistency. Tasters slurp the coffee, evaluating its flavours and notes, and scores are given based on the coffee's characteristics. This process helps determine the coffee's overall quality and unique profile," he adds.

From soil and shade to slurping and scoring, coffee is both craft and chemistry. And the next time you catch a hint of citrus or chocolate in your cup, remember that flavour began its journey long before the kettle boiled.

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