



Cairo, the World's First Coffee Capital

Coffee consumption in Egypt developed thanks to the brotherhood of Sufi Islamic mystics, who used it during prayers. The drink soon acquired a social and cultural role: by the end of the 17th century, Cairo already had 643 bayt qahwa, coffee houses which became cultural centers and gathering places. Even today, coffee drinking is an important social occasion for Egyptians, at all levels of society. In many cases, a coffee house becomes a kind of literary circle or political club, but the peaceful, comfortable ambience also makes it an ideal place in which to do business, and in fact many coffee houses can be found in markets, where traders meet to negotiate. In Egypt, as in Syria, when ordering coffee you also need to say how much sugar you prefer, because sugared water is used in the preparation. You can choose from mildly sweet (arriha), medium-sweet (mazboot), or very sweet (ziyada); bitter coffee (sada) is reserved for sad occasions such as funeral ceremonies.

Kahwa bl baharat

Turkish coffee with spices

A spiced version of the classic Turkish coffee, typical of the Egyptian city of Alexandria.

Here's how to prepare your coffee in order to get the maximum amount of foam at the top.

1. Fill up your coffee cup with cold water. Transfer this water to a cezve, a small saucepan, or another container you can place on your range.
2. Add about 3 tablespoons of very finely ground coffee and 1 to 3 tablespoons of sugar. Two tablespoons is typical, while zero is hardly ever asked for. Stir this mixture thoroughly and then set your spoon aside. In order to preserve the foam, you won't ever stir your coffee again.
3. Place your cezve (or saucepan or another container) on the range on fairly low heat. You can bring the heat up as you get more experienced with this process. You're going to bring your coffee just to the brink of boiling three times. The lower your heat is, the easier it will be to pull it off of the burner at just the right stage.
4. Wait until your coffee begins to simmer and bubble. When the bubbles start to rise rapidly, immediately pull your cezve off of the heat and pour about a third of it into your coffee cup. Return it to your stove until bubbles form again and start to rise. Again, immediately pull the cezve off of your stove and pour out most of the remaining coffee into your cup. Return the cezve to the heat a third time, wait for the bubbles to rise once more, and then pour out the rest of the coffee into your cup.
5. You should have a cup of delicious smelling coffee that's got a nice thin layer of foamy bubbles on top. Do NOT stir this. Instead, give it at least thirty seconds to settle so you don't wind up drinking coffee grounds.
6. After a minute or so, your Egyptian coffee is ready to drink!

Additions To Egyptian Coffee

Some Turkish coffee is enjoyed with a small amount of cardamom. This can either come mixed in with the finely ground coffee or added afterward. If you enjoy the taste of cardamom, simply add one smashed cardamom pod to your coffee with the sugar and coffee grounds. You'll get a bit of authentic natural flavor that will make your Egyptian coffee even more unique.