



# Yemeni Coffee: Past, Present, & Future

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## Coffee's Origins in Yemen

- Native to Ethiopia, coffee took off in Yemen, where it was **first commercially traded around 1450**.
- Sufi mystics first used coffee to prepare *Qahwa*, a caffeinated drink that also uses the leaves of the stimulant *khat*. This would allow them to stay awake and perform *dhikrs* (prayers) after long working days.
- Coffee has played recurring roles in Yemeni history; for example, its trade fueled the Zaydi uprising against the Ottoman Empire in 1638.



Yemen once propelled coffee to international fame, and today, coffee may be able to save the country from the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

## Coffee through the Crisis

Today, a few companies are working to bring the famous and elusive Yemeni coffee to the world, while simultaneously addressing the humanitarian crises, including:

### Al-Mokha

- Led by Harvard Alumni & experienced businesspeople

### Port of Mokha

- Founded by Mokhtar Alkhanshali, a Yemeni-American coffee trader



The city of **Mokha**: home to the historic port



A plantation full of coffee trees

## Complication: the Culture of *Khat*

Today, Yemeni coffee faces a strong rival for agricultural resources (such as water, land, and labor), in the form *khat* or *qat*: leaves picked from the *Catha edulis* plant. When chewed, *khat* produces a mild high, as its chemicals are similar to amphetamines.

Rates of *khat* consumption are so high, its market drains a major portion of household incomes. Due to its high demand, farmers often grow *khat* over coffee, especially since it is **at least twice as profitable (domestically)** per average hectare and produces a **regular crop**.

Unfortunately, *khat* is eating up to **2/3 of cash crop land** and about **1/3 of all Yemen's ground water**, at a time when the country is already facing a severe water crisis.

While *khat* may be successful domestically, coffee has far more **international potential** for generating revenue and enabling Yemeni prosperity in the long run.



**Alkhanshali** and Yemeni civilians deep in coffee cherries



Several varieties of **Al-Mokha**

## Reputation of Yemeni Coffee

Yemeni coffee has had long connections to the **historical port of Al-Mokha**. From the name of this port and with reference to Yemeni coffee's **chocolatey undertones**, we get the word **mocha**.

Yemeni coffee is world-famous, highly coveted, and very expensive: its scarce supplies translate into high prices.

It has a distinctive taste because:

- It is grown at **high altitudes** over 2,000 meters.
- Its beans are of the high-quality **Arabica** variety.
- It reflects **long traditions** of cultivation and processing.
- It has an **intense flavor** that is heavily valued for espresso.

## Challenges

- Political instability and civil war in Yemen
- Underdeveloped transportation infrastructure complicating exportation
- Rivalry with *khat*, exacerbated by its widespread grip on Yemenis today

## The Future of Yemeni Coffee

**Yemen can claim to have what may be the finest coffee in the world. While the country now faces severe challenges, coffee may be the key to a brighter future.**