

COFFEE MATCHMAKERS: TAKING A LOOK AT MISTOBOX SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE

When it comes to coffee lovers there are two kinds of people—those who claim to be monogamous and those who play the field. Here at Baristas.com, you'll find both types, but regardless of our leanings, we've decided to cater to the philanderer in all of us with regular reviews of coffee subscription clubs and the coffees they deliver.

Each month we will subscribe to a different club and review both the company as well as the coffees they send. A Baristas.com staffer will be joined by a panel of tasters, who while they might subscribe to a certain type of coffee that they like to come home to, are more than willing to see what else is out there in hopes of having a fling with something new. They will participate in a formal cupping session as well as see how the coffees brew up at home.

You'll find our impressions and recommendations here, which will hopefully help you in your own personal quest to find a coffee that you love.

THIS MONTH'S COFFEE SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: MISTOBOX

<https://one.mistobox.com/>

The story behind the beans. MistoBox grew out of a class project that founders, Connor Riley and Samantha Meis, developed for the McGuire Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Arizona. After studying different business models, they keyed in on subscription services and decided the coffee industry with its lightweight, routinely used product was a perfect fit. Over \$10,000 in Kickstarter funds enabled them to launch in 2012. A year later, Mark Cuban invested \$75,000 on Shark Tank for 30 percent ownership. Today, the company works with 40 roasters representing 600 coffees and promises a personalized experience that approaches another business model we're reminded of—matchmaking.

How it works. To get the most out of the MistoBox experience, start by completing a short survey designed to find out whether, when it comes to coffee, you're adventurous or conservative, prefer light roast or dark, favor single origin beans or blends. Based on your input, in-house curator (matchmaker) Seth Mills will select a 12 ounce bag he thinks you'll love. If commitment is an issue for you, you can choose the four bag sampler pack (comes in two sizes--1.7 ounces each per coffee or 3.4 ounces) that will introduce you to the offerings from four different roasters. Up until now, these boxes have been "one size fits all," but after December 29, even the assortment option will be personally curated based on your coffee profile. Finish customizing your order by letting MistoBox how often you want them to ship. Depending on the plan you select, new coffee will arrive anywhere from every 10 days to every month.

What's to like. There's a lot about MistoBox that's fresh, and we're not just talking about their beans. The matchmaking aspect offers hope that you're not just hooking up with a coffee that is totally incompatible with your tastes. The longer you subscribe, the better fit MistoBox thinks they can deliver. Based on coffee reviews you share with them via email or post on their website, they can tweak their pairings in the next month's selection.

Being a multiple roast subscriber service, MistoBox offers a great variety to choose from, so even though you've committed to a particular club, you're not limited to one roaster. On top of that, once you land on a coffee you like, you can order it from MistoBox through their online store and it will ship directly from the roaster with free shipping included. Subscriptions auto renew and can be cancelled at any time.

The new and improved website is continuing to evolve and customer coffee reviews will soon be available to help guide you in your search. Those should be helpful when it comes time to commit to a 12 ounce bag you plan on living with for a while.

What's not to like. Like most multi-roaster subscription services, MistoBox's sampler packs have to take a detour from the roaster to you through their re-packaging facility. That adds a few days to the timeline from roast to brew.

MistoBox ships the coffee out seven days after it has been roasted and then it's in the hands of the United States Postal Service. In our case, that meant our sampler box left the MistoBox processing center in Illinois on December 4, but didn't arrive on our doorstep until December 12. Add that lag time to the fact the coffees in our pack had roasted on November 24, and you can see why freshness might be a concern. Bags are heat sealed, however, and as one taster pointed out, that window could still be considered "peak" time for tasting, especially if you're not living in a third-wave hotbed like Portland, Oregon, or Seattle, Washington, where anything past seven days of roasting is considered a coons age.

Ordering 12 ounce bags eliminates this problem as the coffee ships directly from the roaster, usually within 48 hours.

Decaf drinkers will have to pass on the smaller bag option as decaffeinated coffee is only available in the 12 ounce sizes.

What's it going to cost? Payment is on a per shipment basis. For \$21, you can have a 12 ounce personally selected bag of coffee delivered to you every 10, 12, 15, 21, or 28 days, depending on your coffee consumption. Sampler packs run \$19 for four 1.7 ounce samples (providing a suggested 15 cups) or \$30 for four 3.4 ounce bags (30 cups) with delivery options of every two or four weeks. Each shipment includes a coffee profile, giving you the story behind the bean as well as roasting dates and MistoBox's tasting impressions. Follow them on Twitter and/or Facebook and watch for specials like their Cyber Monday 50 percent off deal on one month's subscription.

MEET OUR COFFEE TASTERS

Our tasting panelists hail from Portland, Oregon, voted America's Best Coffee City by *Travel and Leisure* readers. <http://www.travelandleisure.com/articles/americas-best-coffee-cities>

- Lora Woodruff, owner of Third Wave Coffee Tours, guides coffee lovers through the Portland micro-roaster and café scene. She prefers a light roast.

<http://www.thirdwavecoffeetours.com/>

- Jesse Coutts is a nurse by trade, local coffee personality by passion whose Twitter profile (@PDX_coffee) reads, "A lover of all things coffee." Jesse has no hot coffee biases but likes his iced coffee to be fruit forward with floral and tea notes.

- Max Goins has been a Peet's barista for over five years and likes his coffee strong and so dark he can't see through it.

MEET THE COFFEES

COLOMBIA UNIÓN NARIÑO by Ruby Coffee Roasters

<http://rubycoffeeroasters.com/>

- The story behind the beans.** This coffee hails from northern Columbia and is grown by four producers—Orlando Delgado, Aura Eliza Nippan, Paulino Diaz and Carlos Estrella—out of a group of 99 growers in the Minga de Suenos association in the La Union sub-region. The beans are manually de-pulped, fermented for 16-22 hours in tiled tanks, washed, cleaned and dried on raised beds.

The basics: Fully washed. Variety: Caturra and Castillo. Grown at 1,700-1,950 meters.

- Tasting notes.**

Aroma: Breaking the crust gave way to a Malt-O-Meal breakfast cereal sweetness with a tinge of molasses, especially in the beginning.

Flavor: Fruit came to the forefront along the lines of raspberries and blackberries followed by cherries as it cooled. There was also a certain tartness pulling on the back of the mouth. The coffee traveled clean and had a tea-like body.

Tasting at home. The Colombian was brewed using a Kalita Wave, single cup pour over method and tasted very fruity, leaning towards citrus—specifically grapefruit. It was a clean, balanced cup, very characteristic of a lighter roast profile which this particular taster prefers.

- The story behind the roaster.** Ruby Coffee Roasters was named one of the 15 best new coffee roasters in the U.S. in 2014 by the popular food, drink and travel website, Thrillist.

<http://www.thrillist.com/drink/nation/best-new-coffee-roasters-local-coffee-companies>

It has been an evolution for owner, Jared Linzmeier who started out as a dishwasher in 2007 at Intelligentsia Coffee in Silver Lake in Los Angeles before moving on to a series of jobs in the industry including barista, roaster and green bean buyer. In 2013 he moved to Wisconsin to put his knowledge and passion into his own roasting company. His slogan, “Colorful Coffees” speaks to his desire to produce coffees with a little flair and that draw up images of things we can easily reference like orange blossoms, syrupy brown body and green acidity.

HONDURAS LAS CAPUCAS by Coava Coffee Roasters <http://coavacoffee.com/>

●**The story behind the beans.** The coffee was grown by farmers in the Capucas community near the Mayan ruins in western Honduras. Despite being one of the poorest regions Coava trades in, farmers have made the investment in better tools, education, and competitions to produce higher quality coffee.

The basics: Fully washed. Variety: Pacas, Catimor. Grown at 1,400-1,600 meters.

●**Tasting notes.**

Aroma: Picked up on baker’s chocolate at first whiff along with some very subtle spice and notes.

Flavor: Taste was dominated by tart cherry and blackberry notes with a clean finish. The cup was well balanced, with just enough going on to keep things interesting. This Honduras received a thumbs-up from Max as the most drinkable of the group—what he would deem his go-to cup for everyday sipping.

Tasting at home: Used the Hario V60 dripper to brew and noticed unmistakable blackberry aroma during the first bloom that gave way to black tea and honey upon completion. Berry notes were present which became tarter as coffee cooled. While hot, coffee would pass the test of average coffee drinkers; however, as it cools, the more exotic flavors may favor a different palate.

●**The story behind the roaster.** Matt Higgins started Coava in 2008 with the intent to build his company on the best beans he could find. That search has taken him many places, including to his relationship with the Capucas community, one of the first cooperatives he started dealing with. Coava tries to keep the focus on the green coffee and looks at roasting as a “silent” partner in bringing out the qualities that will best tell the coffee’s story.

SUMATRA SIDIKALANG TABU JAMU by Bow Truss Coffee Roasters
<http://www.bowtruss.com/>

●**The story behind the beans.** The coffee was sourced from small family owned farms sitting on the shores of Lake Toba near Sidikalang in the Lington region of Sumatra. The lake sits in the crater of an ancient super volcano, providing rich volcanic soil for local growers. This lot was a group effort with about 1,000 producers contributing to it. As is typical for Indonesian coffees, this Sumatra was processed in a semi-washed method in which the mucilage is left on the coffee bean when pulped. During the drying stage, the inherent sweetness of the mucilage contributes to the bean’s ultimate flavor.

The basics: Semi-washed. Variety: Bourbon, Typica, Catimor. Grown at 1,100-1,350 meters.

● **Tasting Notes.**

Aroma: In true Sumatran style, sweet earthy smells were present with heavy chocolate notes at first break that diminished over time.

Flavor: Earthiness showed up in the taste coupled with smokiness and juicy berry notes. Felt smooth in the mouth and lingered long after it was gone. Lora, whose coffee leanings are on the opposite side of the flavor wheel from Indonesian coffees said, “If I was going to drink a Sumatran, I could drink this one.”

Tasting at home: The Sumatran was brewed using the Hario V60 dripper and released sweet blueberry scents upon blooming. This time around the taste was very woody; however, adding cream quieted down those qualities, allowing a richer dark chocolate taste to emerge. Smoothness carried over from the cupping session.

● **The story behind the roaster.** Bow Truss, under Phil Tadros’ lead, has been operating out of Chicago for about 2 ½ years. Master Roaster Dennis Jackson has been with the company the whole time and explains their roasting philosophy as “trying to do what’s best for the coffee.” It seems to be resonating with coffee lovers. At the start Jackson was roasting 200 pounds per week. Today it’s more like 2,400.

ETHIOPIAN KOCHERE by Portola Coffee Lab

<http://www.portolacoffeelab.com/>

● **The story behind the beans.** This is Portola’s second year buying this coffee from the Tekelu Demble mill in the Kochere Woreda (district) in Yirgacheffe . Time is invested in hand sorting the cherries to eliminate under and overripe fruit before wet milling. Further sorting takes place at the drying stage as well.

The basics: Fully washed. Variety: Ethiopian Heirloom. Grown at 1,800 to 2,000 meters.

● **Taste notes.**

Aroma. Keeping with the Yirgacheffe reputation, floral notes were the dominant theme with underlying peach layers in the background.

Flavor. Peach flavor burst in your mouth at first sip and continued to develop as the coffee cooled. Honey sweetness wound its way through and it felt clean and delicate like drinking tea. It was very light, not overstaying its welcome but making you very glad that it decided to visit.

Tasting at home. Brewed using a Melitta pour over cone and found the coffee to retain its cupping qualities. The peach flavor was more subdued at first, allowing sweet honey notes to surface, but as the coffee cooled, the peach reclaimed the lead. The oolong tea finish made drinking it out of a china cup feel very appropriate.

● **The story behind the roaster.** Portola Coffee Lab was picked as *Roast* magazine’s 2015 Micro Roaster of the Year.

<http://roastmagazine.com/about/contests/roasteroftheyear/2015/>

Co-owners Jeff and Christa Duggan opened for business in Costa Mesa, California in 2011, taking Jeff's roasting hobby to the next level. Recently they partnered with two other coffee companies—Klatch Coffee and Bird Rock Coffee Roasters—to form Roasters United in an effort to establish sustainable relationships with coffee farmers that will improve the growers' coffee quality as well as their standard of living.

GROUNDS FOR THOUGHT

Despite the time lapse between roasting and tasting, we felt that these coffees all offered a reason to pour, and everyone was happy to leave with beans to enjoy at home.

MistoBox managed to match us up with some coffees that we could see having a second date with in the future. Portola Coffee Lab's Ethiopian was the favorite of two of the tasters while another chose the Honduras and the other, the Sumatran. The takeaway? Seems like falling in love with coffee is just like falling in love with people—it takes all kinds.