Tea, coffee and cocoa

Tea, coffee, and cocoa are cultivated for their young leaves, cherries, and beans respectively, from which popular beverages are made and consumed worldwide. Many people drink these beverages not only for their flavour, but also for the boost they provide thanks to their major central nervous system stimulant, caffeine.

Cocoa

The tasty secret of the cacao tree was discovered 2,000 years ago in the tropical rainforests of the Americas. The first people known to have made chocolate were the ancient cultures of Mexico and Central America. These people, including the Maya and Aztec, mixed ground cacao seeds with various seasonings to make a spicy, foamy drink. It was first introduced to Europeans following Cortes' visit to the Aztec royal court.

Cacao plants (*Theobroma cacao*) are small trees of the *Malvaceae* family, which bear their flowers and fruits directly on their trunks. Cultivated on small farms throughout South and Central America, Asia, and Africa, the tree grows well in wet lowland tropics, often in the shade of taller trees. The fruit, or pods, contain seeds that can be processed into cocoa and chocolate after fermentation and roasting. Shells of the cacao fruit can be pressed to yield cocoa butter.



Cacao fruit

Coffee

The two major species of coffee plants (*Coffea arabica* and *Coffea canephora*; family *Rubiaceae*) are tropical evergreen shrubs or small trees of African origin. The earliest records of coffee are from Ethiopia, where natives chewed leaves and fruits gathered from wild trees. Wild coffee plants from Kefa (Kaffa), Ethiopia, were taken to southern Arabia and placed under cultivation in the 15th century. Then coffee was introduced into Europe throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

Latin America, eastern Africa, Asia, and Arabia are leading producers of Arabica coffee. The Arabica bean requires a cool subtropical climate. It grows at higher elevations and requires a lot of moisture, sun, and shade. Western and Central Africa, Southeast Asia, and Brazil are major producers of Robusta coffee. The Robusta bean can grow at lower elevations.

Arabica is considered a milder, more flavourful and aromatic brew than Robusta, though the latter is a hardier plant and is thus cheaper to produce. It has twice the caffeine content of Arabica and is typically the bean of choice for inexpensive commercial coffee brands.

The ripened fruits of the coffee plant are known as coffee cherries, and each cherry generally contains two coffee seeds. The cherries are processed by disengaging the coffee seeds from their coverings and from the pulp and by drying the seeds. Coffee roasting is a process by which the aromatic and gustatory qualities of coffee beans are developed at high temperatures.



Coffee plant with coffee cherries

cacao: *seme di pianta tropicale*
cocoa: *polvere ricavata dalla frantumazione dei semi torrefatti della pianta di cacao*
to disengage: *staccare, togliere*
foamy: *spumosa*
ripened: *maturo*
shell: *guscio*
withering: *appassimento*

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Tea

The tea plant, a species of evergeen (*Camellia sinensis*), is valued for its young leaves and leaf buds, from which the tea beverage is produced. Two principal varieties are used, the small-leaved China plant (*C. sinensis* variety *sinensis*) and the large-leaved Assam plant (*C. sinensis* variety *assamica*). Hybrids of these two varieties are also grown.



Worker picking tea leaves

According to legend, tea has been known in China since about 2700 BC. For millennia it was a medicinal beverage obtained by boiling fresh leaves in water, but around the 3rd century AD, it became a daily drink, thus tea cultivation and processing began. In tea manufacture, the leaf goes through some or all the stages of withering, rolling, fermentation, and drying. The leaves may be fermented or left unfermented. The most important classification is by the manufacturing process, resulting in the three categories of fermented (black), unfermented (green), and semifermented (oolong or pouchong) tea. Oolong tea falls between green and black tea, undergoing a short fermentation process that results in a product that contains less caffeine than black tea. White tea is made from the fresh buds of *Camellia sinensis* and is the least processed and most expensive tea.

1 Decide if the sentences are true or false. Correct the false ones.

	T	F
1. Caffeine occurs naturally in the tea plant, so all brewed tea contains some caffeine.	☐	☐
2. The first cacao plants were found in Europe in the 16th century.	☐	☐
3. Coffee cherries are the fruits of coffee plant.	☐	☐
4. The Robusta coffee species is more expensive and difficult to grow than Arabica.	☐	☐
5. Roasting coffee seeds enhances their aromatic qualities.	☐	☐
6. Tea is produced from the pods of the tea plant.	☐	☐
7. In the tea manufacturing process, the fermentation stage is always carried out.	☐	☐
8. Black tea is stronger in flavour and caffeine.	☐	☐

2 Complete the text with the words given below.

beverage • commodities • countries • crops • production • tea

Economic Impact of Tea, Coffee and Cocoa

These crops are among the most important agricultural **1.** ..... worldwide. The economy of many growing countries depends heavily on the earnings from these **2.** ....., which support directly or indirectly millions of people in both producing and consuming countries. Tea is the most popular **3.** ....., and it is consumed by 65% of the world's population, while coffee ranks second with about 2 billion cups consumed daily. Nearly 4 kg cocoa bean equivalent is consumed per capita annually in developed **4.** ..... The production of processed tea, green coffee, and cocoa beans occurs largely in the developing world (except for **5.** ..... in China), while the consumption happens mainly in the developed economies. For each of these commodities, more than 50% of the **6.** ..... is in only three countries, but the market price is regulated by consumption countries.

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