



FREAKING GOOD COFFEE

A truly ethical cup of great coffee can now be had in the heart of Bali

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY MATT MACKAY

CUP OF COFFEE PHOTO: FREAK COFFEE

O

ver the years of travelling to Indonesia, I've shared the frustration of many foreign tourists and

expats, that, despite growing some of the world's best coffee beans, it's been virtually impossible to find a decent cup of coffee.

The normal practice in Indonesia is to grind over-roasted beans into a fine powder, which is then mixed straight into a glass of hot water. What you typically end up with is a thick black mud with not a lot of flavour, as the coffee has usually been stored for a long time after roasting and grinding. But thanks to an unlikely collaboration between a Balinese coffee grower and an American "coffee guru", the days of having to grit your teeth and swallow another cup of tasteless Indonesian "mud" have become a distant memory.

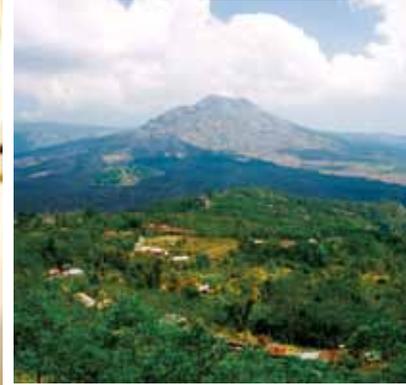
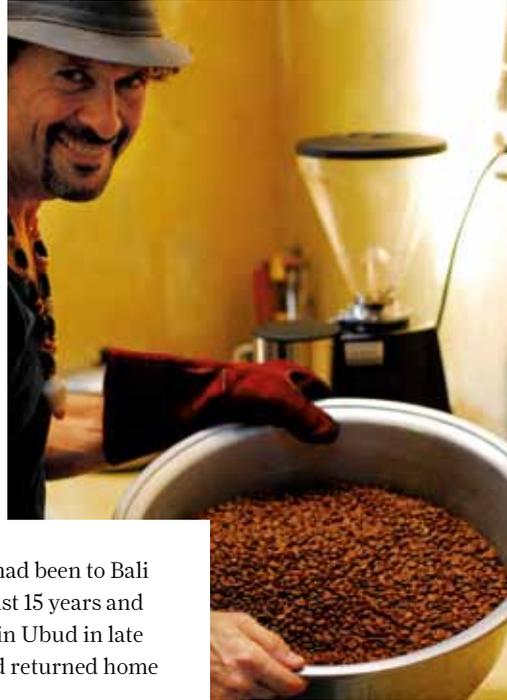
I Nyoman Wirata's family has been growing coffee at Kintamani, in the central mountains of Bali, for generations. The fertile volcanic soil, optimum climate and altitude of the Kintamani region produces the highest quality beans in Bali, if not Indonesia.

Wirata, like most farmers, had been growing both Robusta and Arabica beans which he'd sell to local coffee suppliers for a meagre and undervalued IDR 25,000 (around AU\$3) per kilo. In recent years however, Wirata has only been planting the more lucrative and higher quality Arabica trees.

Wirata's family has always grown its beans organically, without the use of pesticides and employing permaculture principles to reduce pests. Despite producing such quality beans, the potential of Wirata's beans had never been fully realised. That was, until his recent partnership with long-time friend and American "coffee guru" Asher Yaron.

Asher, having run his own mobile coffee roasting business in the US for three years, had always dreamt of establishing a truly ethical and sustainable coffee business. Despite trying to source organically grown beans and using his own biodiesel van, he'd been frustrated by having to source beans from far-away countries and the subsequent environmental impact this had.

FROM LEFT: Coffee beans from Ubud; a fresh brew from F.R.E.A.K.; Asher and Wirata; fresh berries promise a good cuppa



He and his wife, Avara, had been to Bali several times over the past 15 years and when they arrived back in Ubud in late 2010, they felt like they'd returned home and decided to stay.

Although Asher and Wirata were already good friends, they quickly formed a deep connection through their passion for coffee. But it wasn't until Asher visited Wirata's farm in Kintamani and sampled some of his beans that he could see the potential and realise his dream of starting a truly ethical coffee business in Bali. Wirata though was still a bit sceptical and needed more convincing, but Asher was so enthusiastic that in just six weeks he'd built his own bean roaster and got hold of a high quality Italian espresso machine (both of which he'd modified to run on propane gas to reduce their energy use). Once Wirata tasted a "real" cup of espresso from his freshly roasted beans, he needed no further convincing.

"It was hard to believe that was my coffee," Wirata recalls. And so F.R.E.A.K. — Fresh Roasted *Enak* (delicious in Indonesian) Arabica Kintamani Coffee — was born.

Wirata already had two *warungs* (local restaurants) in Ubud serving traditional Balinese food so it wasn't long before they'd

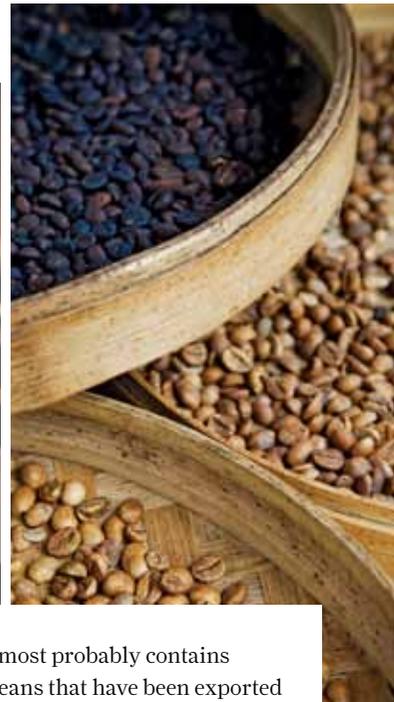
created extra space for two new espresso machines. The difficult part was teaching his staff

how to use them. Word quickly spread about F.R.E.A.K. and Wirata's *warungs* were soon pulling in a whole new clientele. Not only could you get a delicious *nasi campur* (rice with meat and vegetables) but you could cap the meal with a real espresso!

Buoyed by the initial positive response, Asher opened a new F.R.E.A.K. café in the heart of Ubud. He describes it as "a coffee temple dedicated to roasting and serving the best coffee anywhere. It's also a place for educating people about the health benefits of drinking fresh roasted coffee which is consumed within 24 hours of roasting".

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The process of drying the beans; Asher with freshly roasted beans; Kintamani's volcanic soil produces high quality beans; F.R.E.A.K. café is dedicated to serving the best coffee

Once Wirata tasted a "real" cup of espresso, he needed no convincing



Earlier that morning, I tried a cup of pre-ground Kopi Luwak from Java — the most expensive coffee in the world, produced from Arabica beans that have been digested and excreted by wild civet cats. The theory goes that the cats only choose the best quality ripe beans which go through their digestive system whole and are excreted with only the outer skin removed; they're then washed and roasted. Kopi Luwak can sell for around US\$350 per kilo. The pre-ground Kopi Luwak I tried that morning didn't come close to the quality and flavour of the freshly roasted and ground F.R.E.A.K. coffee which Asher served me.

For Asher, making the perfect coffee is a science with many variables (he regularly adjusts the grind during the day to account for changes in the weather) but insists the most important part of the process is using freshly roasted beans.

“It's a sad irony that many tourists go to the supermarket across the road to purchase an expensive Italian brand

of coffee that most probably contains Indonesian beans that have been exported to Italy, roasted and ground there, and then sent back to Indonesia — by which time it's months old or 'dead coffee' which has lost all its original qualities,” Asher explains. Meanwhile, he's selling a far superior local product at around half the price!

It's not just the coffee that's special. For those who like it sweet, F.R.E.A.K. only uses natural coconut palm sugar, traditionally produced in Kintamani. I like my coffee straight black but after trying this natural brown sugar, I was hooked! It has a subtle lingering sweetness with a hint of caramel that not only tastes great on its own but also complements the coffee's bitterness.

As the business expands, Asher and Wirata hope to convince other growers in Kintamani to farm organically and then pay them a much higher price for their premium quality Arabica beans. Asher also has plans to use pure spring water from Kintamani to further improve the flavour of their coffee and return a percentage of the profits to community projects in the Kintamani region. ★

TAKE ME THERE

**F.R.E.A.K. CAFÉ
(WARUNG SATE KAKUL)**
Sayan Rd,
Singakerta,
Tebongkang, Ubud
**F.R.E.A.K. CAFÉ (WARUNG
MAKAN MAKAN)**
Bintang Shopping Plaza,
Sanggungan, Ubud
F.R.E.A.K. CAFÉ
19 Hanoman St,
Central Ubud

**CLOCKWISE FROM
LEFT: Asher is a master
roaster; palm sugar
wrapped to go; various
coffee beans; the perfect
roast of bean is a ball
of love**

Jetstar has great low fares to Bali. Visit Jetstar.com to book.