



# English Learning for Curious Minds



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## Episode #105

### Coffee

### 10th Nov, 2020

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:10] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about coffee, a drink that hundreds of millions of people drink every day, and that you might even be enjoying right now.

[00:00:34] We'll talk about where coffee comes from, how it started getting popular, and follow its journey to where it is today, one of the world's most popular drinks, and the second most valuable [commodity<sup>1</sup>](#) in the world, behind oil.

[00:00:49] So, feel free to press pause and make yourself a cup, if you don't have one in front of you already.

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<sup>1</sup> a product that is bought and sold



[00:00:56] Otherwise, let's get started, and talk about coffee.

[00:01:00] Let's start with some statistics, because you know that coffee is popular, but you might not know just quite how popular it is.

[00:01:09] Every day around 2.25 billion cups of coffee are drunk, which is over a million and a half every minute, and 30 thousand every single second.

[00:01:21] It's the third most popular drink in the world, after bottled water and tea, and were it not for the amount of tea drunk in China and India, it would be the world's second most popular drink.

[00:01:34] So, it's very popular, but you knew this already.

[00:01:39] What you might not know is the story of where it came from, and how it came to be so popular.

[00:01:45] The story of the discovery of coffee is, like the discovery of many things we now [take for granted<sup>2</sup>](#), debated.

[00:01:53] We'll probably never know for sure exactly how and when it was first discovered, but here are some of the main theories.

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<sup>2</sup> fail to appreciate fully



## Coffee

[00:02:03] They all have a similar theme - someone either eats a coffee bean, or roasts and boils one, feels the effect of the [caffeine](#)<sup>3</sup> on the body, gets very excited and the rest is history, as they say.

[00:02:18] The first theory involves an Ethiopian goat [herder](#)<sup>4</sup>, a goat farmer, a man called Kaldi. In the 9th century he noticed that his goats were eating these bright red berries from a tree he hadn't noticed before. The goats became very energetic and [overexcited](#)<sup>5</sup>, so Kaldi thought, that's strange.

[00:02:42] He went and told the [monks](#)<sup>6</sup> at a local [monastery](#)<sup>7</sup>. They went to collect the beans, roasted them and boiled them in water, and [ta-da](#)<sup>8</sup>, that was the first ever cup of coffee. The monks drank this drink and found that it kept them awake during the night, when they were praying, and it quickly [took off](#)<sup>9</sup> from there.

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<sup>3</sup> the substance in coffee and tea that makes you feel more active

<sup>4</sup> a farmer of cows, goats, sheep etc.

<sup>5</sup> too happy

<sup>6</sup> male religious men

<sup>7</sup> the building where monks live

<sup>8</sup> used to indicate that something has arrived

<sup>9</sup> became more popular



## Coffee

[00:03:06] Another story involves a Moroccan [mystic](#)<sup>10</sup>, a wise man, and is a similar idea, apart from you swap the goats for birds, and this [mystic](#) just decides to try the berries himself.

[00:03:21] While these stories might all be [apocryphal](#)<sup>11</sup>, they might not be completely true, coffee was certainly discovered in or around the Arabian [peninsula](#)<sup>12</sup> - some people say Yemen, but if you ask an Eithiopean they would say Ethiopia.

[00:03:38] By the 15th century it was being grown in large parts of the Arabian [peninsula](#)<sup>12</sup>. It was taken up to Egypt, to Persia, and Syria and Turkey, and there was a growing culture of coffee houses, where men would go to drink coffee, socialise, and listen to music.

[00:03:58] Given the annual [pilgrimages](#)<sup>13</sup> that muslims would make to Mecca, which was a centre of coffee [consumption](#)<sup>14</sup>, knowledge of this wonderful drink started to spread.

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<sup>10</sup> a religious person who spends a lot of time praying

<sup>11</sup> well-known but probably not true

<sup>12</sup> a piece of land surrounded by water

<sup>13</sup> special journeys made for religious reasons

<sup>14</sup> the eating or drinking (of a substance)



## Coffee

[00:04:09] It was called, and no doubt I'm going to [mispronounce](#)<sup>15</sup> this, but qahwah in Arabic. This word is thought to come from the word for 'to lack hunger', which sounds quite sensible, given that this is one of the effects of caffeine.

[00:04:26] From the word qahwah in Arabic came the word kahve in Turkish, then koffie in Dutch, and that's where our word 'coffee' comes from in English.

[00:04:37] To the Arabic speaking, the Turkish speaking and the Dutch speaking listeners, apologies if I've [mispronounced](#)<sup>16</sup> those words.

[00:04:45] Coffee drinking, and what I guess we can call coffee culture started to grow in the Middle East, but it wasn't until the 16th century that coffee really started its journey of global [domination](#)<sup>17</sup>.

[00:05:00] The Ottomans had conquered large parts of the Arabian [peninsula](#), and coffee had become a [staple](#)<sup>18</sup> of Ottoman culture.

[00:05:08] It was a social drink, and the fact that it wasn't alcoholic meant that its [consumption](#) could be promoted, even by religious leaders.

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<sup>15</sup> say incorrectly

<sup>16</sup> said incorrectly

<sup>17</sup> control

<sup>18</sup> food that is used a lot



## Coffee

[00:05:17] As the Ottomans started to trade with Europe, this wonderful bean was an obvious thing to sell to the Europeans.

[00:05:26] However the very first arrival of coffee in Europe wasn't actually believed to have come from Ottoman traders, but actually Ottoman prisoners.

[00:05:38] In the year 1565 the Ottomans tried to attack the small island of Malta, which was then the home of the Knights of St John, a religious [order](#)<sup>19</sup>.

[00:05:50] They failed to capture it, and the Turks that didn't manage to escape were taken prisoner.

[00:05:57] The knights of Malta noticed that these prisoners were preparing a particular drink by mixing this dark powder together with sugar and water, and they thought, well that looks interesting, and decided to try it for themselves.

[00:06:14] Indeed, even today Maltese traditional coffee is very similar to the Turkish style, and has different spices added to it.

[00:06:24] Coffee might have first arrived in Malta, but its proper arrival to Europe came when Ottoman traders took it to the great trading port of Venice, in Italy, around the year 1615.

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<sup>19</sup> (of a religion) a society or group



## Coffee

[00:06:39] The Venetians weren't immediately sure what to make of this drink, and were suspicious of its effect, even calling it the '[bitter](#)<sup>20</sup> invention of [Satan](#)<sup>21</sup>', of the devil.

[00:06:52] There was huge debate about whether this drink should be allowed, and so it was taken to the pope, Clement the Eighth to decide.

[00:07:02] He said that he wouldn't be able to make a decision about the [fate](#)<sup>22</sup> of coffee if he hadn't tasted it himself [firsthand](#)<sup>23</sup>.

[00:07:10] This seems a little bit of a strange thing for a pope to do, if you ask me, but Pope Clement VIII decided that he needed to taste this [bitter](#) invention of [Satan](#) to see for himself.

[00:07:23] He took a [sip](#)<sup>24</sup> of this new, black [concoction](#)<sup>25</sup>, and decided he liked it.

[00:07:29] Coffee was ok, it wasn't an invention of [Satan](#), and he gave it his [papal blessing](#)<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> having a strong, sharp taste

<sup>21</sup> the devil

<sup>22</sup> what happens to a person or thing

<sup>23</sup> for yourself

<sup>24</sup> a small drink

<sup>25</sup> a food or drink created by mixing different things

<sup>26</sup> the approval of the pope





## Coffee

[00:07:37] Indeed, he [reportedly](#)<sup>27</sup> declared ‘this devil’s drink is so delicious we should cheat the devil by [baptising](#)<sup>28</sup> it’.

[00:07:46] Initially it was actually used mainly for medicinal purposes, for curing [all manner](#)<sup>29</sup> of different sicknesses, and was mainly sold by [apothecaries](#)<sup>30</sup>, by chemists.

[00:07:59] Coffee started to flow further north into Europe, and this [spawned](#)<sup>31</sup>, this created, the culture of the European coffee house.

[00:08:09] Coffee houses [sprung up](#)<sup>32</sup> over the great cities of Europe. They weren’t just places to drink coffee, but to exchange ideas, to discuss philosophy, and to learn.

[00:08:22] Indeed, in Britain they were even given the nickname of ‘penny universities’, because for the cost of 1 penny, which was the cost of the cup of coffee, you could go and learn from some of the great minds.

[00:08:37] These coffee houses would normally have a long table, so you would go in, pay your 1 penny, and sit and discuss ideas with strangers.

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<sup>27</sup> according to some people

<sup>28</sup> introducing someone or something into the church

<sup>29</sup> all sorts

<sup>30</sup> people who mixed and sold medicines

<sup>31</sup> created

<sup>32</sup> emerged quickly



## Coffee

[00:08:47] It's probably no coincidence that the Enlightenment overlapped<sup>33</sup> with the boom<sup>34</sup> in coffee houses. The coffee house provided a public place for people to discuss ideas; beforehand<sup>35</sup> this didn't really exist in the same way.

[00:09:04] Coffee became the 'go-to'<sup>36</sup> drink both for the morning, and for business. Previously people drank beer in the morning, and would go to taverns, to pubs, to conduct<sup>37</sup> business. The invention of the coffee house meant that you could drink coffee in the morning at the start of the working day, and also go back to the coffeehouse to meet with other merchants<sup>38</sup> or business contacts.

[00:09:33] So it's no surprise that people became a lot more productive.

[00:09:38] I guess if you used to drink a few pints of beer to start the day, then drink beer throughout the day you'd probably feel a bit more productive if you switched the beer to coffee.

[00:09:51] Coffee was brought to North America by the British in the mid 17th century, but it was still produced thousands of kilometres away, in the Arabian peninsula.

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<sup>33</sup> happened at the same time

<sup>34</sup> quick increase

<sup>35</sup> before

<sup>36</sup> the best or most popular person or thing for a particular task

<sup>37</sup> do

<sup>38</sup> businesspeople



## Coffee

[00:10:02] This made it [prohibitively](#)<sup>39</sup> expensive.

[00:10:05] Then, in the year 1723 a young French officer took the first little coffee plant from Paris all the way to Martinique, in the Caribbean, and it's from this little plant that 18 million coffee trees grew in Martinique.

[00:10:23] Coffee plants were transported to the other French colonies in the Caribbean, and French Guiana became a [hub](#)<sup>40</sup> for coffee production.

[00:10:33] This berry was becoming so popular, but the French didn't want to share their coffee trees with anyone. They knew that if another nearby country got a coffee tree then they could then build up a coffee [plantation](#)<sup>41</sup> and compete with the French.

[00:10:50] They weren't to hold their [monopoly](#)<sup>42</sup> on coffee production in the Americas for long though.

[00:10:56] In 1727 a Brazilian soldier was sent to French Guiana on a mission to get coffee tree [saplings](#)<sup>43</sup>, baby coffee trees, so he could then take back to Brazil to create coffee [plantations](#)<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> in a way that is too great that it prevents you from doing something

<sup>40</sup> a centre

<sup>41</sup> a large farm where a particular crop is grown

<sup>42</sup> a group that has complete control over a particular thing

<sup>43</sup> small trees

<sup>44</sup> large farms where particular crops are grown



## Coffee

[00:11:10] Obviously the French wouldn't give them to him, so he needed to get creative.

[00:11:16] [Legend has it](#)<sup>45</sup> that he [seduced](#)<sup>46</sup> the wife of the French governor, and when he left she gave him a large [bouquet](#)<sup>47</sup> of flowers. Hidden inside the [bouquet](#) was a load of coffee tree seeds, which he took back to Brazil, and that was how the coffee industry got started in Brazil.

[00:11:36] Back in North America, coffee was getting more and more popular, and it could now be imported from the Caribbean, it didn't have to be brought all the way from the Arabian [peninsula](#), which naturally helped make it more [affordable](#)<sup>48</sup>.

[00:11:51] But tea was still the more popular drink until an event that changed the course of history, at least the course of coffee history, forever.

[00:12:01] In 1773 King George III of Britain passed something called the Tea Act, which gave favourable [terms](#)<sup>49</sup> to British tea [merchants](#), and required American tea importers to pay heavy taxes.

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<sup>45</sup> according to stories

<sup>46</sup> persuaded to sleep with

<sup>47</sup> a group of flowers

<sup>48</sup> not expensive

<sup>49</sup> conditions for an agreement



## Coffee

[00:12:19] This caused protests and [riots](#)<sup>50</sup>, which you may know as the Boston Tea Party.

[00:12:25] After this even drinking tea in America was viewed as [unpatriotic](#)<sup>51</sup>, and the [trajectory](#)<sup>52</sup> of coffee changed forever.

[00:12:35] Coffee production increased dramatically, which was [enabled](#)<sup>53</sup> by the capturing and [enslavement](#)<sup>54</sup> of millions of Africans who [toiled on](#)<sup>55</sup> these [plantations](#) so that Americans and Europeans could enjoy their coffee.

[00:12:51] Coffee has a complicated relationship with slavery, in that the early coffee trade was [enabled](#) by slave labour, and there are often reports of people, and even children, now working as modern day slaves on [plantations](#) in different coffee-producing countries.

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<sup>50</sup> large protests

<sup>51</sup> not showing a love for your country

<sup>52</sup> the path that something goes on

<sup>53</sup> allowed to happen

<sup>54</sup> the act of making someone a slave

<sup>55</sup> worked hard on



[00:13:10] Of course, the situation now is very different to how it was in the mid 19th century, and consumers are becoming more [discerning](#)<sup>56</sup>, wanting responsibly sourced coffee, but it is still very much an issue.

[00:13:24] Today, coffee remains a major export for dozens of countries around the world.

[00:13:30] Brazil, from that bunch of flowers with coffee seeds hidden at the bottom, has grown into the world's biggest coffee producer, exporting \$5 billion worth of coffee every year, or almost 16% of the world's total. It's down from its [lofty](#)<sup>57</sup> heights of producing over 50% of the world's coffee, but it's still the largest by a long [margin](#)<sup>58</sup>.

[00:13:53] And in terms of coffee [consumption](#), of coffee drinking, the countries that are top of the list of the world's most [avid](#)<sup>59</sup> coffee drinkers may surprise you.

[00:14:05] It's not anywhere in the Arabian [peninsula](#), it's not the Italians or the Brazilians. They're nowhere close, and indeed it might surprise you that coffee consumption in coffee-producing countries actually [tends](#)<sup>60</sup> to be very low.

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<sup>56</sup> showing good judgment

<sup>57</sup> showing high standards

<sup>58</sup> amount

<sup>59</sup> keen and interested

<sup>60</sup> likely to be



## Coffee

[00:14:21] The top of the table is dominated by Northern European countries - the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, which obviously can't produce their own coffee.

[00:14:32] We probably need another whole episode on the production of coffee, and how it gets from growing on a tree in Colombia, Brazil, Vietnam, or Ethiopia, to being served at your favourite coffee shop, but it's quite a unique product in that it is produced mainly by small farmers, of whom there are around 25 million worldwide.

[00:14:56] Harvesting coffee is a manual process, it can't be completely done with agricultural machinery, and this has meant that coffee farming hasn't been dominated by huge farms in the same way as other [crops](#)<sup>61</sup> have.

[00:15:12] So it's a pretty amazing thing to think that this small bean has become the world's most popular drug, consumed by hundreds of millions of people every day, and providing employment for 25 million small farmers.

[00:15:28] And it all came, perhaps, from a man looking at some [overexcited](#) goats.

[00:15:36] OK then, there you go, that is a quick look at the history of coffee, and how it went from, potentially, being [miraculously](#)<sup>62</sup> discovered by an Ethiopian goat [herder](#)

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<sup>61</sup> plants such as fruits or vegetables, grown in large amounts to be eaten

<sup>62</sup> unexpected and very lucky



## English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #105

### Coffee

to being tasted by a pope, then making a [treacherous<sup>63</sup>](#) journey across the Atlantic to its current position as one of the world's most popular drinks.

[00:15:57] It's a fascinating story, and one with which you can impress the next person you're having coffee with.

[00:16:04] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:16:08] You can head right in to our community forum, which is at [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com) and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:16:16] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:16:21] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

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<sup>63</sup> extremely dangerous





## Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Commodity	a product that is bought and sold
Take for granted	fail to appreciate fully
Caffeine	the substance in coffee and tea that makes you feel more active
Herder	a farmer of cows, goats, sheep etc.
Overexcited	too happy
Monks	male religious men
Monastery	the building where monks live
Ta-da	used to indicate that something has arrived
Took off	became more popular
Mystic	a religious person who spends a lot of time praying
Apocryphal	well-known but probably not true
Peninsula	a piece of land surrounded by water



## Coffee

<b>Pilgrimages</b>	special journeys made for religious reasons
<b>Consumption</b>	the eating or drinking (of a substance)
<b>Mispronounce</b>	say incorrectly
<b>Mispronounced</b>	said incorrectly
<b>Domination</b>	control
<b>Staple</b>	food that is used a lot
<b>Order</b>	(of a religion) a society or group
<b>Bitter</b>	having a strong, sharp taste
<b>Satan</b>	the devil
<b>Fate</b>	what happens to a person or thing
<b>Firsthand</b>	for yourself
<b>Sip</b>	a small drink
<b>Concoction</b>	a food or drink created by mixing different things
<b>Papal blessing</b>	the approval of the pope
<b>Reportedly</b>	according to some people



## Coffee

<b>Baptising</b>	introducing someone or something into the church
<b>All manner</b>	all sorts
<b>Apothecaries</b>	people who mixed and sold medicines
<b>Spawned</b>	created
<b>Sprung up</b>	emerged quickly
<b>Overlapped</b>	happened at the same time
<b>Boom</b>	quick increase
<b>Beforehand</b>	before
<b>‘go-to’</b>	the best or most popular person or thing for a particular task
<b>Conduct</b>	do
<b>Merchants</b>	businesspeople
<b>Prohibitively</b>	in a way that is too great that it prevents you from doing something
<b>Hub</b>	a centre
<b>Plantation</b>	a large farm where a particular crop is grown
<b>Monopoly</b>	a group that has complete control over a particular thing



## Coffee

<b>Saplings</b>	small trees
<b>Plantations</b>	large farms where particular crops are grown
<b>Legend has it</b>	according to stories
<b>Seduced</b>	persuaded to sleep with
<b>Bouquet</b>	a group of flowers
<b>Affordable</b>	not expensive
<b>Terms</b>	conditions for an agreement
<b>Riots</b>	large protests
<b>Unpatriotic</b>	not showing a love for your country
<b>Trajectory</b>	the path that something goes on
<b>Enabled</b>	allowed to happen
<b>Enslavement</b>	the act of making someone a slave
<b>Toiled on</b>	worked hard on
<b>Discerning</b>	showing good judgment
<b>Lofty</b>	showing high standards



## Coffee

Margin	amount
Avid	keen and interested
Tends	likely to be
Crops	plants such as fruits or vegetables, grown in large amounts to be eaten
Miraculously	unexpected and very lucky
Treacherous	extremely dangerous

*We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com)*

