

5th Column (2016. 10. 15)

「Australian Café/Coffee Culture」

It has now been over a year since I moved to Japan. Although it feels like time has passed quickly, the past year has also been full of unique experiences. Life here is good, but there is just one thing that is missing...

Coffee.

Australia began as a British penal colony, so one might expect Australia to have embraced their tea culture. However, coffee dominates tea in Australia. Not only is coffee popular, the quality is world class. Espresso based coffee is the drink of choice for Australians, thanks to the influx of European immigrants after the 1950s. These immigrants, mainly from Greece and Italy, opened cafes that offered quality espresso drinks. By the 80s, Australia was hooked. The “Café Boom” hit, the number of cafes kept rising and so did the competition. It is believed this is when lattes and cappuccinos became a staple in Australia.

Right now in Australia, the top three most ordered coffee drinks are cappuccino, flat white, and latte. With these drinks, there is an easy way to gauge how well the coffee was poured. That is by looking at the “latte art” – the design/pattern on the surface of the coffee, created by pouring the foamed milk into the espresso. Some designs/patterns are simple such as hearts and rosettas, while others are more complex like the famously difficult “swan”. Not only does latte art make your coffee look good, but it is also proof that your barista is skilled at foaming/texturing the milk, and pouring an espresso shot with crema. These two factors play a key role in making your coffee taste great. A more complex design also means the barista has made their fair share of lattes too, so a nice latte art on your coffee is almost like a quality assurance stamp. We have become such coffee snobs that latte art is now the standard.

Coffee consumption per capita in Australia is around 3kg, which equates to around 90-100 cups of coffee a year. This statistic can look like an opportunity waiting to be seized for those in the coffee biz. The most popular coffee chain in the world, Starbucks, certainly noticed this. However, Starbucks has now closed 75% of their branches in Australia since their entry in the Australian cafe market. Again, Australians have become spoiled coffee snobs, and Starbucks was no match for the cafes thriving in the outback café wars.

Many Australians drink coffee throughout the day: on the way to work, before lunch, with lunch, in the afternoon, and after work etc. When we see new cafes, we tell our friends about it and share our excitement for the new potential source to feed our caffeine addiction. That is one thing I definitely miss about Australia.