



REGIONAL NOTES

COSTA CHICA is known for body and balance

FLAVORS: Chocolate, nuts, caramel, citrus

MOUTHFEEL: Medium body, short finish

Costa Chica is a region not normally separated out for quality. Most volumes are grown on medium to large farms (for Oaxaca). These are professional farmers who benefit from the Pacific mists, as well as access to roads and cities. Despite this access, farmers in La Costa have not attracted specialty buyers as have their neighbors up the same mountain range in Sierra Sur; farmers in Costa act purely as individuals who sell into local markets. For this reason, most coffee from Costa ends up in blends for big brands that roast and distribute within Mexico. However, there are thousands of smallholders strewn throughout the mountains surrounding the town of Santa Catarina Juquila. This is a place where we can find individual farmer lots and encourage the most engaged farmers to expand their commitment to quality.

SIERRA SUR is known for rich flavors, yellow fruits

FLAVORS: Chocolate, panela, red fruits, citrus, yellow fruits

MOUTHFEEL: Creamy body, rich with medium aftertaste

Sierra Sur is the heartland of specialty coffee in Oaxaca. It's a pine forest fed by the Pacific ocean mists; hot during the day and cold at night and located on the range that separates the Central Valley from the coast. Sierra Sur has seen waves of emigration up mountain of Zapotec, Mixtec, Chatino, Amuzgo, Trique, and more modern Mexicans from other areas. This is also where Starbucks and other specialty buyers first came to make 'La Pluma' a household name. La Pluma is a type of Typica specific to this range, but also refers to the town/area around Pluma Hidalgo. This small mountain-top town serves as a trading center and municipal hub for the surrounding slopes. It is one of seventy towns in the region. These towns are strung together into alliances based on common language and history. They serve as the first step in the staircase of intermediary markets that move coffee from up-mountain down to larger trading towns like San Gabriel Mixtepec. From a purchasing point of view, Sierra Sur is approached supply-chain by supply-chain, starting from the top of the mountain, as this is where you'll find the greatest distinctions in the cup. Geographically, the region can be broken down into multiple zones, but at least separated by East / West, in which case Pluma Hidalgo would represent ranges to the east of the highways, where Candelaria Loxicha might be the gateway to the west.

LA CAÑADA is known for interesting acidity (stone fruits, malic), complex sugars

FLAVORS: Citrus, peach, passion fruit, cantaloupe

MOUTHFEEL: Creamy body, sweet with a long aftertaste

La Cañada is rather new to selective picking. Most farmers are members of indigenous communities and work through cooperatives that have traditionally focused on other priorities (like education and healthcare) over coffee. Without incentive or support for specialty, cold climates and month-long drying times turn from an asset to a liability for most. Most coffees from Cañada are either sold as high-end 1-5 bag nano lots or bulked into 83-84 point organic container-loads that are sold as 'specialty' into the commodity market.

Small farms, large distances, and depressingly-low production all contribute to a growing gap between those half-hectare producers who are embracing new practices and those who are waiting to see if the extra effort will be worth it. From a buyers' perspective, it's worth the wait. The wait seems shorter every year as more specialty buyers make the drive up to the zone around Huautla de Jimenez and to the Cuicatlan catch basin centered around San Pedro Sochiapam. The variety you get from microclimates is compounded by the diversity of culture. This dictates one's approach to coffee and the routes (relationships) through which they get coffee to market.

MIXTECA is known for having red fruit and red berry sweetness

FLAVORS: Stone fruits, strawberry, raspberry, chocolates, honey, cocoa

MOUTHFEEL: Creamy body, lingering sugars

Mixteca is where specialty buyers today travel to first. Tlaxiaco is the seat of the region, providing both strong support and easy transfers to the surrounding area. Further south you will come across the town of Putla de Guerrero, simply known as Putla, which indeed is very close to the state of Guerrero. This is down mountain from one of the most in-the-know specialty regions where farmers in towns like Yucuhiti and Nuyoo were trained and made famous by buyers like Stumptown in the early aughts. Lastly, the town of Santa Maria Zacatepec is an excellent launchpad coffees coming from further south. The road that connects these pueblos is high, narrow, and treacherous winding through high-altitude rainforest. Before La Roya hit this was a near-perfect paradise for coffee. After La Roya, production was reduced to nearly zero for years. Most buyers left and most formal farmer organizations closed. As crops recovered, many of these groups remained splintered—held together loosely by proximity or parentage and often at the mercy of one-to-many middle men who set up shop in their region. Communities already isolated by geography are now left to their own decisions on issues such as pricing, best practices, and what to replant. The last few years have seen an even greater balkanization of qualities from Mixteca that can be better understood by meeting the extension agents (agricultural engineers) and thought leaders in any given cluster of communities.