

MERIDIAN COFFEE CO. · ORIGIN SERIES



The Kenya Coffee Guide

Africa's Most Electrifying Cup

From the slopes of Mount Kenya to the ridges of Nyeri — the complete guide to understanding Kenya's legendary AA-grade coffee, its unique varieties, and its extraordinary blackcurrant-wine flavor.

CHAPTER ONE

The Country That Rewrote the Rules

Kenya did not discover coffee — Ethiopia, its neighbor to the north, gave coffee to the world. But Kenya did something perhaps more remarkable: it reinvented what coffee could taste like. Through decades of rigorous scientific breeding, meticulous wet processing, and a grading system that prizes quality above all, Kenya created a flavor profile unlike anywhere else on earth.

When specialty coffee enthusiasts talk about "wine-like coffee," they're usually talking about Kenya. The blackcurrant, the grapefruit, the tomato — flavors so vivid and unexpected in a coffee cup that first-timers often ask if something is wrong. Nothing is wrong. Kenya coffee is just that extraordinary. It grows at 1,400–2,000 meters on the slopes of Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Range, in deep red volcanic soils enriched by centuries of highland climate.

AA

Kenya's Highest Grade —
Screen Size 18+

2,000m

Peak Growing Altitude
Near Mt. Kenya

700K+

Smallholder Farmers
Across Kenya

UNDERSTANDING QUALITY

The AA Grade: Why Size Matters

Kenya's grading system is unlike any other

Kenya grades its coffee by screen size — the physical diameter of the dried bean measured through a series of metal screens with different-sized holes. AA is the top grade, meaning the bean passed through a screen size 18 (approximately 7.2mm diameter). Larger beans have more surface area, develop more complex sugars during the cherry's long maturation, and roast more evenly.

But grading doesn't stop at size. Kenya's Coffee Board runs a weekly auction system — one of the world's most sophisticated — where licensed tasters score and bid on every lot before it reaches roasters. This double-quality filter means that Kenya AA reaching specialty buyers has passed through more scrutiny than almost any other coffee on earth.

AA

Screen 18+
Top Grade

AB

Screen 15-16
Very Good

C

Screen 14
Good

PB

Peaberry
Unique

SL28 & SL34: Born in a Lab, Loved by the World




In the 1930s, the colonial-era Scott Agricultural Laboratories (hence "SL") set out to breed coffee plants for Kenya's specific highlands — varieties that could thrive at altitude, resist drought, and produce outstandingly flavorful beans. The result: SL28 and SL34, two cultivars found almost nowhere else on earth, and together responsible for Kenya's unmistakable flavor signature.

SL28

Scott Labs, 1931 · Drought Tolerant

The crown jewel of Kenya. SL28 was developed from a drought-resistant Tanganyika strain and produces the most intense, complex flavor of any Kenyan variety. Its large beans develop exceptional acidity — the source of that signature blackcurrant and grapefruit.

FLAVOR DNA




-  Blackcurrant & Dark Berry
-  Wine-Like Acidity
-  Citrus Zest

SL34

Scott Labs, 1935 · Rain Tolerant

Developed for Kenya's wetter regions, SL34 is more forgiving in high-rainfall growing zones. Its flavor is slightly softer than SL28 — still brilliant acidity, but with more body and a rounder, more approachable profile. Often blended with SL28 in export lots.

FLAVOR DNA

-  Tomato & Red Currant
-  Full Body
-  Honey Sweetness

THE PROCESS

Double Fermentation: The Kenyan Secret

Two ferments for twice the clarity

Kenya's most distinctive processing step is the "Kenya Washed" or "double-fermentation" method. Unlike standard washed coffees that ferment once, Kenyan farmers typically ferment their coffee twice — once dry for 24 hours, then submerged in clean water for another 24-72 hours. Between each fermentation the mucilage is scrubbed away with paddle boards. This extra step creates exceptional clarity of flavor — the fruit notes cut through with surgical precision.

1

Pulping

Ripe cherries are depulped the same day — within hours of harvest to preserve freshness

2

1st Ferment

24 hours dry fermentation — natural yeasts break down mucilage and develop first layer of complexity

3

2nd Ferment

Submerged in fresh water for 24-72 hours — removing remaining mucilage and building acidity clarity

4

Raised Drying




21 days on African raised beds — slow sun drying locks in the fruit notes and builds a syrupy body

The Three Faces of Kenyan Coffee

Nyeri

1,700–2,000m · The Benchmark




Nyeri sits on the southern slopes of the Aberdare Range and is widely considered Kenya's finest coffee region. The proximity to Mount Kenya's glacial streams provides perfect water for washing — clarity in every cup.

-  Intense Blackcurrant
-  Grapefruit Acidity
-  Syrupy, Wine-Like Body

Kirinyaga

1,400–1,800m · Mt. Kenya Slopes




Named after Kenya's sacred mountain, Kirinyaga coffees inherit the volcanic red soils of the highland slopes. The flavor here is slightly rounder than Nyeri, with more body and a tomato-like savory quality unique to this micro-region.

-  Tomato & Red Currant
-  Full Body
-  Honey Finish

Murang'a

1,400–1,700m · The Reliable

Murang'a's lower altitude and warmer temperatures produce a more accessible Kenya — still brilliant, but with softer acidity and a creamier mouthfeel. A perfect entry point into Kenyan specialty coffee for those new to the style.

-  Dark Cherry
-  Milk Chocolate
-  Raspberry Sweetness

How to Make Kenya Sing in Your Cup

Kenya's acidity needs the right approach

Pour Over

The definitive Kenya method. Pour over's clarity lets the blackcurrant and grapefruit notes ring out cleanly without any oil interference. Use slightly lower water temp to keep the acidity bright, not harsh.

- Grind: Medium
- Ratio: 1:16 (coffee:water)
- Water: 89-91°C / 192-196°F
- Bloom: 45s, Total: 3:30-4:00

Aeropress

Inverted Aeropress concentrates Kenya's syrupy body without the bitterness of over-extraction. A short brew time and medium-fine grind gets you an intense, clear cup — incredible as a base for a light Americano.

- Grind: Medium-Fine
- Dose: 15-17g / 220ml
- Water: 91°C / 196°F
- Steep: 1:30, Press: 30s

Iced Pour Over

Kenya's vibrant acidity translates beautifully to iced coffee — the fruity notes become intensely refreshing when served over ice. Japanese-style iced pour over (brewing directly onto ice) keeps the aromatics sharp and vivid.

- Grind: Medium-Fine
- Half ice in carafe
- Brew hot at 1:13 ratio
- Serve immediately over ice

What to Avoid

Kenya is sensitive to over-extraction and high water temperature — both turn the bright acidity into harsh bitterness. Avoid dark roasting Kenya; the delicate fruit notes disappear above medium roast. And never let it sit on a hot plate — serve fresh.

- Avoid water above 95°C
- Avoid over-extraction
- Avoid dark roast
- Avoid long brew times



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Shop Our Kenya Collection

Three expressions of Kenya's extraordinary terroir — from the legendary AA Highland to the double-fermented Nyeri Washed. Each bag ships direct from specialty roasters to your door.

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