

# Civet 'cat' dung secret to Indonesia luxury coffee

10 March 2011, by Alvin Darlanika Soedarjo



A wild civet eats ripe Arabika coffee beans at a plantation which produces Luwak coffee on the Indonesian island of Bali. The "golden droppings" of the luwak produced after the creature eats and then excretes ripe coffee beans, can fetch up to \$800 per kilogram in countries like the US, Australia, and Singapore but suppliers are struggling to meet demand.

Indonesia's self-proclaimed "King of Luwak", Gunawan Supriadi, is having a hard time keeping up with demand for the beans excreted by his stable of pampered civet "cats".

And he's not alone. Demand for [coffee](#) brewed with beans plucked from the dung of the furry, weasel-like creatures -- known locally as luwaks -- is surging among well-heeled connoisseurs around the world, exporters say.

About 40 civets at Supriadi's plantation in West Lampung district, Sumatra, provide the intestinal machinery for his Raja Luwak (King of Luwak) brand of bean. Lampung is the undisputed capital of luwak coffee.

"My target is to have 150 civets soon because I have to meet the surge in demand," Supriadi said.

"In 2008, I gathered about 50 kilograms of luwak beans and sold them to local distributors. In 2009, I

sold 300 kilograms. In 2010, I sold 1.2 tonnes."

The "golden droppings" of the luwak, or Asian palm civet, fetch up to \$800 per kilogram (two pounds) in countries like the United States, Australia, Japan, [South Korea](#) and Singapore.

It's another story altogether at retail level. Single cups of the world's most expensive coffee have been known to sell for almost \$100 in specialty outlets in London.

**Coffee Luwak**  
Brewed from beans excreted by Asian palm civets

- Sells for up to \$800 per kilogram

**Role of civet**

- Selection of ripe coffee beans
- Partial digestion said to strip bitterness from taste

**Asian palm civet**

- Habitat: tropical forest
- Range: India, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines
- Mostly tree dwelling
- IUCN status: least concern

Source: Animal Diversity Web

*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*  
Length: about 53 cm  
Weight: Up to 5 kg

AFF

Fact file on civet cat coffee, made from beans excreted by Asian palm civets.

The civets play two roles. Firstly, they tend to choose the best berries to digest. Experts say wild civets are the most discerning, but their droppings are also the most difficult to harvest.

Having nibbled off the thin outer layer of fruit, the civets put their digestive juices to work. The enzymes penetrate the beans -- usually arabica in Sumatra -- and change their chemical balance in subtle ways.

The end product, after a good wash and light roasting, lacks the bitterness of ordinary coffee and has a unique, soft flavour.

"If luwak coffee is a car, then it must be a Rolls-Royce," Supriadi said.

Exporter Doni Irawan said his sales had grown 50 percent in the past year.

"It has become the prima donna of coffee due to its high price and limited supply. It keeps gaining new, dedicated fans," he said.

population earns less than \$2 a day, luwak coffee sells for about \$8 a cup in up-market shopping malls.

"I never used to like coffee at all, but after trying luwak coffee my world changed. I became addicted," Jakarta resident Galang Sulung Ramanda, 24, told AFP.



A waitress serves up an expensive cup of Kopi Luwak at a local coffee shop in Jakarta. Single cups of the world's most expensive coffee have been known to sell for almost \$100 in specialty outlets in London.

The tradition of luwak coffee stretches back hundreds of years to the time of Dutch rule in Indonesia.

Banned from their colonial masters' coffee crops, indigenous farmers took to collecting, cleaning and roasting undigested beans found in the forest-dwelling animals' droppings.

The Southeast Asian archipelago of 240 million people is now the world's main producer of luwak coffee, but the industry has really only flourished in recent years and official export figures are hard to find.

Retailers said demand was also high among status-conscious members of Indonesia's burgeoning middle class.

In a country where around 40 percent of the



A jar of civet cat coffee marketed under the "Coffee Alamid" brand is seen on display in Manila. The coffee, branded as among the rarest in the world, is naturally fermented through a civet cat's digestive tract.

"I also drink it for its health benefits. I heard that it can prevent asthma, Parkinson's, colon cancer and diabetes," he said.

The success of luwak coffee has given birth to a plethora of fake brands, which promise that special civet experience at half the usual price.

Not to be outdone, Vietnamese entrepreneurs say

they have developed a way to chemically treat regular beans to produce the same luwak taste.

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