

Guatemala independence day

Agriculture, especially coffee, remains growth factor

On Sept. 15, 1821, Guatemala gained its independence from Spain after two centuries of colonial rule.

Located in the center of the Americas, sharing borders with Mexico, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador and the Pacific

and Atlantic oceans, Guatemala has a diverse climate, with cool highlands and fertile coastal plains along with a tropical jungle in the northern lowlands. Within the Central American nation's 109,000-sq.-km land area there live 14 mil-

lion people who come from different backgrounds, including 22 ethnic groups of Mayan Indians each speaking a different Amerindian language.

Once there flourished the impressive Maya civilization and many precious sites re-

main throughout the country.

Today, Guatemala is a constitutional democratic republic. In 2007, new voting legislation reform was agreed upon, which helped usher in a new era of healthy democracy. The implementation doubled the number of voting places, which resulted in higher voter turnout in rural areas.

In recent years, Guatemala's economy has been thriving. After signing a final peace accord in December 1996, Guatemala became well-positioned for rapid economic growth.

Agriculture is particularly important in Guatemala's economy, which contributes 13.4 percent to Guatemala's gross domestic product (GDP) and accounts for 26 percent of its exports. On top of winter vegetables, fruit and cut flowers, commodities such as sugar and coffee continue to represent a large share of the export market. Among them, Guatemala's coffee enjoys a world-class reputation. For over 150 years, Guate-

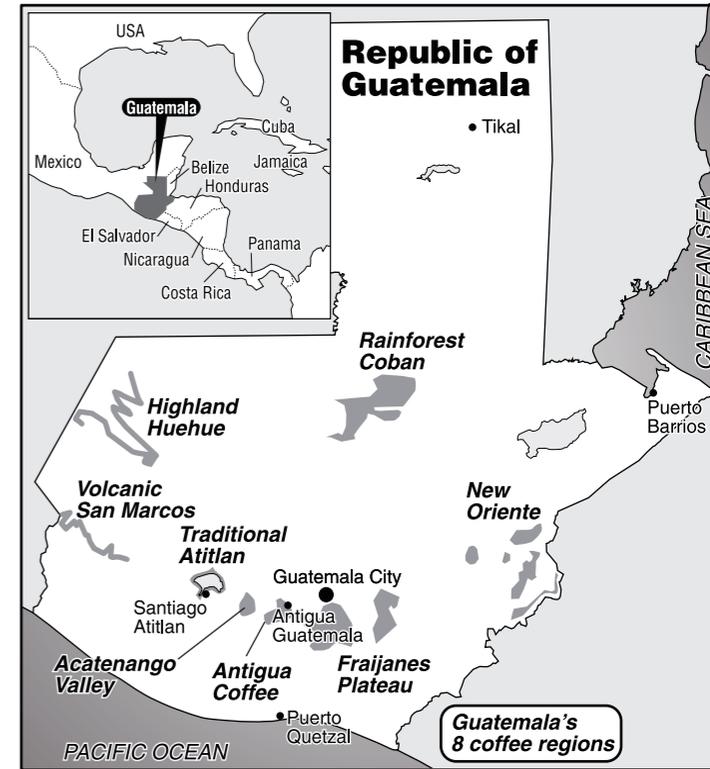
mala has distinguished itself by producing some of the best coffee in the world. There are over 65,000 coffee growers in Guatemala, of which 95 percent are small growers. All coffee is handpicked and an abundance of fresh water permits the coffee to be wet milled. The altitude and diversity of Guatemala's microclimates produce a unique coffee experience.

In recent years, coffee has become a commodity significant to Guatemala not only for its strong sales but also for its greater social ramifications. The World Coffee Conference was held in Guatemala City from Feb. 26 to 28 this year, organized by the Guatemalan National Coffee Association, also known as ANACAFE, in collaboration with the International Coffee Organization (ICO). The conference showcased exceptional coffee from eight coffee-producing regions in Guatemala: Traditional Atitlan, Acatenango Valley, Antigua Coffee, Fraijanes Plateau, New Oriente, rain forest Coban

and Volcanic San Marcos. Each of the eight regions has a unique personality forged from the combination of distinct natural and human elements. Varied microclimates, volcanic soils, consistent rainfall patterns and high altitudes predestine Guatemala for growing fine quality coffee. Coffee is not grown in isolation; it is a thread woven into the cultural and natural context of each region.

When grown under shade, coffee is wonderfully friendly to the environment: 95 percent of Guatemala's coffee is shade-grown. The country's coffee and some 38 million shade trees comprise the largest artificial forest in Central America, covering 260,000 hectares. This forest nourishes the soil, protects the watershed and dramatically reduces erosion.

Shade-grown coffee is also strategically important to the bird population of the Americas. The U.S. Smithsonian Institute has documented that Guatemala's coffee forest



Congratulations

to the People of the Republic of Guatemala
on the 189th Anniversary of Their Independence Day

We support the Guatemalan coffee industry through our coffee concern.

Takehige Ogawa

Honorary Consul of the Republic of Guatemala in Yokohama
and
Group Representative

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plays a critical role in providing natural habitats along the migratory corridor especially for songbirds.

The theme for the 2010 World Coffee Conference was "Coffee for the future: Toward a sustainable coffee sector."

Great hopes and visions about coffee were voiced, particularly in regard to environmental and social sustainability.

With information provided by the
Embassy of Guatemala.