

## **Chocolate: Where did it come from?**

For 3,500 years, humans have been bewitched by the sweetness of chocolate. Kids love it, and women fell in love through it. But where did all start? Here are a few tidbits from the pages of chocolate history.

### **The sacred plant?**

The Cacao tree was believed to be a gift from the god Quetsalcoat and considered holy by the Olmecs around 1500 B.C. The rich and elite of their community began juicing cacao fruit and drink it in ceremonies. It is found that the early people in Mexico and Central America already knew how to make chocolate from the cacao seeds as early as 1700 B.C. (Hmm... Chocolate was already enjoyed by people for more than 3,500 years before Nestle decided to make their own!)

### **Where do cacao trees grow?**

For starters, cacao trees only grow well about 20 degrees north or south of the equator (the imaginary line that divides the northern and southern hemispheres). Same as vanilla, these trees love a hot, humid, and wet climate. Fun fact: Some cacao trees grow well over 100-200 years! In a single year, a cacao tree produces around 2,000 pods. That's a ton of pure chocolate goodness!

### **Cacao seeds for business**

Did you know that the Mayans and Aztecs considered cacao seeds very precious that they may have been used as currency to buy stuff? Cacao beans were their main form of currency, which they stored in bags of 24,000 beans. It was during this time that chocolate was considered more valuable than gold mist. How about that?

Interesting fact: During those days, if you want to own a rabbit, you can buy one for 10 beans, and if you want to buy someone for a slave, you can have him or her for 100 beans. Now you know! The beans were so precious that only the rich Mayans had enough seeds to enjoy the chocolate drink, which they called 'xocolatl'.

### **What? 50 cups of cocoa a day?**

An Aztec king by the name of Montezuma drank 50 cups of cocoa a day. Now, when he was going to meet a lady, he would take an extra goblet (curious!). Fun fact: Did you know that during this time, Aztec women were not allowed to drink cocoa? That's because the extract from beans had stimulating effects (We wonder!).

### **Chocolate for bath, anyone?**

The Aztecs were known to bathe every day and believed that a hot bath could cure sickness. Remember King Montezuma? Not only did he have 50 cups of cocoa each day, he also was reported to have bathed in chocolate drink, not once, but twice per day! Can you top that?

See, there's more to chocolate than fun and sweetness. It also has a cute (and weird) history.