

Uganda coffee: A global commodity rooted in culture, sustainability and opportunity

In the heart of Tokyo, where precision meets tradition, Uganda's coffee story was brewed to perfection. At the SCAJ World Specialty Coffee Conference & Exhibition 2025, Uganda didn't just showcase beans — it unveiled a legacy. A legacy steeped in culture, sustained by communities and now poised to captivate one of the world's most discerning markets: Japan.

With exports reaching \$2.24 billion from 7.93 million 60-kg bags in the year ending August 2025, Uganda has emerged as the 6th largest coffee producer globally, as well as the 2nd largest coffee producer and top coffee exporter in Africa. But behind these figures lies a deeper narrative — one that connects heritage, sustainability and transformation.

Coffee as culture: Uganda's living legacy

In Uganda, coffee is more than a beverage. It is a symbol of hospitality, unity and reverence. In Bugisu, Rwenzori and Kisoro, traditional coffee ceremonies still thrive — beans are roasted over clay pots, ground by hand and brewed slowly, shared among family and guests in rituals that foster connection and storytelling. In central Uganda, coffee cherries are steamed with salt and chili, wrapped in fibers and eaten as a travel snack — a practice passed down through generations.

Coffee is woven into the social fabric of our communities. It marks celebrations like marriages and births, seals agreements and welcomes strangers. It is a crop of memory and meaning, cultivated not just for profit but for pride.

Sustainability: Brewing resilience from the ground up

Uganda's coffee renaissance is not just about volume — it's about values. Across the country, farmers are embracing climate-smart practices that protect both their crops and the planet.

In the Greater Masaka region, young farmer Steven Kamya has transformed his small Robusta plot into a model of low-carbon farming. Through the "Change Brewing" initiative, Steven and nearly 2,000 farmers have been trained in sustainable techniques — intercropping, shade management and the use of bio-



Courtesy of Uganda Embassy
Uganda's Ambassador Tophace Kaahwa, far left, front row, at the SCAJ 2025 opening ceremony

gesters and biochar to enhance soil fertility and reduce emissions.

"Sometimes I ask other farmers: why struggle to secure food and income when nature offers solutions?" Steven shares. "Agroforestry changed everything for me. My yields are better, my soil is healthier, and I'm feeding my family."

In the Greater Ankole region, the Uganda Carbon and Coffee Project is helping over 16,000 farmers integrate agroforestry and carbon finance into their coffee systems. These practices not only mitigate climate change but unlock new income streams — turning environmental stewardship into economic opportunity.

Transformation: From beans to better lives

Coffee supports over 12.5 million Ugandans across the value chain. For many, it is the difference between subsistence and success. Take Grace Nansubuga, a farmer from Kyotera district. Before joining a youth-led farmer field school, Grace struggled to access markets and finance. Today, she runs a thriving coffee enterprise, mentors other women and has built a savings group that funds school fees and farm inputs.

"I used to sell coffee without knowing its value," Grace says. "Now I understand quality, traceability and branding. I'm not just a farmer — I'm a businesswoman." These stories are not isolated. They are echoes of a sec-

tor that is evolving — empowering youth, promoting gender equity and building climate resilience.

Japan: A market of precision and promise

Japan's coffee culture is rooted in ritual, refinement and respect for origin. Consumers value quality, sustainability and authenticity — values that Uganda embodies.

At SCAJ 2025, Uganda's pavilion offered a sensory journey from bean to cup. Visitors sampled sweet, winy Arabicas from Mt. Elgon and the Rwenzori Mountains and bold, chocolate-toned Robustas from the central lowlands. Exporters like Mountain Harvest, Bugisu Cooperative Union, Gorilla Highlands Coffee, JKCC and Crystal Coffee engaged directly with Japanese buyers, supported by Uganda's Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries and Uganda Embassy Tokyo.

Uganda's exports to Japan have grown from \$4.3 million in 2021 to \$19.2 million in 2024/2025, with volumes more than doubling. But the opportunity is far greater. Uganda is interested in courting this market as it expands from the traditional markets. As part of our traceability efforts, today, we have registered over 1.6 million coffee farmers across the country, and quality assurance measures are enforced on each of these farms.

For Japanese consumers, Ugandan coffee offers:

- Flavor diversity: From delicate Arabicas to robust, full-bodied blends.
- Sustainability assurance: Climate-smart farming and traceability systems.
- Cultural depth: A story in every sip, rooted in heritage and humanity.
- Direct impact: Every purchase supports farmers, families and futures.

The road ahead

Uganda's coffee journey is far from over. We are revitalizing traditional growing regions, expanding into new ones and investing in value addition and branding. But our greatest export is not just coffee. It is trust. Trust in our farmers, our systems and our story.

Uganda offers a unique proposition: a dependable origin with soul, scale and sustainability. We invite Japan — and the world — not just to taste our coffee, but to un-

derstand it. To feel the heritage in every brew. To see the transformation in every bean. To join us in a movement that is as much about legacy as it is about trade.

Uganda's coffee is not just world-class. It is world-worthy.

By Charlotte B. Kemigyisha
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to the People of the Republic of Uganda
on the 63rd Anniversary of Their Independence



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Izumisano City and Gulu City in the Republic of Uganda signed a Friendship City Agreement on the 18th of July, 2017 for friendship and mutual development and have since carried out a variety of exchange activities.

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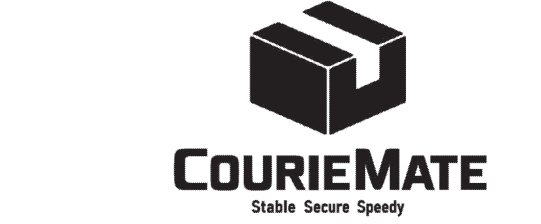
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