

# magkape

*A Philippine coffee zine*

October 2025



## **About this zine**

*magkape* is a slow brew in print — tracing how coffee, culture, and community intertwine across the Philippines. From the misty slopes of Mt. Apo to the cafés of Davao and Benguet’s quiet farms, it tells stories of people who grow, roast, and pour meaning into every cup.

We’ve always wanted to make a zine that looks deeper into coffee — to talk about the industry, the culture, and the people behind every brew. To create space for conversations, reflections, and art from “coffee people”: farmers, brewers, professionals, and enthusiasts.

Through the support of Specialty Coffee Depot and the Strengthening the Implementation of Regional and Local Peace and Development Agendas in Mindanao (SPADe/Min-PAD RISE) project, funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, co-implemented by GIZ and Model Cooperative Network, we finally made it happen. In this first issue, we feature young farmers from Bansalan, Mt. Apo, a social media techie turned farmer in Benguet, and Bene Sanchez, a home brewer turned national brewing champion. We also share contributions on flavor mapping, the Davao coffee scene, and *tambay* culture.

We hope you find this zine on café shelves and in the hands of people who care about coffee, stories, and community. *Halina at magkape!*

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**L**ike many others, our specialty coffee journey began in the stillness of the pandemic. In Davao, we searched for good coffee and found ourselves biking to roadside pop-ups and the few cafés that stayed open. That was where we first tasted Mt. Apo coffee—bright, fruity, and nutty, a sharp contrast to the dark, bold “barako” brews we grew up with.

Curious about the difference, we asked the baristas behind the counter. They explained that Mt. Apo’s Arabica carried notes of lemon, cacao, and nuts, shaped by its high elevation and volcanic soil. They also told us about the farmer who produced it and how it had placed among the top in a national competition. That story stuck with us. For the first time, we realized that coffee was more than a drink—it was a story of people, land, and craft.

From there, we dove deeper. We began brewing at home, experimenting with pour-overs and grinders, joining online coffee groups, and visiting independent cafés whenever restrictions eased. We discovered that specialty coffee wasn’t about luxury—it was about transparency, sustainability, and respect for labor. Each cup revealed not only flavor but also the work behind it.

As our circle grew, so did the community. We hosted tastings, organized small brew parties, and built a home-based slow bar. Friends shared beans and stories. We talked about origins, processing, and flavor, but we also started asking harder questions: Why, in a country so rich in coffee history, do we still import most of what we drink?

According to government data, the country produces only about 60,000 metric tons of dried cherries a year—enough to cover barely 30 percent of domestic demand. Around 70 percent of the coffee consumed nationwide is imported, even by cafés located near coffee-growing provinces. Local beans are often harder to source, less consistent, and more expensive because smallholder farmers face steep challenges.

Most coffee farmers in the Philippines manage just one to two hectares. Many earn only ₱10,000 to ₱45,000 a month, with little access to post-harvest facilities, fertilizers, or capital for expansion. Climate change, pests, and aging trees make each harvest more uncertain. Government programs exist but are difficult to access. It's no surprise that younger generations are leaving the fields, while older farmers choose to retire without successors.



These struggles mirror the larger problems in Philippine agriculture—trade policies that prioritize cheap imports, limited research investment, and lack of support for rural producers. In contrast, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand built thriving coffee sectors by investing in farmer training, infrastructure, and technology, ensuring that their farmers could compete globally.



Still, there are reasons to hope. Across the country, new farmer-producers are emerging—small cooperatives, women-led groups, and young returnees experimenting with better cultivation and processing. In Davao del Sur, the Balutakay Coffee Farmers Association (BACOFA) has proven that some smallholders can achieve specialty-grade quality when given access to training and post-harvest equipment. Their Arabica beans have placed among the best in the country, showing that excellence has strong potential at the grassroots level.



*Farmer JL Dela Cerna preparing sacks of coffee beans to sell.*



*Young farmer Leize! Endrina checking on trees and coffee cherries.*



to unite, promote, and advocate for Philippine coffee and support local production.

Coffee in the Philippines has always been about enduring despite the odds. It survives typhoons, droughts, and shifting markets because behind every cup is someone who refuses to give up on the crop or the craft. But for this story to continue, it must be grounded in fairness and casting improvements in both practice and policy, where farmers earn enough to sustain their families, systems support local production, and consumers understand the true value of every cup.

Fighting for Philippine coffee means more than brewing styles or local-themed aesthetics. It means seeing coffee as livelihood, culture, and identity. The path forward lies not in chasing trends but in building bridges—from café to farm, from passion to purpose. One cup, one conversation, one shared commitment at a time.

# *The sloping fight to move*

## *Philippine coffee forward*

**A**t sunrise in Bansalan, Davao del Sur, mist drifts down the slopes of Mt. Apo. Farmers walk the narrow footpaths between coffee trees that rise 1,400 to 1,700 meters above sea level. The volcanic soil, cool air, and altitude give their cherries a depth prized by local roasters. Here, the story of Philippine coffee unfolds at its most human scale — smallholders tending a few hundred trees on ancestral Bagobo-Tagabawa land.

For 30-year-old coffee farmer John Lawrence Dela Cerna, the rhythm of tending Arabica is both an inheritance and a fight. After years in the city, he returned home to manage his family's coffee plots. *"Maganda ang pakiramdam ko sa bukid. Maganda sa aking mental health,"* he said.

Yet the calm of the highlands hides the weight of daily work. *"Kailangan ng tulong sa pag-increase sa yield. Maraming peste. Kumokonti din ang harvest."*





Dela Cerna moves through rows of trees, pruning branches, checking cherries, and adjusting drying racks. Pests, erratic rainfall, and change in climate make every harvest uncertain. What keeps him anchored is the hope that the small plot he tends today will sustain his family tomorrow.

***Shared slopes, shared struggles***

In 2013, farmers from Sitio Balutakay organized the Balutakay Coffee Farmers Association (BACOFA) to face those odds together. They began with only 20 members; today, 68 families grow highland Arabica between 1,400 and 1,700 meters. Training from the Coffee Quality Institute, the Philippine Coffee Board, Inc., and the Department of Agriculture programs gave them the skills to process beans for specialty markets.

“  
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Inside BACOFA's small processing station, Princess Dianne Tapdasan sorts green beans by hand. *"Hindi ko nga natitikman yung kape na pinaprocess ko eh,"* she said. *"Naghihintay na lang ako ng feedback na galing sa nakatikim."*

Her precision sustains the cooperative's reputation. *"Minsan, napakaraming sinosort kasi may defects,"* she said, smiling. *"Pero masaya pa rin... alam naming masarap."*

Nearby, Leizel Endrina, 27, an accountant-turned-processor, records pH, temperature, and drying times for each batch. *"Nagka-interest ako sa kape dahil naka-attend ako sa mga trainings,"* she said. *"Ngayon nag-self-study ako ng mga innovative processing methods para sa mga kape namin."* More than a year ago, Leizel decided to leave her city job to help tend her parent's farm.

She says despite strong orders, they cannot always meet supply because production remains limited.

For Endrina and other members of BACOFA, the challenge is expansion, as they need capital, manpower, and tools to plant more trees. Dela Cerna's challenge on the other hand is increasing yield — with no more land to expand into, he focuses instead on better farm management, experimental processing methods and testing new tree varieties.

Despite these challenges, BACOFA's lots consistently place among the top Arabica entries in the Philippine Coffee Quality Competition (PCQC) — proof of Mt. Apo's potential, and that patient, community-led processes can yield quality capable of competing with imported beans.

### ***The hardest part of the climb***

According to the 2022 Philippine Coffee Industry Roadmap, the country produced 60,640.95



Tapdasan sorting green beans.

metric tons of dried cherries in 2020 from 113,264.89 hectares, with an average yield of only 0.54 metric tons per hectare. Robusta accounted for 76.5 percent of the total output, while Arabica accounted for 16.7 percent. The roadmap's target of 44.58 percent self-sufficiency by 2025 hinges on boosting productivity in farms like those on Mt. Apo.

Across Bansalan, farms are typically small and steep, often measuring less than a hectare and situated on 40- to 60-degree slopes. Expansion is limited, so productivity must come mainly from within, by rejuvenating old trees, controlling pests, and replanting trees. These efforts need coordination and subsidy during the years when trees are not yet bearing fruit.

Pest outbreaks like borers also frequently damage about half of the harvest. Farmers note that pest management must be collective: if only one farm sprays or rehabilitates, insects simply migrate to the next plot. The same coordination is needed

for fertilizer use and cherry transport, since many farms are accessible only by footpaths.

The challenges of Bansalan mirror those identified by most producers nationwide. In Bukidnon, there is land to plant on but little capital. In the Cordilleras, terrain and access roads remain the bottlenecks. Infrastructure, credit, and training are recurring needs across all growing regions.

### **From foothill lots to a national path**

The 2018 Coffee Roadmap once envisioned 214,626 metric tons of output and full self-sufficiency by 2022. That goal remains far off. According to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2024, imports still account for approximately 80 percent of domestic consumption. Self-sufficiency lingers between 15 and 20 percent.

Mindanao remains the country's primary coffee belt, led by the Davao Region, Bukidnon, and Sultan Kudarat.

Researcher Nico Ralloza, who studied Mt. Apo's coffee economy, observed that the "specialty" label may not automatically translate to better livelihoods. Many smallholders remain unable to scale up without systemic support.

Government roadmaps recommend tree rehabilitation, distribution of pest-resistant varieties, communal processing facilities, credit programs, and crop insurance. But

implementation on the ground depends on functioning cooperatives and consistent government follow-through.

### **Toward continuity and cooperation**

Every day, Endrina logs fermentation data to track what works. Tapdasan watches over drying racks to prevent over-fermentation. Dela Cerna prunes branches and replants younger trees to revive productivity. Each act is small but cumulative—a quiet strategy to keep the next harvest alive.

The 2022 roadmap frames coffee as one of the Philippines' "priority high-value crops," forecasting yield growth and renewed export capacity by 2025. It warns, however, that without local implementation and accountability, targets may remain only on paper.

For the farmers on Mt. Apo's slopes, progress is both physical and symbolic. It means higher cupping scores, steadier supply, and youth choosing to stay in farming rather than leave.

Dela Cerna remains hopeful as he tends his farm each morning. "*Mas happy ako sa pagtatanim. Mas magtatagal na ako dito. Mamanahin na din siguro ito ng anak ko,*" he said. For him, the fight is not for trophies or titles but for endurance. For BACOFA, it is about trust, collective spirit, and community. And for the Philippines, it is about proving that coffee grown on these sloping lands can carry not only flavor but also pride and dignity.

*The SPADe/MinPAD-RISE Project Recognizes BACOFA Cooperative's role in ensuring fair market trade in behalf of its member producers, thereby ensuring sustainability and improvement in coffee production.*

*By strengthening BACOFA's internal governance, technical expertise in specialty coffee production, and capacity for market engagement, the project hopes to sustain a vital support system for coffee producers in this part of Mount Apo.*

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# Brewing dependency: How imported coffee drowned out local production



Most Filipinos get to know coffee in sachets, as powdered 3-in-1 blends of sugar, creamer, and instant granules. But behind that everyday habit lies the story of how trade liberalization dismantled a once-thriving local industry.

By the late 1800s, the Philippines ranked among the world's top coffee exporters, shipping Arabica from Batangas and Cavite to Europe and Asia. The boom collapsed in the 1890s when coffee leaf rust, pests, and Brazil's oversupply devastated local farms. Under American rule, Robusta was introduced, and domestic consumption rose. By the 1960s, protectionist measures like Republic Act No. 2712 banned imports and fixed farm prices under the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) quota system.

This system kept prices stable and allowed farmers to earn a decent income until 1989, when the ICA collapsed after the United States withdrew, triggering a global price crash. The Philippines soon joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later the World Trade Organization (WTO), removing import controls and subsidies that had shielded local growers. Cheap beans from Vietnam and Indonesia flooded the market, while local producers, mostly smallholders, lacked access to capital, training, or post-harvest facilities.

By the 2000s, imports had surged from USD 69 million in 2005 to over USD 262 million in 2014, while exports fell from USD 6.2 million to just USD 2.6 million in the same period. Today, about 81 percent of the coffee consumed in the country is imported, and self-sufficiency hovers around 15 percent. Multinationals like Nestlé now dominate over 80 percent of the domestic market through contract growing and instant coffee production.



The mornings are quieter now. In Benguet's misty highlands, where pine and kalasan trees breathe in the same cool air as the volcanic soil beneath them, Noemi Lardizabal Dado no longer starts her day in front of a glowing computer screen. Instead, she walks among rows of Arabica trees, brushing dew off their leaves.

Online, people knew her as “momblogger,” one of the pioneers of Philippine digital advocacy. But today, she is a farmer-producer at Agnep Heritage Farms, tending to land that carries her husband's family history of more than a century.

“It started with a cup of coffee and a conversation with my daughter,” she recalled of a drive one January morning in 2018. “If you love coffee so much, maybe you should be a coffee farmer,” she had told her daughter. What began as a playful remark became the seed of something enduring.



***From social media to farming:***



***Noemi Lardizabal Dado's  
coffee journey***

*By Marjohara Tucay*

### **From bean to brew**

Agnep Heritage Farms is situated high in Sitio Bayo, Balili, Mangkaya, Benguet, at an elevation of 1,620 meters above sea level. When the family began planting, the land was covered in kalasan and pine trees. Today, the coffee grows among them, a mix of Typica, Red Bourbon, and Orange Bourbon, all sheltered under a natural canopy that keeps the cherries cool and slows their maturation.

“It is five hectares. We have around 11,000 trees,” Dado said. “We plant the coffee in between all those trees.”

Their patience paid off. In 2022, Agnep’s Benguet Arabica won a bronze medal at the *Global Coffee Championship* in Korea, proof that quiet persistence can reach far beyond the mountains.

“Last year, we had a very good run,” she said. “But we plant every year because sometimes the coffee will not bear cherries.” Production

depends on the weather, yet Dado plants for resilience, not volume.

Using the South Korean JADAM natural farming method, she produces microbial fertilizers from local materials. “We don’t use chemicals,” she said proudly. “We make our own.”

While Agnep’s output is modest compared with big Robusta producers, specialty roasters are drawn to its traceable, sustainably grown cherries. “Production is low in terms of cherries,” she said, “but I compensate for it by ensuring the cup quality is high.”

Her impact extends beyond her own farm. “We buy cherries from neighbors and process them,” she said. “They need to be trained on how to pick right.” In 2023, she helped organize the Kabatangan Coffee Growers, a small community of farmers who share techniques, resources, and a vision. “I go there every month to monitor,” she added. “We want farmers to earn from coffee.”



Agnep Heritage Farms’ Benguet Arabica: winner of a bronze medal at the 2022 Global Coffee Championship in Korea.

“  
**We need  
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It’s about  
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— Noemi Lardizabal Dado,  
coffee farmer-producer

### ***The meaning of continuity***

Forty percent of Agnep’s land remains under forest cover. Birds, insects, and microbes thrive alongside the coffee, turning the farm into a living classroom for natural farming. “Because we use fermentation, we rely on microbes to create flavor,” she said. “Healthy soil means flavorful coffee.”

Online, she continues to write about farming and women’s empowerment. Offline, she employs local women who, like her, view coffee as both a livelihood and a legacy. “They know this can bring them income, especially as specialty producers,” she said.

For Dado, farming is not just production. It is an act of stewardship. “We need to look just beyond production,” she said. “It’s about dignity and continuity.”

Agnep Heritage Farms stands as quiet proof that heritage and innovation can coexist. From five hectares of shade-grown Arabica, Dado has cultivated more than a crop. She has built a way of life rooted in care, memory, and the slow craft of growth.

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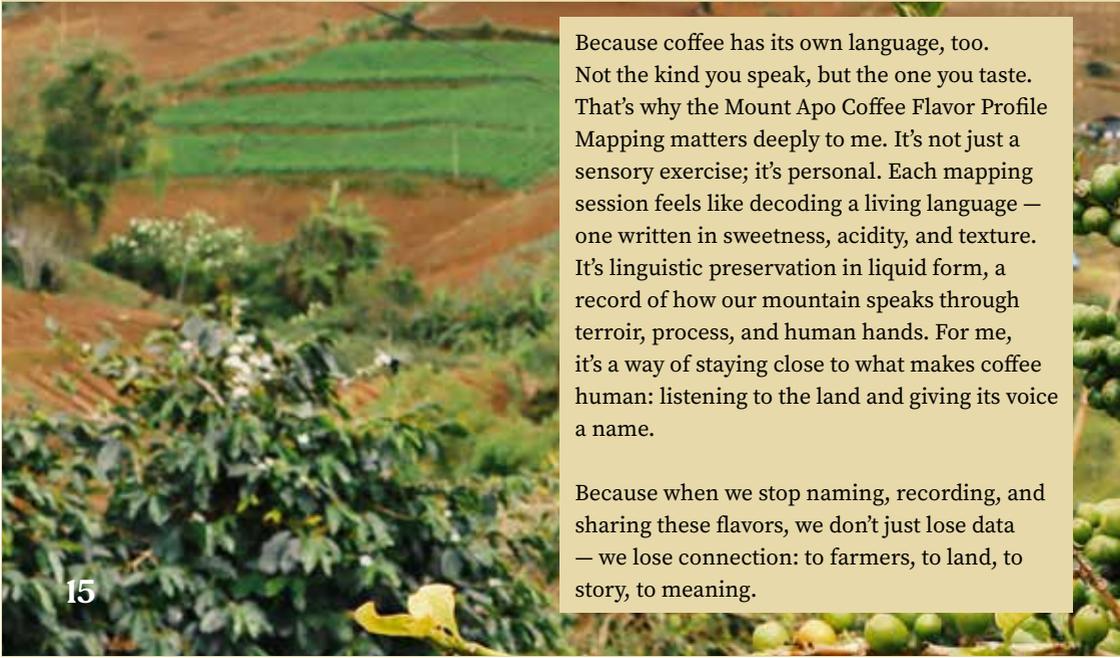
# Mount Apo coffee flavor profile mapping

By Dot Mediano

A few years ago, I sat across from my good friend Frank, microphones between us, as we discussed something close to our hearts: the Bisaya language. Our podcast, *Brighter Bisaya: Mga Murag Korek*, had one episode that struck deeper than expected — *Bisaya Language Extinction*.

I'm no linguistics expert, just a curious learner who loves language and its stories. However, our conversation touched on what scholars have long studied. Linguist David Crystal, in *Language Death* and *How Language Works*, wrote that when a language dies, it's like losing a species from the ecosystem — a way of seeing the world disappears with it. As the saying goes, "The story of language is the civilization of language." Every word carries history, identity, and the soul of a people.

That conversation stayed with me — and oddly enough, it followed me into coffee.



Because coffee has its own language, too. Not the kind you speak, but the one you taste. That's why the Mount Apo Coffee Flavor Profile Mapping matters deeply to me. It's not just a sensory exercise; it's personal. Each mapping session feels like decoding a living language — one written in sweetness, acidity, and texture. It's linguistic preservation in liquid form, a record of how our mountain speaks through terroir, process, and human hands. For me, it's a way of staying close to what makes coffee human: listening to the land and giving its voice a name.

Because when we stop naming, recording, and sharing these flavors, we don't just lose data — we lose connection: to farmers, to land, to story, to meaning.

### ***Two stories in a cup***

When I first met Sir JL Dela Cerna — known for his award-winning *Moonlit Berries* — it wasn't on his farm but in the city. Yet when we shook hands, I swear I felt the mountain in him: the weight of morning mist, the cool air, the patience of someone who spent his youth listening to trees.

As we tasted his coffee, I shared what I found: orange, berries, caramel, and chocolate. He smiled — not politely, but with the joy of being seen. “*Salamat kaayo, Sir Dot — dakong tabang kaayo makabalo mi sa lasa sa among kape,*” he said. That simple line held joy, pride, and gratitude.

Then there was my friend Leizel Endrina — a young farmer who gifted me a small experimental process. I brewed it at home: bright tropical notes, soft melon-like acidity, a sweet finish. Later, she messaged me, delighted to hear feedback on her experiment. Her excitement reminded me of the risk and curiosity behind every batch — and how her courage now had a language that spoke through her coffee.



That's what flavor mapping truly is: helping farmers hear their coffees and giving voice to years of labor. Whether through large-scale mappings like Mount Apo's or small personal exchanges, every shared flavor note matters.

### ***Why it matters***

Mount Apo coffee isn't just good — it's world-class, vibrant, and alive. Beyond its volcanic soil and altitude lies something more profound: people whose care doesn't end at harvest. They are craftsmen of instinct, guided by precision born of experience — scientists of intuition who measure not just in data, but in devotion.

Yet there's urgency here. A *PLOS ONE* study projects that approximately half of the land suitable for Arabica coffee could become unsuitable by 2050, particularly in hotter, drier regions. Even cooler equatorial zones will face losses. Adaptation, therefore, begins with awareness.

Documenting and mapping flavor today works like long-term ecological monitoring. Each profile adds to a growing dataset that supports adaptation and heritage preservation — helping

us understand where coffees thrive, how they evolve, and why they matter. Each record becomes both a snapshot of the present and a guide for the future.

If language loss is cultural death, flavor profile loss is agricultural amnesia — and flavor mapping is how we remember.

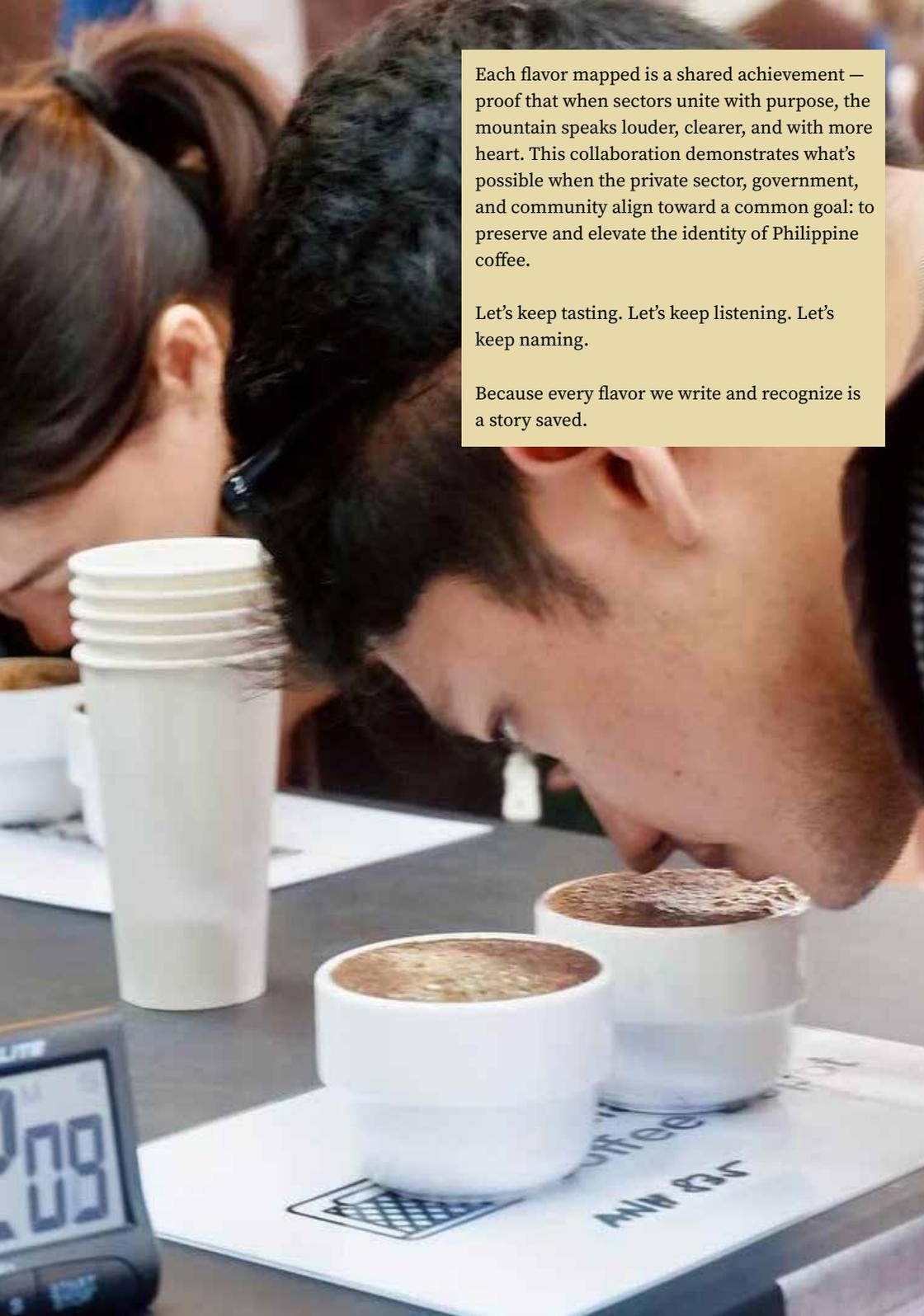
### ***The collaboration that speaks volumes***

The Mount Apo Coffee Flavor Profile Mapping is more than a project - it's movement born of collaborations. It brings together Specialty Coffee Depot (SCD), the Filipino Coffee Institute (FCI), Ateneo De Davao Coffee and Cacao Collaborative Learning Laboratory (ADDC3LL), MAGSIGE, Davao del Sur State College, the Department of Agriculture, and the steadfast support of the SPADe/MinPAD-RISE project, funded by the EU and BMZ.

It was a sight to behold: farmers, graders, brewers, enthusiasts, and dreamers gathered around one table. Together, they built a framework that connects people and purpose, turning data into understanding and understanding into legacy.

***If language loss is cultural death,  
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is how we remember***

*Dot (@hgtpdot38) is a certified Q Arabica grader and chairperson of Specialty Coffee Depot. He owns Lot38 (@lot38kape), a home café serving specialty coffee in Davao.*



Each flavor mapped is a shared achievement — proof that when sectors unite with purpose, the mountain speaks louder, clearer, and with more heart. This collaboration demonstrates what's possible when the private sector, government, and community align toward a common goal: to preserve and elevate the identity of Philippine coffee.

Let's keep tasting. Let's keep listening. Let's keep naming.

Because every flavor we write and recognize is a story saved.



***Brewing change, together***

*Specialty Coffee Depot*



**Specialty Coffee Depot**

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In every cup of Philippine coffee lies a story of people, place, and purpose. Specialty Coffee Depot—officially registered as the Specialty Coffee Marketing Cooperative (SCMC)—is a collective enterprise of young farmers, roasters, and entrepreneurs working together to uplift the local coffee scene: one bean, one brew, one shared vision at a time.

The creation of SCMC was made possible through the Strengthening the Implementation of Regional and Local Peace and Development Agendas (SPADE) project funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Model Cooperative Network (MCN). Working with partner-cooperatives, such as MAGROW, MAGSIGE, BACOFA, and other Mindanao-based coffee cooperatives, a shared realization emerged—the need for a dedicated enterprise that would focus on promoting and trading specialty coffee.

SCMC has since grown into a pivotal market linkage within the Philippine coffee value chain. Its mission is to help producers transition from the low-value commodity market to the high-value specialty segment—where premium prices reward quality, transparency, and sustainability. Each batch roasted and every cup shared carries with it the story of the farmers', roasters' and entrepreneurs' dedication and craftsmanship.

By bringing together all actors in the value chain—from farmers and processors to entrepreneurs and consumers—SCMC embodies a new model of cooperative collaboration. It demonstrates how collective effort can elevate both product quality and market presence, setting a new benchmark for inclusive, value-driven enterprise.

Looking ahead, SCMC seeks to strengthen its collaboration with BACOFA and expand partnerships with other specialty coffee-producing cooperatives across Mindanao, while also supporting the growth of local coffee entrepreneurs—together contributing to the continued advancement and excellence of Philippine specialty coffee.

In her presentation to the SPADE Project Knowledge Fair last October 22-24, 2025, MCN CEO Rhoda Pillerin, mused, “As the next chapters of the coffee industry history of the Philippines unfold, I hope it will be about farmers who become innovators and entrepreneurs, about entrepreneurs who become part of a vibrant cooperative economy, and about the Philippine specialty coffee that serves as a platform for rural innovation and shared prosperity.”

To drink specialty coffee is to champion science, story and solidarity. It is to taste care, patience and precision — to honor the people who made it possible. It's to slow down, breathe, and savor something made with intention: a cup brewed mindfully and shared meaningfully.

Because in the end, it's more than coffee. It's community. It's craft. It's belief that Philippine coffee can bring about shared prosperity.

If you are passionate about Philippine coffee, go beyond the cup and be part in making change. Join Specialty Coffee Marketing Cooperative now and be a member.

Contact [info@specialtycoffeedepotph.com](mailto:info@specialtycoffeedepotph.com)/  
[specialtycoffeedepotph@gmail.com](mailto:specialtycoffeedepotph@gmail.com) and learn how you can contribute and benefit.

*From home brews to  
the world stage:*



*Bene Sanchez, 2025  
PH Brewers Cup champion*

*By Marjohara Tucay*



**H**ome-brew cafes prove challenging to find. After booking with Bene Sanchez, the reigning 2025 PH Brewers Cup champion, via Instagram, I travelled to Ireneville Subdivision in Sucat, Parañaque, just a few streets away from SM Sucat.

Alighting from the vehicle, I found myself in the middle of quiet houses with no café in sight. *“Tama naman yung pin ko,”* I thought, before asking a man leaving his gate, *“Saan po dito yung Eleven Coffee? Café po.”*

*“Walang café dito, tutoy. Baka sa BF Homes yung hinahanap mo,”* he replied.

His words didn’t discourage me to keep looking.

And luck would have it, just two houses away, I saw a small sign that read *“Coffee is a gift to the world.”* From the outside, it appeared to be a typical suburban house. But inside, it was a calm space lined with brewing tools and cups, all arranged neatly on a wooden counter.

Bene welcomed me softly. He moved quietly as he heated water and prepared to brew. On the counter sat a small packet of Panama La Esmeralda Trapiche — washed Geisha beans. As he brewed, aroma filled the room, floral and citrusy. The cup that followed was clean and tea-like, bright with orange, cherry, and pineapple. Beside it sat a slice of matcha roll, baked by his wife Tish, who helps manage their home-based Eleven Coffee.

### ***Finding balance in every pour***

Before the competition, Bene was far from the spotlight. He first encountered pour-over coffee years ago, long before he became a barista. The slow, deliberate process drew him in. “I liked how calm it looked,” he said. Watching the water spiral through coffee grounds, he began trying it himself at home, learning through taste and repetition.

Eventually, he worked at a café in Makati City that served only pour-overs. There, he brewed hundreds of cups each week, refining his patience and precision. “I’ve been trying to brew coffee for as many people as I can,” he said softly. “I was nervous, but I wanted to see if it was something I could do.”

When the pandemic hit, Bene stopped working behind the bar and focused on brewing at home. “I was just making coffee at home for my dad,” he recalled. His break came when his friend Gio invited him to join a small brewing competition called the April Brewers Cup. “I joined that

competition just for fun,” he said. “Like I said, why not? The entry fee was Php1,000 and the prize was a Fellow kettle, and I really wanted one. I had no expectation at all of winning.”

He won that event, and with it, a chance to be coached by Patrik Rolf, founder of the Danish roaster April Coffee Roasters and silver champion of the 2019 World Brewers Cup.

That mentorship gave him the confidence to compete at the national level. “Even the thought of joining nationals never crossed my mind before,” he said. “But because I was given that opportunity to be coached by Patrik, I said, okay, let’s try this too.”

Bene entered the Philippine Brewers Cup in 2023 and placed second in his debut. There was no national competition in 2024, but he used the time to refine his brewing and presentation. “We tried again in 2025,” he said quietly, “and I’m grateful that I was able to win.”

“  
***I’ll brew every day,  
and I’ll keep tasting.  
The goal is to make a  
cup that tells a story.***

—Bene Sanchez,  
2025 PH Brewers Cup Champion

His approach remained grounded in simplicity. “I like this combination,” he said, referring to his preferred dripper and filter. “It makes great coffee—balanced, clean, and sweet.” Each pour was carefully measured, though he added with a shy smile, “I wasn’t thinking too much about numbers. I was just trying to make something that tastes good.”

After his 2025 national win, Bene began preparing for the World Brewers Cup with quiet focus.

“After I won the nationals, there’s this feeling that you ask yourself, what’s next?” he said. “For the past months, going to your nationals, you’re working so hard every day, trying to give your 110 percent—and now you gave that. Then you ask, How do I make that better for the World’s?”

He studies his score sheets from previous competitions to track improvement. “I saw areas where I improved from two years ago,” he noted, “but there are still things I need to work on—some of it is technical skill, especially consistency in brewing.”

He also recognizes the mental and physical demands ahead. “Going into the competition, you really do struggle with the mental-health aspect of it, as well as the physical, because it’s really tiring to do the entire routine multiple times in one day,” he said.

To prepare for the world stage, he continues to train with his mentors, Leng Leng Lu and Jimmy of Afloat Coffee Roasters, who also roasted his winning beans. “They really helped level me up from a home brewer who brews at home to somebody who can share coffee on a national level,” he said. “I’m continuing to work with them for the World’s.”



### ***Brewing toward the world stage***

Bene's journey since the national win has been quiet but focused. That has been his mark ever since he started competing. And that composure will now be put to the test on the global stage.

As the 2025 Philippine Brewers Cup champion, Bene will represent the country at the 2026 World Brewers Cup. "I'll keep practicing," he said simply. "I'll brew every day, and I'll keep tasting. The goal is to make a cup that tells a story."

And as he steps onto the world stage, Bene brings with him the optimism for the future of Philippine coffee brewers. "I think my goal when I go up on the world stage is to show them that we home brewers in the Philippines are ready to be on the world level, to bring the Philippines to the world, and to bring the world level to the Philippines," he said cheerily.

"I'm a home brewer, so I don't grow coffee or roast coffee, but I think in the way that we organize events for other home brewers, the way that we share coffee, our relationship with coffee is much deeper and much more levelled up than before. I want to show them that the Philippine home brewers are doing these amazing things, and that there's so much growth and potential here in the Philippines," he added.

Bene recognizes that much needs to be done to catapult the practice of home-brewing and appreciating specialty coffee in the country. "That's something that I'm curious to see," he said. "More creative ways for consumers to meet producers and to understand the work that goes into the coffees that they drink."

As our conversation wound down, the cup in my hand had cooled, but its fragrance lingered—bright, clean, and confident, like the quiet brewer ready to take Philippine coffee brewing to the world.







# *Bene Sanchez's Brewers Cup Recipe (2025 Philippine Champion Routine)*



**Coffee:** Colombia Finca La Negrita  
Geisha Natural DRD  
Afloat Coffee Roasters

**Grind:** 26 clicks on Comandante C40  
(medium-coarse)

**Water:** 50 ppm using Aquacode

**Brew Ratio:** 1:15 (14g coffee to 210g  
total water)

**Filter:** Abaca

**Dripper:** CT-62

**Water Temperature:** 90°C for the first  
two pours, finishing at 85°C

**Total Brew Time:** ~1:40 minutes

**Target Yield:** 170g

## ***Brew Steps***

**Bloom (0:00s):** Pour 40g of water at  
90°C to saturate all grounds evenly. Let  
bloom for 30 seconds.

**Second Pour (0:30s):** Add 80g of water  
(for a total of 120g). Maintain an even  
circular motion and keep the bed level.

**Third Pour (1:00s):** Add the remaining  
90g of water at 85°C (for a total of 210g).  
Finish pouring by 1:20.

**Drawdown:** Allow the brew to drain  
completely by 1:40.



**T**here's something magnetic about Davao's cafés. Maybe it's the easy rhythm, the mix of good coffee and quiet air that makes time stretch a little. In a city known for taking things slow, that pace feels less like delay and more like defiance. Here, to stay is to resist.

*Tambay* isn't laziness. It's an act of reclaiming time. In a world obsessed with output, *tambay* says, "Wait, let's breathe." To *tambay* is to invite the serendipity of unexpected conversations, the stillness between sips, the feeling of being part of something without needing to perform.

Davao's cafés carry that rhythm. One turns into an open mic stage. Another becomes a gallery of postcards and sketches. Guitars lean by walls, doodles spill over menu boards. These aren't props. They're proof that people lingered, that they belonged for a while.

The city's annual Davao Coffee Crawl captures that spirit. It invites everyone to explore independent cafés, meet baristas, and discover local brews. More than a caffeine run, it's a map of connection—a reminder that cafés thrive when people stay long enough to talk, read, and listen.

But before coffee became a lifestyle, it was a livelihood.

Years ago, I interned with Coffee for Peace, a group that used coffee to start conversations about land and livelihood. That's where I learned that every cup carries the labor of farmers who plant, roasters who perfect, and baristas who pour. Coffee culture isn't built by design trends. It's built by people who care.

Still, not everyone feels welcome in that space. Specialty coffee can feel intimidating—scales, drippers, ratios. But maybe it doesn't have to be. Baristas can keep things simple. Regulars can invite curiosity. Because at its core, coffee is about sharing.

My own coffee story began with a small kindness. A barista handed me a free pour-over after my flat white. I tasted it and was stunned. It was delicate, almost like tea. That cup changed how I understood both flavor and generosity.

The more we learn about coffee, the more we value its makers. We begin to see the chain of hands behind every brew—from farm to café table. *Tambay* is part of that chain. It connects us through stillness and shared time.

Maybe reshaping the country's coffee culture starts there. One cup. One talk. One *tambay* at a time.

“  
**We're not killing  
time. We're  
reclaiming it.**”

*Kiara (@masayang.mabuhay) is a coffee shop *tambay* who believes cafes have the power to shape modern collective consciousness.*

**Tara, *tambay*!**

By Kiara Rholerio



# *Coffee crawling in Davao City*

*By RJ Lumawag*

What started as a casual question among friends in 2021 — “*Mag-unsang ta karong October 1, diba International Coffee Day na?*” — sparked what is now known as the Davao Coffee Crawl.

First organized by the owners of Confex & Co., Onse, Espresso Lab, Mugshots, Spark, and Lara Mia, the crawl began as a fun way to explore cafés during the pandemic while supporting local businesses. With just a week to prepare, nine cafés joined the first run, offering small prizes and plenty of caffeine-fueled camaraderie.





The idea was simple: visit participating cafés, collect stamps, and complete the “crawl card.” But its impact went far beyond that. The event helped spotlight Davao’s growing coffee culture, strengthened bonds among café owners, and inspired more people to appreciate locally sourced coffee.

Since 2021, the Davao Coffee Crawl has become an annual tradition that celebrates both community and collaboration. What began as a small volunteer effort has grown into a citywide celebration of local cafés, coffee lovers, and the shared passion that brews between them.



*RJ is founder of [kapediaries.com](http://kapediaries.com)*

**J**ournaling is the act of recording aspects of one's life, whether through modern, digital means or through more analog ways using pen and paper. This is the creative act of remembering and archiving that quietly protects the local coffee community. The call to journal becomes louder during the start of the year when people are feeling reflective about the year that has passed and enthusiastic about the year that is unfolding. In Davao, we've seen the steady billowing of interest for journaling, and this interest is only going to grow bigger with the new year on the horizon.

Within the context of café culture, avid coffee enthusiasts journal about their craft in three major ways. First, there is the way of journaling that always first comes to mind when we hear the term. Perhaps I should call it reflective journaling, where one nurses a cozy beverage while writing away one's thoughts on a piece of paper. Second, and arguably the more popular way in recent times, is creative journaling. This approach utilizes mixed media to create a journal page that bursts with life. Lastly, there is the more niche way of journaling within the context of café culture and that is creative coffee journaling. This way of journaling merges the first two, as it requires deep reflection on the coffee attributes while being challenged to creatively lay out the fruits of one's reflection on a journal page.

# *How to make coffee shops last forever*

It goes without saying that coffee shops and even espresso bar pop-ups have been sprouting at an exponential rate. It's so nice to see! However, along with this reality is another bittersweet reality: not all cafes share the same life expectancy. Even great ones have to say goodbye when the time comes. And we can only look back on them, hopefully with less sadness and with more joy, because our journal pages made the beauty of the beverages and spaces, we once loved, eternal.

*By Kim Fabular*

*Kim is the owner of Glasshouse Coffee.*



# Kape kontra Kurakot

These coffee folks showed up at the massive anti-corruption protests last Sept 21. Here's what they brewed up to say:

**“**  
***When people start to actually care about what’s happening in their community, they become aware that everything affects everything. That includes every single part of the value chain leading to the cup of coffee you drink every day.***  
**”**

—Caith, Head of Coffee, Niseko Coffee (@kitboo)

**“**  
***We work with and serve those most affected. We feel the impact of stolen resources every day. Showing up is a collective effort to stand with our community and be the voice of change.***  
**”**

—AJ, co-owner, Wicked Coffee (@\_wickedcoffeeph)



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“

***It affects everyone. I encourage people to join, to feel the very essence of what we're fighting for and to meet others from all walks of life. The government keeps turning a blind eye, but the people are watching. We need to show up, so we're not silenced or misrepresented.***

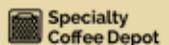
—Jet, Bern Coffee Roastery  
(@jeteroo)

“

***We participated as regular citizens and human beings, but it became more meaningful when we biked there with and ran into people we had met at the coffee shop. It's nice to realize we share some things as strong as the coffee we drink together, and our circles of community extend beyond the circumference of a cup. :)***

—Aubrey, Laya Coffee Diliman  
(@layacoffeediliman)

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