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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Hot Beverages

As the temperature cools down and fall draws near, more and more people reach for a hot beverage to warm themselves up. In Japan, many people enjoy drinking various kinds of tea, and coffee is also very popular. Some people prefer a cup of *amazake*. There are many kinds of hot drinks that are enjoyed all over the world, so this month, I'm going to introduce a few.

Coffee

With its rich aroma and energizing properties, coffee is one of the most popular beverages worldwide. It's enjoyed all year long, but September 29 is National Coffee Day in the United States, and October 1 is International Coffee Day.

Coffee plants originated in the forests of Ethiopia, but the beverage has roots in Yemen. In the 15th century, Sufi Muslims harvested, roasted, and brewed the beans into a hot drink to aid their concentration during night prayer sessions. The drink quickly spread throughout the Arab world and then to Europe through Mediterranean trade routes. Nowadays, the biggest producers of coffee are Brazil, Vietnam, Indonesia, Colombia, and Ethiopia.

My hometown, Seattle, is considered the coffee capital of the US. Since the weather is dull and dreary for most of the year, local coffeehouses became a place where people could escape the rain and perk up. Seattleites became very serious about artisanal coffee, and international coffee giants such as Starbucks Coffee, Tully's Coffee, and Seattle's Best Coffee were born.

In 2003, Starbucks invented the Pumpkin Spice Latte.

It is based on pumpkin pie, and contains cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, milk, espresso, whipped cream, and sugar, with pumpkin purée added to the recipe in 2015. It does not actually taste like pumpkin, as the warm spices take center stage. Since it is only available for a limited time in the fall, it has a cult following and has sparked many imitations, as well as "pumpkin spice" flavored foods and scented candles. Some people even say that fall does not truly begin until they have their first Pumpkin Spice Latte of the season in September.



Tea

Even though I'm from Seattle, I have always preferred tea. While coffee is famous for its quick energy boost, a hot cup of tea offers a gentle, calming warmth that is perfect for crisp September days.

The history of tea goes back thousands of years to ancient China, where it was first used as medicine. Today, from the formal afternoon tea of Great Britain to the sweet, mint-infused green teas served in Morocco, tea is enjoyed all over the world. In Japan, autumn is the

perfect time to enjoy the earthy taste of hot green tea. On chilly mornings and evenings, I love having a steaming cup of *hojicha* (roasted green tea). I enjoy the warm, nutty aroma, and with its naturally low caffeine content, I find it incredibly relaxing.

When I want something richer and spicier than Japanese tea, my go-to choice is chai. Originating in India, where it is traditionally called *masala chai*, this comforting beverage is made by boiling strong black tea leaves with milk, sugar, and a blend of aromatic spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, and ginger. Interestingly, the word "chai" simply means "tea" in Hindi, so when people in Western countries order a "chai tea," they are technically asking for "tea tea!" The spices in chai not only create a wonderful aroma that rivals any pumpkin spice latte, but they also naturally warm up the body, making it the perfect beverage to welcome the arrival of fall.



Hot Chocolate

Hot chocolate, also called hot cocoa, is another one of my favorite cool-weather drinks. The cacao plant originally comes from the rainforests of the Amazon and Orinoco River basins, but it was brought north to Central America by indigenous traders. Cacao beverages became an important part of Maya and Aztec culture for centuries. These cacao beverages were unsweetened, bitter, and spicy due to the addition of chili peppers. Sugar and milk were added, and chili peppers were removed after the drink was brought back to Europe by Spanish explorers.

Nowadays, there are many ways to prepare hot chocolate. It can be made from melted chocolate or cocoa powder, with hot water or hot milk. It is almost always sweetened with sugar, and in Mexico and other Latin American countries, cinnamon is also added. Hot chocolate is a traditional breakfast drink in many

countries, such as France, Spain, Colombia, Nigeria, and Jamaica. Hot chocolate is enjoyed with churros in Spain, and with a block of cheese in Colombia!

In North America, instant hot chocolate mixes are widely available. We like to top our hot chocolate with whipped cream or marshmallows, and even the instant packets come with little freeze-dried marshmallows to add to the mug.



Apple Cider

For many North Americans, apple cider is the quintessential autumn drink, but it is often misunderstood. Outside of North America, cider is an alcoholic drink made from fermented apples. In Japan, cider is a carbonated lemon-lime drink. However, in the US and Canada, apple cider is fresh, unsweetened, and unfiltered apple juice. It looks cloudy and brown because it contains the entire apple, giving it a much deeper, richer flavor than standard clear apple juice.

During the autumn harvest, visiting a local orchard to buy fresh-pressed cider is a cherished seasonal tradition for many families. It is often served hot with spices like cinnamon, cloves, allspice, and sometimes orange peel. Much like pumpkin spice, apple cider is a beloved autumn flavor, and it is used in many seasonal treats, such as apple cider donuts and cakes. ☕



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