



Roasting coffee beans is a tricky process.

A shot of something *memorable*

Ramona Depares visits Joure, a tiny village in the Netherlands that gave birth to a big brand of coffee, Douwe Egberts.

The smell of coffee was everywhere. Inense. Aromatic. Making my mouth water. A paradise for a coffee-lover like myself. I would say coffee-addict, but in reality the descriptor doesn't fit. Addicts tend to be desperate creatures, ready to grab at anything that is the subject of their addiction. I, on the other hand, will refuse coffee unless it is a brand I approve of, and unless it is prepared 'just so'.

So far, Douwe Egberts had satisfied me on all counts. My nostrils were twitching in appreciation. Earlier that day, my tastebuds had been equally gratified, multiple times.

The venue of all this bounty was the Cafitesse Academy, Douwe Egberts' coffee school, part of the factory based in Joure, The Netherlands. Douwe Egberts, for those who haven't yet tasted it, happens to be the number one coffee in that part of the world. If you've ever holidayed in Amsterdam and ordered coffee in one of the coffee-shops (because yes, they do serve that too, you know), there is a 100% chance that it would have been Douwe Egberts.

The purpose of my visit to The Netherlands was precisely to learn more about this brand that is imported, distributed and marketed in Malta by AppleCore Foods Ltd. Accompanying me on this quest were the top



names from Malta's catering professionals.

My first introduction to Douwe Egberts had happened as soon as I arrived at my hotel, the NH Barbizon. Before setting off to see the sights, I needed a good caffeine kick to help me recover from the three



Top: The coffee beans, prior to grinding.

Left: Pierre Mattocks, Roland Brouwer, Ramona Depares and Joseph Xuereb show their customised blend.

hour flight. The Douwe Egberts espresso not only provided me with the kick, but also with a lovely aftertaste.

The next day found me travelling to Joure, a small and picturesque village to the North of Amsterdam. This is where the main Douwe Egberts factory is based, and where the majority of operations happen. Our first two stops were the museum and the White Ox outlet, which both gave us the opportunity to gently ease ourselves into the world of coffee. Afterwards, our group was ushered into the factory's rather stylish lounge and coffee area, where we proceeded to enjoy yet another cup (or three) of coffee. This time round I opted for cappuccino, which didn't disappoint.

From then on, it was a marathon of fun facts and figures about the coffee – from bean to cup – courtesy of Douwe Egberts coffee master Roland Brouwer.

The two-hour session that followed was a most intriguing one. It was here that we learnt about the different kinds of coffee beans, the biggest enemies of coffee (oxygen and moisture, so keep that in mind when storing your coffee), the different Douwe Egberts blends and so forth.

And it was here that we learnt that at Douwe Egberts they are firm believers in quality control, which is at the bottom of every single principle the brand holds dear.

Quality control kicks in from the moment a shipment arrives in The Netherlands, to be greeted by one of the Douwe Egberts specialists. Anything falling short of the brand standard is sent back. Those beans that make it through can then start their rather complicated journey towards the consumer, a journey that is monitored every single step of the way, until finally Douwe Egberts is satisfied with the final product and gives the green light for it to be presented to the public.

Only thing is, it takes more than a good product to ensure that the cup of coffee that reaches the customer is a great one. As Mr Brouwer explained, a lot can go wrong between the time the coffee leaves its packaging until it is presented to the customer.

Storage, method of preparation, machine cleanliness... all these are factors that spell the difference between a cup of energising goodness and a puddle of warm liquid. To cut a long story short, not every bad cuppa can be blamed on the manufacturer.

With that out of the way, we were able to enjoy – you guessed it – another great cuppa, before being whisked off to the part we'd all been looking forward to bigtime. Divided into four groups, we were about to create our own blend of coffee and to have it judged by Mr Brouwer.

Happily for me, I happened to be on a team with some rather illustrious names. Considering that some of Malta's top chefs were present, the competitiveness levels, as you can guess, were sky-high. Deciding to create a blend for serious coffee-lovers, we came up with a mix of Colombia, Sumatra Mandheling, Brazil and Uganda Robusta beans.

But our work was far from done. We also had to grind and roast them (we were aiming for medium, on both counts). The latter is a particularly tricky process, I promise you.

Finally, some 30 minutes later, all the teams were satisfied and it was time to →

Liquid Pleasures

present our creations to the rest of the group and to the judges. I'm happy to report that our blend placed a very respectable second. Of course, we still insist that our blend was the rightful winner.

Once we had all finished explaining quite why our blend was the best, it was time to head over to the factory, to see where the real action happens, so to speak. From the time the beans arrive at Joure to the time they emerge in their smart Douwe Egberts packaging, we were walked through every step of the way by a trained representative. I have to say that the process, when viewed up close and personal, does make you appreciate the qualities of the coffee that much more!

The factory itself is rather impressive. Appropriately dressed personnel did their own thing precisely as had been previously



explained by Mr Brouwer and the whole process ran like clockwork.

An hour or so later I walked out of the factory with a much clearer understanding of what goes into producing a perfect cuppa. And I certainly know what to look out for now.

This feature was made possible courtesy of AppleCore Foods Ltd., exclusive importers, distributors and marketers of Douwe Egberts in Malta.

www.applecorefoods.com

The Douwe Egberts story

Douwe Egberts coffee was born in a small village in the Netherlands in the year 1753, around the same time that coffee houses were becoming popular places to meet to discuss the important topics of the day. Egbert Douwes opened a grocery store in Joure, selling mostly coffee, tea and tobacco.

He decided, like other merchants at the time, that Joure's easy access to the waterways would allow trade to flourish, and he was right.

The original shop was called The White Ox, but the family renamed the company Douwe Egberts as its trade in coffee and tea expanded, along with its reputation. As the business developed, its headquarters were moved to Utrecht, and in 1920, the iconic Douwe Egberts seal – now incorporated into the company's logo – was introduced.

In 1978, Douwe Egberts was acquired by Sara Lee, and as part of this global food and beverage organisation, the company moved into new markets. Innovation drove the business forward, and in 1998 the organisation expanded into Brazil.

The company partnered up with Philips to launch the revolutionary single-serve coffee system, Senseo, in 2001, and in 2010 the company moved into the portioned espresso market with the launch of L'Or Espresso capsules. ●

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