

A Brief History of Chocolate

Chocolate has become one of the world's most cherished and celebrated foods, and for good reason. We all know how great the taste of quality chocolate is, and how it can brighten someone's day, but what you may not be familiar with is the fact that this wonderful food we enjoy today has actually been nearly 4000 years in the making! To learn more, take a look at this brief but fascinating history of chocolate while you enjoy your latest order from Totally Chocolate!

2000 BC

Since its discovery by multiple peoples and cultures over time, chocolate has been made from one key ingredient; Cocoa. It is estimated by scientists and classical historians and archaeologists that Cocoa originated in South America's Amazon Rain forest at least 4000 years ago!

6th Century AD

Thanks to conclusive archaeological evidence found in the ancient Mayan territories of Central and South America, we have learned that Mayans cultivated the earliest known cocoa plantations. Unlike the solid, sweet treat we are used to today however, the Mayans consumed cocoa in a liquid form during religious ceremonies due to their belief that cocoa, or **xocoatl** as they called it (meaning 'bitter water'), was the food of the gods.

1200s

By the 1200s, the Aztecs culture had also incorporated the thick, unsweetened beverage known as **xocoatl** into their culture as a ceremonial and health elixir, as well as an aphrodisiac. The Aztecs believed that the cocoa tree originated in paradise, and revered the plant so much that they were even known to have used cocoa beans as currency!

1492

Upon Columbus' return to Spain from the New World, he brought many strange and wondrous substances back to show King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Apparently however, in all the excitement and fervour over the discovery of new lands and wealth, the little brown cocoa beans were overlooked...but only at first.

1502

On his fourth trip to the New World, in what is now known as Nicaragua, Columbus actually witnessed cocoa beans being used as currency among the indigenous population. The Italian explorer still did not see any potential market for the bean back home however, and continued his search for a route to India.

1513

Less than 15 years after Columbus' trip to Nicaragua, a man named Hernando de Oviedo y Valdez actually purchased a slave using cocoa as currency. It is at this time that chocolate began to catch on among European explorers and merchants, who began referring to the ancient Mayan and Aztec drink as **Chocolatl**, which was a combination of the Mayan word **xocoatl** and the Aztec word for warm liquid.

1519

After his conquest of most of Mexico was completed in the same year, Hernan Cortez actually established a cocoa plantation. He did so after noticing the high value of the beans as currency, and although he did not care for the drink made by the indigenous tribes, he wanted to take advantage of the potential for wealth that a cocoa plantation would generate on Spain's behalf in the New World.

1528

Upon his return to Spain, Cortez presented cocoa beans and the recipe for **chocolatl** to King Charles V, while adding sugar (an unknown substance to the Mayans and Aztecs) to the bitter beverage. While this did produce a more universally enjoyable drink, the Spanish decided to keep their sweetened discovery a secret from the rest of the world for nearly 100 years!

1544

Although it was still highly secretive at this point, the cocoa industry at this time began to flourish with the help of Dominican Friars who were assigned to learn the secrets of the bean from the Mayans. Once they had learned all they could, and perfected their craft of processing the cocoa, the friars began to share their discovery with the wider world, leading to cocoa being used as currency in Europe as it once was among ancient Mayans and Aztecs.

1585

Nearly 100 years after Columbus' first voyage to the Americas, cocoa was finally shipped in bulk to Spain to be sold on the open market. This would lead to an explosion of trading and innovation inspired by the unique cocoa bean.

1625

Like their ancient predecessors who used the cocoa bean as currency throughout Central and South America, the Spanish at this time had also incorporated cocoa beans into their economy as legal tender. 200 small beans were now the equivalent of 4 cents.

1643

After her betrothal to Louis XIV of France, Spanish Princess Maria Theresa presented her future husband with a gift of chocolate for their wedding. It didn't take long for the Sun King, Louis, to notice the appeal of chocolate, and to appoint Sieur David Illou to begin manufacturing the sweet treat to be sold in large quantities in France.

1657

By this time, the appeal of chocolate is becoming more widely known among Europe's elite royal class. In London, England, Chocolate Houses became all the rage, where the elite could enjoy the new "excellent West India drink."

1662

As its popularity continued to grow more rapidly among Europeans, the Roman Catholic Church began to take a renewed interest in chocolate. What was once known as a 'bewitching beverage' was now being seen as an enjoyable drink that was even excluded from fasting restrictions, meaning people weren't required to give up chocolate while they fasted for religious holidays!

1674

In London, a popular Coffee House called **At the Coffee Mill and Tobacco Roll** revolutionized the way chocolate was ingested by the masses by serving chocolate in an edible cake form. This trend would continue as people discovered more and more ways to enjoy this new delicacy.

1677

Chocolate, having been transformed by European imagination and experimentation was returned to the Americas at this time. By Royal Spanish Decree, Brazil was able to establish modern cocoa plantations in order to mass produce the cocoa bean which would be used to make more chocolate for sale in Europe.

1697

Belgium gets its first taste of chocolate in Brussels thanks to Heinrich Escher, the mayor of Zurich. Having travelled all the way from Switzerland to share this delicacy, Escher would inspire an entire nation to improve and experiment with this unique new flavour!

1755

Almost 20 years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, colonists living in what would become the United States of America got their first tastes of chocolate. Like the Europeans before them, this would incite the creation of an entire industry devoted to the manufacture and sale of this irresistible new delicacy.

1765

Less than 10 years after it was introduced to the colonies, the first chocolate factory was built in New England. This led to faster production of chocolate on a scale never seen before throughout the entire world!

1780

Although American Colonists were the first to create a factory designed to mass produce chocolate, it was the Spanish who first created a factory where machine-made chocolate was produced. In less than 20 years from this point, the entire world would follow suit in order to keep up with demand for this wildly popular treat.

1800

Chocolate would now be produced on an industrial scale. On the eve of the Industrial Revolution, a man named Antoine Brutus Mercier created the first factory where chocolate could be mass produced on a scale never witnessed before.

1830

Although the processing of chocolate had reached massive scales, it wasn't until this period that J.S. Fry and Sons, a British chocolate maker, that chocolate began resembling the food we eat today. It was this company that began to first produce solid chocolate similar to chocolate bars of present day.

1840

With the new solid format of chocolate, a huge number of chocolatiers began to pop up all over the Western world, some of which still exist today as huge chocolate making companies. It was the Belgian chocolate maker, Berwaerts however, that sold the first pressed chocolate tablets, pastilles and figurines at this time.

1912

The 20th century would mark the beginning of Belgium's status as a nation of elite innovators and manufacturers in the chocolate world. The first praline (chocolate with soft filling) was invented in this year by Jean Neuhaus Jr.

1915

Not long after her husband, Jean Neuhaus Jr., invented the praline, Louise Agostini created the first ornate box in which to pack pralines, known as a '**ballotin**'.

1925

One of the most important inventions to ever come about in the chocolate industry was created by the

Belgian chocolatier, Charles Callebaut. He revolutionized the way chocolate is stored and transported by inventing a way to transport liquid chocolate.

1935

Basile Kestekides did everyone with a major sweet tooth a favour in this year when he invented the '**Manon**', a large praline coated in new *white chocolate*!

1952-58

One of the latest inventions in the world of chocolate was also a Belgian invention. Chocolate spread was first sold by Cote d'Or in 1952. This delicious innovation rapidly gained popularity throughout the world between 1952 and 1958, as Cote d'Or featured this product as it's latest and greatest addition at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels.

Present Day

Today, Belgian Chocolatiers from both Brussels and Flanders are world renowned for the quality of the chocolate they produce each year, as well as the creativity they show while coming up with new ways to enjoy this 4000 year old delicacy.