

Gong + Cacao

Cacao FAQ

1. What is cacao? How is it different from cocoa or chocolate?



Cacao is the **superfood plant** that chocolate is made from! The indigenous peoples of what is now Latin America have been using it in their food and drinks for thousands of years, calling it the “Food of the Gods,” and even trading it like currency.

Cocoa is the highly-processed material made from cacao that is used to make chocolate, baked goods, and hot cocoa mixes. Aside from removing the natural and healthy fats, cocoa is also produced at very high temperatures (and sometimes processed in other unknown ways), leading to the **destruction or removal of the original nutrients**. Additionally, products labeled “cocoa” are likely produced using conventional agricultural methods with pesticides and other undesirable chemicals.

The cacao we’ll be having today is pure, unprocessed, non-GMO, and free of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. It is tested for heavy metals and compliant with FDA/EU Commission published standards.

2. What are some of the effects and benefits of cacao?

People report **elevated mood** (from **anandamide**, the “**bliss molecule**”), **focus**, **motivation**, and **heart-opening** effects, as well as **sustained energy without crash or cravings**. For thousands of years, the indigenous cultures of Latin America have also regarded cacao as **sacred** and a way to connect with the divine, as well as your own body and soul. For some, it can even create **aphrodisiac** effects!

Cacao contains a **high amount of antioxidants** (possibly the highest amount of any food!) – mainly **polyphenols** which are known to help the heart and brain. Cacao also boasts **magnesium** (which relieves muscle tension), **iron** (which increases oxygenation), and other minerals. It also features **theobromine**, a mildly stimulating compound from the same family as caffeine, but that doesn’t cause the jitters or crashes and cravings. Cacao also contains some caffeine, but theobromine occurs in much larger amounts, which helps mitigate the effects of the caffeine.

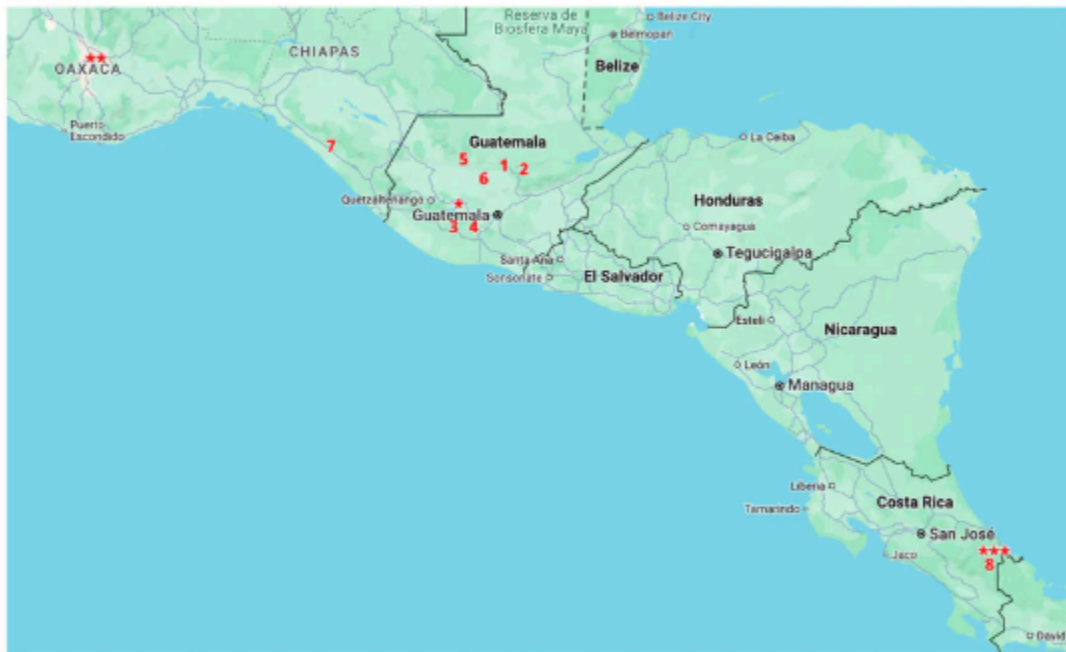
3. Where did it come from?

This cacao comes from a local Portland-based company called [Soul Lift Cacao](#). They source their cacao through ethical direct trade with family farms and collectives in Latin America that prepare cacao in small batches to ensure things are done at the human scale and in a way that's sustainable for the people and the land.

Soul Lift offers transparency about their sourcing, checks on the quality of farming and preparation systems, and ensures that standards of worker compensation and care are higher than cacao industry averages. Because this cacao is prepared at the place of origin, more money from your purchase goes back to the people preparing the cacao in the same country where it grows.



SOURCING MAP



- 1) Heart of the Earth - Alta Verapaz (GUA) *
- 2) Tuk Tuk - Alta Verapaz *
- 3) Siguacan - Suchitepéquez (GUA) *
- 4) Lavalove - Suchitepéquez *

- 5) La Noche - Quiché and Alta Verapaz *
- 6) El Cielo - Alta Verapaz *
- 7) Mitla - Chiapas (MEX) **
- 8) Betena - Talamanca (CR) ***

Production Centers:
*Sololá, Guatemala
**Oaxaca, Mexico
***Talamanca, Costa Rica

4. What kind will be having at the event?

Today, we'll be having Soul Lift's [Lavalove Cacao](#) – Pure Ceremonial Cacao Paste mixed with hot water. It is [grown in Suchitepequez, Guatemala, and prepared by Izaías Mendoza's collective at Lake Atitlan.](#)

It is gluten-free, vegan, keto/paleo, non-GMO, sugar-free, and wood fire-roasted.

Its flavor profile is described as “malty, with a floral aroma, a light mouth-feel, a subtle nutty aftertaste, “spring morning”.”

From the land of volcanoes, Lavalove cacao is a blend sourced from small, neighboring farms on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, and selected, roasted, and peeled by hand.

The cacao will be served pure (only mixed with water) but it can taste very bitter without some kind of sweetener, so **healthy sweetener options will be available** so you can sweeten it to the level that you prefer.



5. Is it “cultural appropriation” or disrespectful to indigenous peoples to serve cacao at an event like this? Does one need to be “qualified” to serve cacao?

The founder of Soul Lift Cacao offers [“cacao courses”](#) for facilitators interested in incorporating cacao into their workshops, classes, events, etc. I have taken one of these trainings to learn how to prepare and serve cacao in an ethical and responsible way that conveys cultural appreciation versus appropriation, honoring the indigenous cultures who have carried this plant wisdom for millennia.



He shared with us in the class that the farmers and processors he works with are happy that this powerful plant medicine is reaching new parts of the world, especially alongside information about its cultural heritage and sustainable and ethical production methods.

Part of sharing cacao ceremonially, is meaningfully **acknowledging its roots** and sharing it with humility, respect, and gratitude for the cultures and lands it comes from.

6. What makes cacao “ceremonial”?

Many different indigenous cultures (Olmec, Maya, Aztec, and Zapotec, to name a few) have had a deeply respectful and sacred connection with cacao, consuming it during ceremonies, rituals, offerings, feasts, and rites of passage.

However, traditional cacao ceremonies as we know them today—especially those held in yoga studios, sound baths, and new age circles—are **not direct replicas** of these ancient practices.



Much of the **modern ceremonial cacao movement** is traced back to Keith Wilson, known as *Keith the Chocolate Shaman*, who began working with cacao in the early 2000s while living in San Marcos La Laguna, Guatemala. Keith experienced cacao as a powerful heart-opening plant medicine and began offering gatherings where people drank pure, traditionally-prepared cacao in intentional settings. His work emphasized cacao as a **gentle plant ally for emotional release, creativity, meditation, and inner work**. He's often credited with popularizing cacao as a ceremonial and spiritual tool and bringing attention to ethically sourced, whole-bean cacao as distinct from

processed chocolate.

While rooted in respect for ancient traditions, **modern cacao ceremonies are eclectic** and often combine yoga, sound healing, meditation, music, and personal sharing. They're **non-dogmatic**, allowing space for personal spiritual expression.

So, there is no single definition, but Soul Lift defines ceremonial cacao as:

- Non-GMO and grown without chemical pesticides or fertilizers
- Prepared into finished paste in the same country where the cacao grows
- Grown on a small, locally owned, family farm without forced child labor or indentured servitude of any kind.
 - NOTE: For most such farms, organic certification would be cost-prohibitive and take many years. So organic certification isn't one of the required criteria to be considered “ceremonial.”
- The seeds are fermented in wooden crates or heaps on the earth, not in plastic bins as is common in the chocolate industry.
- Seeds are dried in the sun.
- Seeds are roasted over wood fire, not in a modern oven (gas or electric).

- The cacao can be ground the traditional way using a stone metate, or a mechanical mill.
- The cacao is left untempered.
 - Tempering is a process invented by Europeans, where ground chocolate is heated and cooled repeatedly to align the crystallization pattern of the cacao fats. It's how most chocolate bars are produced.
- The cacao is blessed and/or imbued with intentions to be a healing medicine to the world.
- Native Latin American people are involved in both the farming and the processing in an empowering way that involves more autonomy, better pay, and safer working conditions than industry standards.
- Scent, flavor, texture, and appearance matter as well. Those are influenced by cacao genetics, farm location, soil health, length of fermentation, length of roasting, and other factors.
- Soul Lift also has their cacao tested for theobromine, caffeine, and polyphenol antioxidants, and screens for scent, flavor, texture, and appearance. Finally, they also look at the effect – whether it deepens meditative experiences, brings greater insights, and fosters more inner/outer connection and holistic unity.

(Most of the information in this document was taken from www.soulliftcacao.com)