

Isla Vista's Coffee Scene: A European's Honest Review

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I arrived in California from Spain a little over four months ago, armed with a suitcase, a plan, and one pressing concern: where I was going to get my morning coffee.

At my home school in Madrid, a kind lady named Rosana used to serve me a delicious latte for no more than 1€ (\$1.03) — sixty cents more if you decided to add a croissant or any other pastry. Although I haven't found any places in Isla Vista that match that price, I have compiled a list of the best spots in the area that have successfully replaced Rosana's coffee.

Unlike in the United States, Europeans are not in the habit of ordering coffee with syrups, flavors, or an entire menu of milk alternatives. To stay loyal to my European principles—and to keep things as fair as possible—I ordered the same thing everywhere: a simple, classic latte.

8. Tenaya Market

The last item on my list is the coffee served at Tenaya Market. Although this establishment may not be considered part of Isla Vista, it is close enough to be taken into consideration.

Even though the size (small and medium) is appropriate, the truth is that the hot latte with whole milk at Tenaya is not one of my favorites. It is a latte without foam and with too much water, making it impossible to drink without adding some sugar.

It is, however, an acceptable option when one is too far from Isla Vista, such as in Santa Catalina or the surrounding campus housing.

7. Kozy

Number seven could only be Kozy. The space and location are my favorites — the coffee shop's sofas are one of the best places to do homework or study when UCSB students cannot concentrate in the library.

Their coffee is certainly strong and bitter but in the best way possible. Though the taste is flavorful, the size is much too small.

For those who prefer a sweeter latte, I advise grabbing a couple of sugar packets before drinking it. For true coffee lovers, though, who enjoy the authentic taste and aroma of a freshly brewed cup, Kozy is a great option.

6. The Arbor

In sixth place, while this opinion may be quite unpopular, is the Arbor. Although not the favorite of many, this coffee is an essential part of many UCSB students' daily routine.

It is easy to think that there is nothing special about it. However, the truth is — and I believe many would agree — it is more comforting than any of the other lattes on this list.

What drives coffee drinkers in Goleta to buy one at the Arbor is its proximity to the library and the rest of the campus. When students choose this coffee over Cafe or Kozy, it is because their need for caffeine is urgent. There is nothing more gratifying than that first sip that fully wakes you up in the morning and makes that class starting in five minutes just a little more bearable.

5. Starbucks

Although this list focuses more on local coffee shops, it is impossible to talk about coffee without mentioning the world famous chain.

Would it be so absurd as to assume that more than 60 percent of the readers of this article currently have a Starbucks cup, bottle, or mug on their desk?

The truth is, their latte is one of the best on this list. It is a smooth joe that never needs sugar and never has too much milk.

I will admit that going to Starbucks and not ordering seasonal drinks or diving into their Frappuccino menu could be considered a sin — even in European culture, where simple coffee reigns.

4. I.V. Bagel Cafe

In fourth place is I.V. Bagel Cafe. I must admit that my opinion may be somewhat biased because it was 6:30 in the morning and nothing else was open.

This was the first coffee I had in California. Overwhelmed by terrible jet lag, I ventured into I.V. for the first time in search of something to quench my thirst. I must admit, it tasted like heaven, but it was also the first time I compared my usual \$1.03 coffee with a \$4.25 one.

And finally, the long-awaited top three:

3. Old Town Coffee

Without a doubt, the best latte in terms of size and price ratio: not too strong, not too sweet, not too much milk, and not too watery. Old Town's coffee is the perfect balance — ideal to pair with one of their burritos.

2. I.V. Drip

Although this establishment is mostly famous for its delicious cookies, the truth is that the coffee is nearly as good as the baked goods — not to mention how friendly the staff is!

The hot, simple latte with whole milk is undoubtedly one of my favorites. The atmosphere also makes it a pleasant place to grab a coffee.

1. Cajé Coffee Roasters

Interestingly, this was the first latte I tried when creating this ranking. Not only does the design of their cups win first prize, but their coffee also matches that quality.

A little sugar is necessary, especially for those who are not fans of intensely flavored coffee. However, this cup of joe deserves to be at the top of this list: it's impossible to find a single flaw in it.

The location of the establishment is the perfect reward after a hard morning of studying at the library. Whether you walk or ride your bike, your journey to Cajé Coffee Roasters can become your moment of relaxation after a long work session.

Perfect to pair with their bagels or even the cookies from I.V. Drip — just a few blocks ahead — it is the so-called crown jewel of the cafés in IV.