

Speciality Coffee Bag Weights by Origin

by Chris Kornman

There's often a burning question, asked with equal parts sincerity and irony at the average American barbecue: "Why do hot dogs come in packages of eight and hot dog buns come in packages of ten?"

If coffee has a corollary question, it might be, "Why do coffee bags from Brazil weigh 132 lbs and bags from Colombia weigh 154 lbs?"

I actually don't have a good answer for "why." Tradition? Availability? Arbitrary demands? Your guess is as good as mine. The best answer I've found is that they "were originally determined by what a man could reasonably carry on his back" (R.J. Clarke, *Coffee: Volume 2: Technology, Volume 2*). Regardless, common bag sizes vary depending on the origin and coffee type. Arabica and Robusta from the same place may be packed in different sizes.

Searching the internet for a simple list yields the following results (Fig.1), often repeated cut/paste style on importers FAQ sites and enthusiast blogs alike. Any list like this is bound to be reductive, but by-and-large this is pretty close.

For the purposes of what Royal Coffee buys, you'll find our "default" bag sizes listed below, along with a number of alternates we see frequently.

The 132.28 lb bag -- exactly 60 kg, so let's convert to metric -- is the International Coffee Organization (ICO) standard for statistical purposes, and accounts for the majority of coffee bags sold. Brazil uses this size, as do most countries in Africa and Asia as the default. Most of Royal's Yemeni coffee comes in the 60 kg unit as well.

Yet many other coffees do not. The next most common size is 69 kg (152.12 lbs), used by most American nations, including Mexico and all of Central America (except Panama). Ecuador and Peru join this group from south of the Equator.

The final "primary" coffee bag size comes from Colombia, and is 70 kg (154.32 lbs).

There's one other fairly common size, the 100 lb

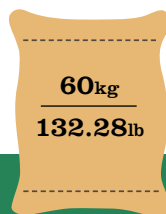
bag, roughly 45-46 kg. This is the default from Hawaii (USA), and is often seen elsewhere. Many American nations also use "quintal" as a measurement (often for parchment), which also varies slightly depending on the country but usually is pretty close to that 100 lb standard (except in Ethiopia, where a quintal is 100 kg, not 100 lb -- confusing!!!).



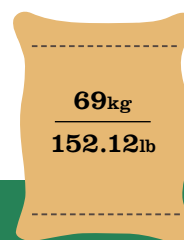
HAWAII



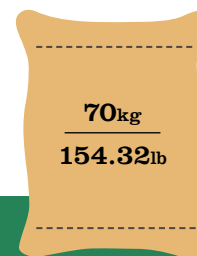
YEMEN*,
INDIA MONSOONED
MALABAR



INDONESIA,
AFRICA, BRAZIL,
AND MOST DECAFS

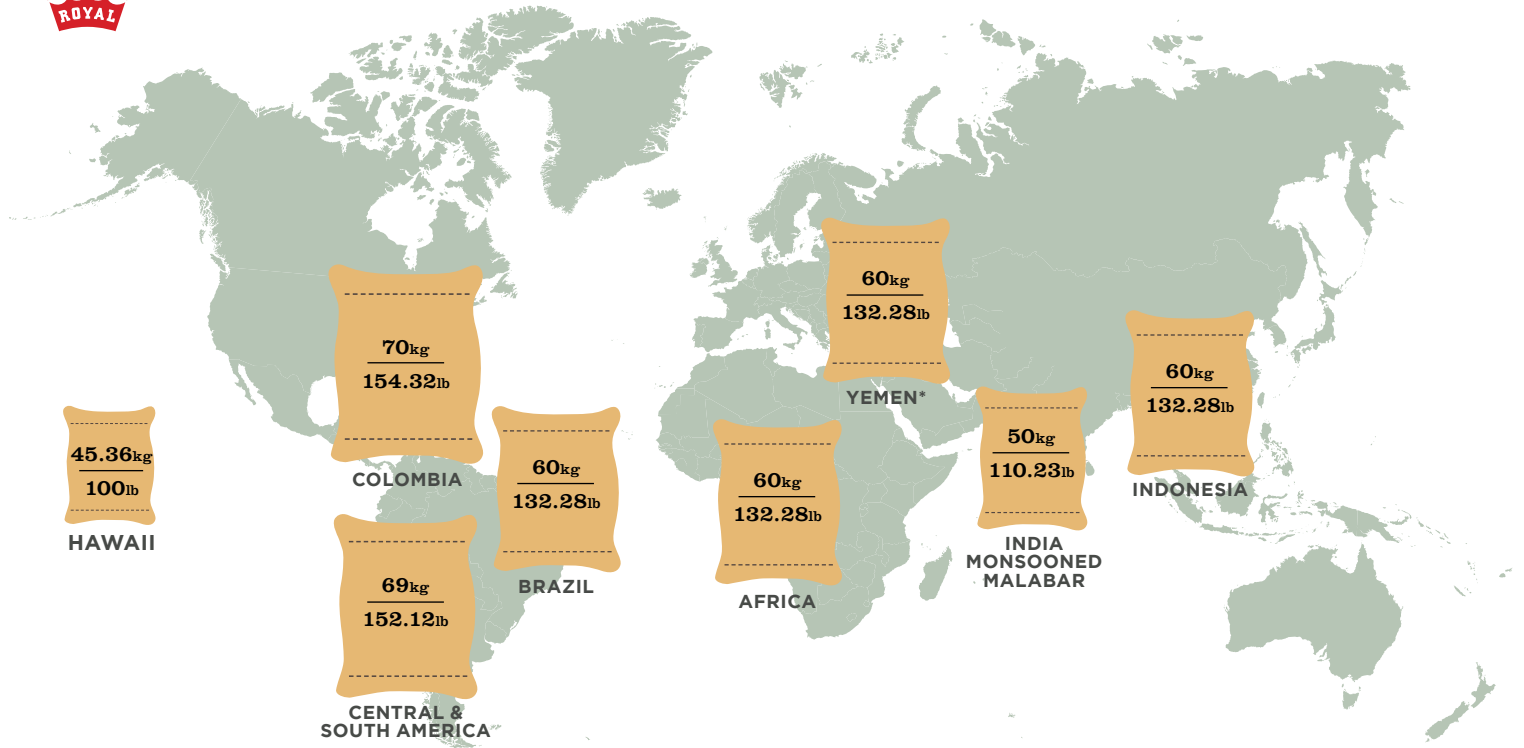


MOST MEXICO,
CENTRAL AND
SOUTH AMERICA



COLOMBIA,
BOLIVIA, AND
SOME MEXICO

Fig.1



And then there are the exceptions. Monsooned Indian coffee is exported in 50 kg (110.23 lb) bags. I’ve seen Bolivian coffee exports in all three of the major units, 70 kg, 69 kg, and 60 kg. A lot of Royal’s Brazilian coffee comes in 59 kg (130.07 lb) bags. Many other non-standard bags exist, including half bags like 35kgs from Colombia and vac-sealed bags and boxes like some Kenyas in 30kg units, for example.

So, how many bags can you stuff (believe it or not, that’s the trade term) into a 20-foot shipping container? Anywhere from 250-325 in the usual 60-70kg bags. As many as 420 of the 46 kg bags may fit. The usual total weight usually comes pretty close to 19 metric tons, or about 42,000 lbs.

Lastly, there’s the percentage of allowable variance. Described as “Shipped Weights” (s/w) in contracts, or the “weight franchise” as a percentage, it holds the seller accountable for the amount of coffee. Many countries have boilerplate number, typically between 0.5% - 1%, so if you contract a 60 kg bag at SW 0.5%, your received coffee could weigh as little as 59.5 kg before you’d be able to claim loss to the seller.

Fortunately for all of us, coffee trades by weight (dollars per pound) rather than by volume. So regardless of whether your green is coming from Hawaii or Colombia, you’ll be paying for the weight of coffee you get, rather than the size of the package it comes in.

* Many exporters list Yemeni coffees as 50kg but most of Royal’s imports are 60 kg



Coffee Bag Weights by Origin

Country	kg / bag	lbs / bag	standard bags / container	max bags / container	shipped weight franchise
Bolivia	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Brazil (59)	59	130.07	325	325	0.50%
Brazil (60)	60	132.28	320	320	0.50%
Burundi	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Cameroon	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Central African Republic	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
China	60	132.28	300	320	0.50%
Colombia	70	154.32	250	275	0.50%
Congo (Democratic Republic of)	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Costa Rica	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Ecuador	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
El Salvador	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Ethiopia	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Guatemala	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Haiti	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Honduras	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
India	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
India Monsooned Malabar	50	110.23	270	350	0.00%
Indonesia	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Jamaica	60	132.28	300	320	0.50%
Kenya	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Madagascar	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Malawi	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Mexico	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Nicaragua	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Panama	60	132.28	300	320	0.50%
Papua New Guinea	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Peru	69	152.12	250	275	0.50%
Rwanda	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Tanzania	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Timor Leste	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Uganda	60	132.28	300	320	0.50%
USA (Hawaii)	45.36	100	400	420	0.50%
Yemen	60	132.28	250	320	1.00%
Zimbabwe	60	132.28	300	320	1.00%
Common Alternate, Many Countries	46	101.41	400	400	