

Next to water, cocoa is the healthiest substance, says The Medicine Hunter, who discovered some of the world's best at this organic, fair-trade cooperative in Ecuador.



Some of the cocoa growers out in a cocoa plantation located in the northern coastal area of the Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador.



Freshly harvested cocoa pods. Because they are grown sustainably here, this cocoa actually helps to protect the rainforest.

While the fictional character Indiana Jones traveled the globe to find artifacts possessing special powers, Chris Kilham, aka The Medicine Hunter, searches for plants with equally amazing properties. His latest adventure took him to Ecuador in search of some of the highest-quality cocoa in the world. Cocoa beans, derived from bright amber-colored fruits, are an incredibly rich source of antioxidants that have heart, brain and even immune benefits. There's a reason the Mayans called their traditional drink made from cocoa "food of the Gods." We caught up with The Medicine Hunter, also an explorer-in-residence at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, to ask about his latest health discovery, the people who help to harvest it and why we should all indulge our dark side.

Chris Kilham is
crazy for COCOA

wb | Why is cocoa so good for us?
ck | After water, cocoa is the single healthiest substance you can put in your mouth. Higher in antioxidant power than any other fruit, cocoa delivers potent benefits to the cardiovascular system, immune system and brain. It is an overall wellness agent extraordinaire, and can pare down cardiovascular disease risk to almost zero. It can easily replace a number of psychiatric drugs for mood, plus it produces the same chemistry in the brain that occurs when we fall in love.

wb | Why did you go to Ecuador for cocoa?
ck | The supplement manufacturer, ResVit le, conveyed their interest in bringing to market a cocoa supplement that would contain enough antioxidant compounds to impart a host of positive health

benefits. Ecuador is home to some very fine high-quality cocoa. Also, we had learned about a cooperative called FONMSOEAM, an affiliation of about 350 cocoa growers who pool all their cocoa together. They do so sustainably, and so they seemed an ideal group to use as a cocoa source. Certified organic and fairly traded, the cocoa from the FONMSOEAM growers is superb.

wb | How does FONMSOEAM protect the rainforest, namely the Mache Chindul Ecological Reserve, home to some of the most precious biodiversity in the world?
ck | The certified organic cultivation of cocoa there maintains a clean environment, and is sustainable land use, which provides incentive to maintain a clean and healthy environment.

wb | Can you offer any tips for getting cocoa into your diet?
ck | Put it into as many recipes as you can, drink it and enjoy it. Eat semi-sweet dark chocolate, and lose the guilt. Cocoa supplements can ensure a high level of beneficial antioxidant compounds, notably certain flavanols associated with improved cardiovascular health and lower cancer risk. For people who have blood sugar or weight concerns, cocoa supplements can provide the health benefits of chocolate without the fat, sugar or calories.

ResVit le sources their new line of CocoaWell supplements from the organic, fairly traded cocoa beans grown by the FONMSOEAM cooperative in Ecuador.



Here I'm sitting on the balcony of a cocoa cafe high up in the hills of Quito, Ecuador. That cup of cocoa thick, dark, sweet and very rich was a full meal, and a memorable one for the view, and as a wrap-up to the time spent with cocoa growers.