Have you ever been to a [specialty](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) coffee shop where all the drinks — and even the sizes of the cups — have weird names? If so, you've probably already seen a [barista](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) in action.

A [barista](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is a person who makes [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista)-based coffee drinks. Baristas are usually employed by [specialty](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) coffee shops.

To be a [barista](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista), you have to learn how to make many different types of coffee drinks. You might also need to be a little artistic!

[Barista](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is the Italian word for “bartender." In Italy, baristas serve drinks of all kinds, not just coffee. In the United States, however, the term “[barista](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista)" is generally only used for those who serve [specialty](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) coffee drinks.

Most [specialty](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) coffee shops serve coffee drinks based on [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista). [Espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is not a particular coffee bean or type of [roast](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) (which means how the beans are cooked). Instead, [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is a special way of [brewing](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) coffee.

[Espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is an especially concentrated form of coffee made by forcing hot water and steam under pressure through tightly packed coffee [grounds](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista). [Espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) was invented in Italy in 1884 when Angelo Moriondo patented his first [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) machine.

Compared to “regular" brewed coffee, [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is thicker and has a more [intense](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) flavor. Although some people prefer the taste of plain [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista), others prefer coffee drinks that mix [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) with water, milk or other liquids.

For example, a [cappuccino](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is made with one-third [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista), one-third steamed milk and one-third [microfoam](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista). [Microfoam](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is steamed milk that forms a very fine layer of foam when created with a special [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista)machine. Baristas often top coffee drinks with [microfoam](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) so they can create special, but temporary [works of art](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/06/Latte_art.jpg) on top of drinks.

A [latte](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) is similar to a [cappuccino](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista), except that it is made with almost equal parts of [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) and steamed milk. Depending on the customer's [preference](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista), a [latte](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) may or may not also have a thin layer of [microfoam](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista).

Some people think [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) provides extra energy because it contains more [caffeine](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) per unit of volume than many other beverages. However, a typical two-ounce serving (“double shot") of [espresso](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) has about the same amount of [caffeine](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) as the usual six-ounce cup of “regular" brewed coffee.

If you're wondering how to become a [barista](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista), just ask the employees at your local [specialty](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) coffee shop. Most coffee shops hire workers and train them to be baristas over time.

In some larger cities, you may also find "coffee sommeliers." Coffee sommeliers are professional baristas who have developed special knowledge about the history of coffee, such as types of beans, roasting and [brewing](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) methods, and [latte](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista) art. It can take years of work and study to become a coffee [sommelier](https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-barista)!