

PHIN & CLAY

The Phin *Guide*

How to brew Vietnamese phin coffee at home — plus 12 drinks to make with it, from cà phê sữa đá to salted cream coffee.



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Slow coffee, the Vietnamese way

In Vietnam, coffee is rarely rushed. A small metal or ceramic filter called a **phin** sits on top of a glass, and hot water seeps through the grounds a drop at a time. You wait, you talk, you watch it drip. Then you stir in sweetened condensed milk, pour it over ice, and the day gets a little better.

What this guide covers

How a phin works, how to pick and grind your coffee, a six-step brew method, fixes for a drip that runs too fast or too slow, twelve drink recipes, and how to care for your phin and ceramics.

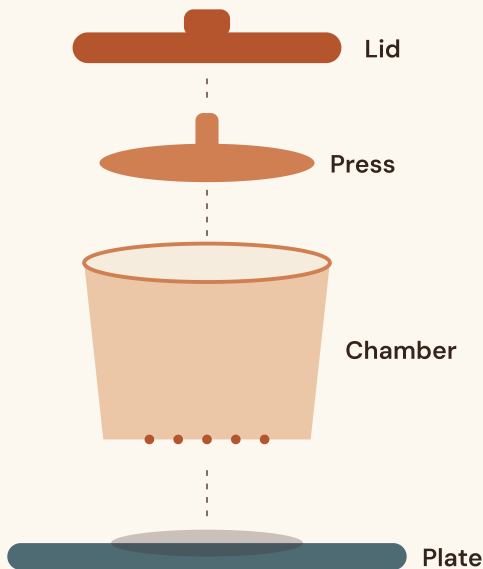
A quick note

We make the gear, not the coffee. Every recipe here uses ingredients you can find at any US grocery store — bring whatever beans you love.

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Four simple parts, one slow drip

A phin (say it “fin”) is a gravity brewer. No paper, no electricity, no pressure — just a perforated chamber and time. Most are stainless steel; ceramic versions work the same way and hold heat a little differently.



1 • Plate

Sits across the rim of your cup or glass. The chamber rests on it.

2 • Chamber

Holds the grounds. Tiny holes in the floor let coffee through and keep most grounds out.

3 • Press (gravity insert)

Rests on top of the grounds to level them and slow the water. Some screw down; many just sit in place. You set it, you don't crush it.

4 • Lid

Keeps heat in while it drips. Flip it over afterward and use it as a drip tray.



Ceramic or steel? Both brew great coffee. A ceramic phin is heavier and takes more heat to warm up, so rinse it with hot water first (step 1 on page 5). Steel heats fast and travels easily.

Any coffee works. A few work especially well.

Classic Vietnamese coffee is bold, dark and chocolatey — built to stand up to sweetened condensed milk and ice. You can chase that style, or just use the beans already in your pantry.

Robusta

The traditional backbone. Heavier body, more bitterness, more caffeine than Arabica. Look for “Vietnamese-style” or “100% Robusta” on the bag.

Arabica

Brighter and smoother. A medium-dark or dark roast makes a gentler phin, lovely black over ice.

Blend

Many cafés mix both. Try a Robusta–Arabica blend if you like milk drinks with a bit of brightness.

Grind: medium-coarse



Espresso-fine
clogs the phin



Drip / medium
often slow



Medium-coarse
the sweet spot



Coarse / French press
runs too fast

Aim for grounds a bit coarser than table salt — somewhere between drip and French press. If you grind at home, start one or two clicks coarser than your drip setting and adjust from there (page 6 tells you which way to go).

- **Buying pre-ground?** Many Vietnamese-style coffees are already ground for phin. Regular “drip” grind works too — just expect a slower drip.
- **Freshness:** keep coffee in an airtight container away from light and heat, and use it within a few weeks of opening.
- **Dose:** start with 2 tablespoons of grounds per phin. Go to 3 for a stronger, milk-ready brew.

We don’t sell coffee — and we don’t have a favorite brand to push. Try two or three, write down what you liked, and keep going.

Six steps, about six minutes

2–3 tbsp

GROUND COFFEE

3–4 oz

HOT WATER

195–205°F

JUST OFF THE BOIL

4–6 min

TOTAL DRIP TIME

1

Warm everything

Pour hot water through the empty phin into your cup, then discard it. Essential for ceramic — a cold phin and cup steal heat from the first drops.

3

Set the press

Place the press on top of the grounds. Let it rest under its own weight, or turn a screw-type press until it just meets resistance. No hard tamping.

5

Fill & cover

Slowly fill the chamber to the top (about 3 oz more). Put the lid on. You should see steady drops, roughly one or two per second.

2

Add the coffee

Set the plate and chamber on the cup. Add 2–3 tbsp of grounds and give the phin a gentle shake to level the bed.

4

Bloom

Pour about 1 tbsp (½ oz) of hot water — just enough to wet the grounds. Wait 30–45 seconds while the coffee swells and releases gas.

6

Wait, then finish

When the dripping stops (4–6 min), lift the phin onto its upturned lid. You'll have about 2 oz of strong coffee to sip or build a drink on.

No thermometer?

Bring water to a boil, take it off the heat, and wait about 30 seconds. That lands you close to 200°F.

Why so little coffee?

Phin coffee is a concentrate, closer to espresso strength than drip. That's why it's built for milk, ice and sweetness.

Why your phin drips too fast (or too slow)

Almost every phin problem comes down to four dials: grind size, dose, press pressure and pour speed. Change **one** dial at a time, then brew again.

What you see	Likely cause	Try this
Water rushes through in under 2–3 min; coffee tastes thin	Grind too coarse · too little coffee · press not sitting on the grounds	Grind a step finer or add ½–1 tbsp more coffee. Make sure the press rests flat on the bed. Bloom a full 45 seconds.
Nothing drips, or it takes 8+ min	Grind too fine · too much coffee · press screwed down too tight	Grind coarser or use less coffee. Loosen the press (or lift it slightly). A gentle tap on the chamber can restart a stalled drip.
Starts fine, then stalls halfway	Fine particles (“fines”) settling and clogging the holes	Shake the grounds in a fine sieve before brewing, or switch to a more even grind.
Bitter, harsh, ashy	Very dark roast · water too hot · drip too long	Let boiling water rest 30–60 sec. Grind a touch coarser. Try a medium–dark roast or a blend.
Sour or flat	Water too cool · drip too fast · stale coffee	Use hotter water (195–205°F), preheat the phin, and check that your coffee is fresh.
Grounds in the cup	Grind too fine · press not seated · worn chamber	Go coarser, seat the press evenly, and let the first few drops fall into a spare cup if needed.
Coffee is lukewarm by the end	Cold phin or cup · lid left off	Preheat both (step 1). Keep the lid on. Old Hanoi trick: set the cup in a small bowl of hot water while it drips.



Keep a tiny log. Jot down the coffee, the dose and the drip time for your best cup. After three or four brews you’ll know your phin by heart.

The classics

Every recipe starts with one phin of coffee brewed as on page 5 (about 2 oz), unless noted. Sweeten to taste — Vietnamese drinks run sweet.

01

SERVES 1
ICED

Vietnamese Iced Coffee

Cà phê sữa đá

The drink that made the phin famous: strong coffee dripped straight onto condensed milk, stirred, and poured over a tall glass of ice.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2–3 tbsp ground coffee
- 1½–2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- 3–4 oz hot water (200°F)
- 1 tall glass of ice

METHOD

1. Spoon the condensed milk into a heatproof glass or cup.
2. Set the phin on top and brew as on page 5.
3. Stir well until the coffee turns caramel brown.
4. Pour over a full glass of ice and stir again.

Tip: brew with 3 tbsp here — ice dilutes fast, and a stronger base keeps the flavor.

02

SERVES 1
ICED

Iced Black Coffee

Cà phê đen đá

No milk, all coffee. Bold and bittersweet — how many people in Vietnam take their morning cup.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2–3 tbsp ground coffee
- 1–2 tsp sugar (optional)
- 3–4 oz hot water (200°F)
- 1 glass of ice

METHOD

1. Add the sugar to your cup if using.
2. Brew the phin straight onto it.
3. Stir to dissolve, then pour over ice.

Make it hot: skip the ice and sip it straight from a preheated cup — *cà phê đen nóng*.

03

SERVES 1
HOT

Hot Coffee with Condensed Milk

Cà phê sữa nóng

The cozy version. Serve it the traditional way — the cup set in a small bowl of hot water so the last sip is as warm as the first.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 tbsp ground coffee
- 1–1½ tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- 3–4 oz hot water (200°F)
- Small bowl of hot water (optional)

METHOD

1. Preheat your cup, then add the condensed milk.
2. Set the cup in a bowl of hot water if you like.
3. Brew thephin on top, lid on.
4. Stir just before sipping.

Tip: use a small cup (4–6 oz) so the coffee stays hot and concentrated.

04

SERVES 1
ICED

Bac Xiu (Milk-First Iced Coffee)

Bạc xỉu

A Saigon favorite for people who want “a little coffee in their milk.” Pale, creamy and gentle — a great first phin drink for anyone new to the style.

YOU'LL NEED

- 1½ tbsp ground coffee
- 2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- 3 oz whole milk (or any milk)
- 2–3 oz hot water · ice

METHOD

1. Brew a short phin (about 1–1½ oz).
2. In a glass, stir condensed milk into the milk.
3. Fill the glass with ice.
4. Slowly pour the coffee on top for a layered look; stir before drinking.

Tip: froth the milk first for a softer, latte-like texture.

05

SERVES 1
HOT

Egg Coffee

Cà phê trứng

Hanoi's famous dessert-in-a-cup: a whipped, custardy egg cream floated over hot coffee. Tastes like tiramisu meets crème brûlée.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 tbsp ground coffee
- 1 large egg yolk (pasteurized recommended)
- 2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tsp sugar (optional)
- 3 oz hot water

METHOD

1. Brew thephin into a small preheated cup.
2. Whisk yolk, condensed milk and sugar 3–5 min (or 1–2 min with a hand mixer) until pale, thick and ribbony.
3. Spoon the cream over the coffee.
4. Eat the foam with a spoon, then sip.

Food safety: this uses an uncooked yolk. Pasteurized eggs are sold in many US grocery stores — use them, especially for kids, pregnant guests or anyone with a weakened immune system.

06

SERVES 1
ICED

Salted Cream Coffee

Cà phê muối

Born in the central city of Huế. A pinch of salt in whipped cream softens bitterness and makes the coffee taste rounder — sweet, salty, rich.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2–3 tbsp ground coffee
- 1 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- **Salted cream:** 3 tbsp heavy cream, 1 tbsp condensed milk, 1 pinch ($\frac{1}{8}$ tsp) fine sea salt
- 3–4 oz hot water · ice

METHOD

1. Brew the phin onto 1 tbsp condensed milk; stir.
2. Whisk or froth the cream, condensed milk and salt until thick but still pourable.
3. Pour coffee over ice, then float the salted cream on top.
4. Sip through the cream — don't stir right away.

Tip: taste the cream before adding it; salt levels in sea salt vary by brand.

07

SERVES 1
BLENDED

Coconut Coffee

Cà phê cốt dừa

A frosty, slushy coconut base with strong coffee poured over the top. Tastes like vacation in a glass.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2–3 tbsp ground coffee
- 3 tbsp coconut cream (canned, well stirred)
- 2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- 2 tbsp whole milk or coconut milk
- 1 cup ice · 3–4 oz hot water

METHOD

1. Brew the phin and let it cool a few minutes.
2. Blend coconut cream, condensed milk, milk and ice until smooth and slushy.
3. Spoon into a glass.
4. Pour the coffee over the top and serve with a spoon or wide straw.

Tip: chill the can of coconut cream overnight for a thicker slush.

08

SERVES 1
ICED · SPARKLING

Iced Phin Tonic

Cà phê tonic

Bright, bitter and fizzy — a café-menu drink that shows off black phin coffee without any milk.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 tbsp ground coffee
- 4–5 oz chilled tonic water
- 3 oz hot water
- Ice · orange or lime peel

METHOD

1. Brew the phin and let it cool for 5 minutes.
2. Fill a tall glass with ice and pour in the tonic.
3. Slowly pour the coffee over the back of a spoon so it floats.
4. Twist the citrus peel over the top.

Tip: pour the coffee slowly — hot coffee into tonic foams up fast. Cooling it first keeps the layers clean.

09

SERVES 1
ICED · SPOONABLE

Yogurt Coffee

Sữa chua cà phê

Tangy, creamy and a little unexpected — a popular Vietnamese café treat that sits somewhere between a drink and a dessert.

YOU'LL NEED

- 1½–2 tbsp ground coffee
- ⅓ cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 1–2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
- 2–3 oz hot water · crushed ice

METHOD

1. Brew the phin and let it cool slightly.
2. Stir the condensed milk into the yogurt until smooth.
3. Add crushed ice to a glass, then the yogurt.
4. Pour the coffee on top; stir as you eat it.

Tip: skip Greek yogurt here — regular plain yogurt gives the looser texture this drink is known for.

10

SERVES 1
ICED

Orange Coffee

Cà phê cam

Fresh orange juice topped with black phin coffee. Sounds odd, drinks like a sunny cold brew with a citrus finish.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 tbsp ground coffee
- 3–4 oz fresh orange juice (about 1–2 oranges)
- 1–2 tsp honey or simple syrup
- 3 oz hot water · ice

METHOD

1. Brew the phin and let it cool 5 minutes.
2. Stir honey into the juice and pour over ice.
3. Gently pour the coffee over the back of a spoon to layer.
4. Garnish with an orange wheel.

Tip: sweeter oranges (navel, Cara Cara) balance a darker roast best.

11

SERVES 1
ICED · DAIRY-FREE

Dairy-Free Phin Latte

Cà phê sữa yến mạch

All the comfort of cà phê sữa đá without dairy. Sweetened condensed oat or coconut milk is easy to find in US grocery stores now.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2–3 tbsp ground coffee
- 1½–2 tbsp sweetened condensed oat or coconut milk
- 2 oz oat milk
- 3–4 oz hot water · ice

METHOD

1. Brew the phin onto the condensed oat milk; stir.
2. Fill a glass with ice and add the oat milk.
3. Pour the sweetened coffee over the top.
4. Stir and enjoy.

No condensed oat milk? Simmer 1 cup oat milk with ¼ cup sugar until reduced by half, about 20–25 min. Cool and refrigerate up to 5 days.

12

SERVES 1
DESSERT

Phin Affogato

Kem cà phê phin

The easiest dessert you'll make all year: a scoop of ice cream "drowned" in hot phin coffee, right at the table.

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 tbsp ground coffee
- 1–2 scoops vanilla or coconut ice cream
- 3 oz hot water
- Crushed peanuts or toasted coconut (optional)

METHOD

1. Scoop the ice cream into a chilled bowl or cup.
2. Set the phin over a small pitcher and brew.
3. Pour the hot coffee over the ice cream at the table.
4. Top with nuts or coconut; eat right away.

Small tweaks, big difference

Once the basic brew feels easy, play with these. None of them need special equipment.

Sweetness

Vietnamese drinks run sweet. Start with 1 tbsp condensed milk and add ½ tbsp at a time. Brown sugar, honey or maple syrup all work in black coffee.

Strength

More coffee, not less water. Going from 2 to 3 tbsp makes a bolder base for iced and milk drinks; the drip time will rise a little.

Coffee ice cubes

Freeze leftover phin coffee in an ice tray. Your iced drinks won't water down as they sit.

Batch for guests

One phin makes one drink. For a crowd, brew several phins in a row into a small pitcher, keep it covered, and build drinks to order.

Warm spices

A pinch of cinnamon or a sliver of star anise on the grounds before brewing adds a cozy, wintery note.

Glass matters

Iced drinks look their best in a clear glass so the layers show. Hot drinks stay warmer in a thick, preheated ceramic cup.



Made a drink you love? Share it with us — tag **#phinandclay**. We're always looking for new ideas to try.

A little spot for a slow ritual

You don't need a big counter. A tray, a kettle and a few favorite pieces turn any corner of the kitchen into the place you want to start the day.



The short list

- **A phin** — ceramic or steel, sized to your favorite cup.
- **A kettle** — gooseneck helps with slow pours, but any kettle works.
- **A cup for hot, a glass for iced.**
- **An airtight jar** for your coffee.
- **A small tray** to catch drips and keep it all together.
- **A spoon rest** — the phin lid and spoon need somewhere to land.

Nice to have

- Kitchen scale for dialing in your dose
- Hand grinder
- A second cup, for company

Solo mornings

One phin, one cup, a spoon rest. Set it out the night before so the ritual is ready when you are.

Coffee for two

Two cups on a tray, brewed one after the other. The second drips while you drink the first.

Weekend café

Glasses, a jar of condensed milk and the cheat sheet (page 15) — let guests pick their drink.

Keep the corner away from the stove and the sink splash zone, and store coffee out of direct sunlight.

Caring for your phin & ceramics

A little care keeps your pieces looking good and brewing well for years.

After every brew

- Knock the spent grounds into the trash or compost — not down the drain.
- Rinse all parts with warm water while they're still warm; coffee oils come off easily then.
- Use a soft sponge and a drop of mild dish soap. Skip steel wool and abrasive powders.
- Let every part air-dry completely before stacking or storing.

Once a week

- Hold the chamber up to the light. If holes look blocked, soak it in warm water with a spoon of baking soda for 15 minutes, then brush gently with a soft toothbrush.
- Coffee stains in cups? Rub with a paste of baking soda and water, then rinse well.

Treat ceramics kindly

- **Avoid sudden temperature swings.** Don't pour boiling water into a cold ceramic phin or cup, and don't take a piece from the fridge straight to hot water. Warm it gradually (step 1, page 5).
- Don't put ceramics directly on a stovetop burner or open flame.
- Don't leave pieces soaking in water for long periods.
- Check for chips or cracks before use; retire anything that's cracked.
- Glazes vary from piece to piece — small differences in color are part of the charm.

Dishwasher? Microwave?

Care needs differ from piece to piece. Always follow the care information on the product page or packaging for your specific item. When in doubt, hand wash and skip the microwave.



Steel phin? Same routine. Dry it right away to prevent water spots, and never soak it in bleach.

Stick this on the fridge

Every recipe at a glance. Base = one phin brewed as on page 5.

#	Drink	Coffee	Add	Serve
1	Cà phê sữa đá	2–3 tbsp	1½–2 tbsp condensed milk	Iced
2	Cà phê đen đá	2–3 tbsp	1–2 tsp sugar (optional)	Iced
3	Cà phê sữa nóng	2 tbsp	1–1½ tbsp condensed milk	Hot
4	Bạc xỉu	1½ tbsp	2 tbsp condensed milk + 3 oz milk	Iced
5	Cà phê trứng (egg)	2 tbsp	1 pasteurized yolk + 2 tbsp condensed milk, whipped	Hot
6	Cà phê muối (salted cream)	2–3 tbsp	3 tbsp cream + 1 tbsp condensed milk + ⅛ tsp salt	Iced
7	Cà phê cốt dừa (coconut)	2–3 tbsp	3 tbsp coconut cream + 2 tbsp condensed milk + 1 cup ice, blended	Blended
8	Iced phin tonic	2 tbsp	4–5 oz tonic + citrus peel	Iced
9	Sữa chua cà phê (yogurt)	1½–2 tbsp	⅓ cup plain yogurt + 1–2 tbsp condensed milk	Iced
10	Cà phê cam (orange)	2 tbsp	3–4 oz orange juice + 1–2 tsp honey	Iced
11	Dairy-free phin latte	2–3 tbsp	1½–2 tbsp condensed oat milk + 2 oz oat milk	Iced
12	Phin affogato	2 tbsp	1–2 scoops ice cream	Dessert

195–205°F

water temperature

30–45 sec

bloom

4–6 min

drip · faster = finer, slower = coarser

Hi, we're Phin & Clay

Phin & Clay is a small online shop for the slow-coffee corner of your kitchen, inspired by Vietnam's café culture — the sidewalk stools, the tiny cups, the long unhurried mornings.

We put together **phin filters, reactive-glaze cups, glasses, trays, kitchen tools and gift sets** designed to make the ritual on the previous pages feel special — and to look good on your counter the rest of the day.

We don't sell coffee. We think you should brew whatever beans you love, and we'd rather help you brew them well.

Where to start

- A phin sized for one cup
- A matching pair of cups for two
- A gift set for the coffee lover in your life

Browse everything at **phinandclay.com**

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Slow down. Let it drip.