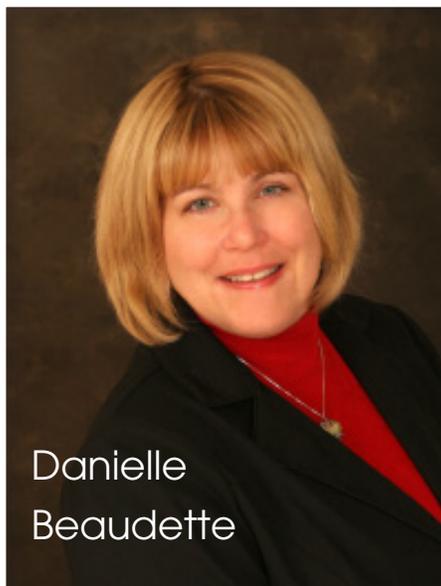


Global Traditions of Tea

By Danielle Beaudette



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A tea ceremony is a communion of feeling, when good friends come together at the right moment, under the best conditions.

~ Yasunari Kawabata

With winter months comes cooler weather and we find ourselves reaching for that hot cup of tea to warm us. People often refer to the ‘way of tea’, meaning the aspects of tea production and tea brewing along with its history, health benefits and ceremonies.

The aesthetics surrounding tea drinking led to formal ceremonies in Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures, all consuming primarily green tea, with some white and black tea in China. Tea was first discovered by Emperor Shen Nong in China over 5,000 years ago when legend states as he was boiling water, leaves from a tea tree fell into his

pot. The aroma enticed him while the flavor made him feel good. This led to the harvesting of the leaf and tea becoming entrenched in almost every aspect of their culture.

In Japan, green tea is widely consumed and produced in the Shizuoka Prefecture and is used in Japanese cuisine as a key ingredient. Tea has deep seated roots in Zen Buddhism that was introduced to Japan from China. Matcha green tea is used in the Japanese tea ceremony and is the most popular, with sencha and kukicha following closely behind. Oolong tea from Taiwan has also become sought after by the Japanese.

In the Korean culture, tea devotion was also popularized by the Buddhist monks who used the tea to stay alert during meditation. Green tea is the most consumed tea, however, it is common to add grains, fruits, flower blossoms, medicinal extracts and plant leaves to their tea today, with chrysanthemum tea being one of the most popular.

In France, Ireland and Portugal, black teas are primarily consumed with milk and sugar; however, fruity green

teas are becoming popular, especially in France. Portugal was the first to introduce tea to Europe and the first to grow tea for all the European countries. In England, from where most of our tea customs are derived, the popularity of tea dates back to the 19th century. In Britain, they started their own tea culture with the introduction of Afternoon Tea, invented by Anna Maria, the wife of the seventh

Tea is Becomes Common at the Table



Duke of Bedford. These teas were elegant affairs, with tea drunk from the best china and small amounts of food presented perfectly on little china plates and served with lots of milk and sugar. The social impact of tea in society stimulated financial, technological and agricultural innovation in England and the U.S. It stimulated a growth in the arts through the demand for English China and was featured in some of the greatest novels (e.g., Great Expectations and Oliver Twist). Because of its value, the ownership of tea and tea ware was an indication of one’s wealth and social status, which is why artists of the 18th and 19th century often included a family’s precious tea possessions in paintings.

The British customs spread to other countries such as India, Hong Kong,

Formal Tea Drinking Ceremonies



Pakistan, East Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Each of these countries today has a slightly different version of the original English afternoon tea.

In Hong Kong, evaporated milk is used instead of regular milk. In the different regions of Pakistan, green tea or black tea may be served. In some areas of Pakistan, it will be served with milk, pistachios and cardamom, while other areas prefer the tea served with Himalayan rock salt and no sugar. The northern areas prefer their tea with butter and salt. In Africa and Australia, tea is still taken in the traditional English style with milk and sugar; however, in Australia, the Taiwanese bubble tea has become widely popular.

In India, chai masala is an Indian tea blend that dates back thousands of years, originally used as a healing or 'ayurveda' medicine. In the multiple regions of India, there are unique cultural traditions in how they prepare and serve chai masala. In Hindi, 'chai' is the word for 'tea'. 'Chai masala' is India's black tea with cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, ginger, black pepper and other spices, depending on the region. It is often served by a chai wallah. It is also similar to what we in the U.S. refer to as chai tea, blended with sweeteners and milk. Some of the most popular teas produced and exported from India are Darjeeling, Assam and Nilgiri teas. Black tea is also the most popular tea in Sri Lanka, and served with warmed milk and sugar.

Due to the Silk Road trade route running through Iran (Persia), tea



quickly became the most popular drink. Tea cultivation in the Gilan province in northern Iran produces most of the tea for the Iranians. They traditionally put a lump of rock sugar in their mouth, and pour the tea into a saucer before drinking it.

Tea traditions in other countries include pickled tea from Myanmar (Burma), which is more of an appetizer. It is blended with sesame oil and served with other sides including fried garlic, peas, peanuts, dried shrimp, shredded ginger and shredded coconut. In Taiwan, oolong teas are the most popular and highly sought after due to their unique flavor and processing. Bubble tea made with black tea, milk and balls of tapioca are also popular. Yak butter tea and Milk tea are the most consumed teas in Tibet. In Southeast Asia, Thai tea is very popular. It is a strong brewed black tea blended with anise, red and yellow food coloring and in some areas other spices. It is sweetened with sugar and condensed milk and served over ice with additional whole milk or evaporated milk poured over it.

In Russia, a strong black tea is consumed, but green tea is most recently becoming more popular. The black tea is served with 1-3 tsp. of sugar, lemon, and no milk. In Egypt, tea (Shai) is the national drink. Mostly black tea from Kenya and Sri Lanka are consumed, with some green tea. It is prepared very strong with large amounts of sugar. Also popular in Egypt are herbal blends such as chamomile, mint, ginger, and hibiscus.

Morocco has popularized the mint tea, a blend of gunpowder green tea from China and their local mint. It is consumed at almost every meal and is a large part of their culture. In Germany, more specifically the East Frisian part of Germany, very strong

Morocco Tea Service



Assam tea is most popular served with rock sugar and cream.

In the U.S., iced tea is more popular than hot tea; however, with the widespread reports on the health benefits of whole leaf black, green and oolong tea, they are now becoming more desirable over iced and tea bag teas. Tea is served throughout the day in most households. In the south, sweetened tea is more popular, whereas in the north, unsweetened tea is desirable. The art of taking the English style afternoon tea is not as popular as it was in the Victorian era, but is enjoyed on special occasions by those seeking a true English tea experience.

Iced Tea US Favorite



Tea is the beverage of ceremonies and people, and like the monsoon rains, it is both calming and stimulating, encouraging conversation and relaxation... Ideas and traditions steep slowly in its steamy transparence.

~ Pascal Bruckner, Purias

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