

A SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH E-BOOK

tea: handheld meditation

EXPLORING TEA'S AMAZING ABILITY
TO NOURISH THE MIND AND BODY



Spirituality
& Health

Edited by Kathryn Drury Wagner

tea: handheld meditation

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**Spirituality
& Health**



When I drink tea, there
is only me and the tea.
The rest of the
world dissolves.

—THICH NHAT HANH

Matcha: Tea's Newest Superstar

THIS HEALTHFUL, BRIGHT GREEN TEA IS SUDDENLY EVERYWHERE. HERE'S WHY.

BY JENNIFER GLATT

Traditionally reserved for royalty, this verdant powerhouse has been enjoyed in Japan for almost 1,000 years. Thanks to its caffeine capabilities with health perks to boot, it's gaining popularity in America quickly. If you've never heard of it, you likely won't be able to say that for long.

"Matcha has been enjoyed in Japan for centuries but the Western world has only just recently discovered it," says tea writer and consultant Nicole Martin, who blogs at teaformeplease.com. She believes the increased interest in tea and better health is what's driving the matcha trend.

Matcha is powdered, premium green tea. Grown only in Japan, where tea preparation and consumption are legendarily celebrated, matcha deserves its own brand of reverence. Several weeks prior to harvest each spring, farmers gradually reduce the amount of sunlight that reaches the plants by covering them with bamboo mats. Chlorophyll production in the plants increases exponentially, which turns the leaves a deep, dark green. After careful harvest,

the leaves are steamed, air-dried, destemmed, and then stone-ground to achieve a fine powder texture.

Perhaps the Zen-like ritual of taking a bamboo brush to whisk the tea and hot water is part of its charm; matcha is, after all, the tea used in Japanese tea ceremonies. But there's more to matcha than meets the eye.

In addition to being 10 to 15 times stronger than steeped green tea, ingesting the entire tea leaf heightens the health benefits. Matcha offers 70 times the antioxidants of orange juice and is rich in vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and fiber. Natural compounds called polyphenols and catechins in green tea may protect against several cancers, including those of the prostate, gastrointestinal tract, lungs, breast, and skin, and thanks to those same components, matcha is said to have incredible immunity-boosting powers. It also contains L-theanine, an amino acid known for its calming effect. Combined with the tea's caffeine, it produces a calm alertness; Buddhist monks drank it to stay alert during meditation, while modern-day city dwellers appreciate the better buzz, too.

But just how big really is the matcha trend?

"It's huge," Martin confirms. "I live near New York City and years ago it was impossible to find matcha. Now there are four specialized matcha bars in Manhattan alone. Sales of matcha products are predicted to grow by 25 percent within the next few years. I've heard from people in the tea industry that they believe demand for matcha will soon outpace supply."

"Outside of its traditional use as a revered beverage in Japan, matcha is now also an ingredient in hundreds of food and even skincare products," says veteran tea industry analyst Brian Keating, who is the founder of the tea consultancy firm Sage Group. "It's hard to identify another beverage, food, or dietary supplement that provides this dynamic combination of wellness support and healthy mind-body nutrition."

Jennifer Glatt is a freelance lifestyle and travel writer based in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she finds that the only thing better than sweet tea is even sweeter tea.



BHOFACK2 / THINKSTOCK



TEA BOOSTS MEMORY Green tea extract boosts cognitive functions, especially memory, **report researchers** at the University at Basel, in Switzerland. This may have future implications for treating disorders such as dementia.



Breathing Into My Cup

THREE TEA MEDITATIONS TO QUIET THE BUSY MIND

Morning Awakening Practice

Many of us rely on the caffeine in tea to wake us up, and as we gulp down our beverage, we miss the activity of preparing and enjoying a cup of tea—a destination unto itself. Matt Valentine notes on his website, *Buddaimonia: Zen for Everyday Life*, “Tea meditation is a perfect example of that fact that you can experience magic in even the most ordinary activities of your everyday life.” Here’s a simple tea meditation to greet the day:

- 1 Prepare your tea mindfully, thinking about how grateful you are to have access to heat and clean, safe drinking water.
- 2 While your tea steeps, contemplate the aromas coming from the cup. Think about the journey of the tea plant as it has traveled to you. Breathe deeply.
- 3 Sip your tea, savoring each small sensation, and allow any thoughts that may come to mind to gently pass by and get acknowledged before you return to your meditation.

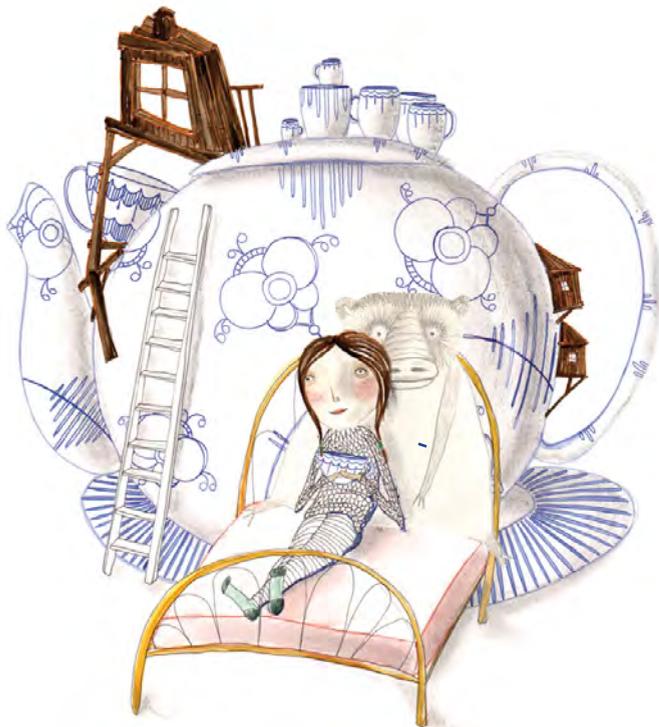
Drinking tea can be a good way to prepare for a morning sitting meditation. Or, you can simply move on to the rest of your day from there.

BY **KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER**

ARTWORK BY **SIGNE GABRIEL**

The Afternoon Pause

By the midafternoon, we're likely to be feeling frazzled. The day's many expectations and our endless to-do list are weighing upon our mind. This is the ideal time to find a quiet nook and retreat with a cup of tea. In her book, *Meditations with Tea: Paths to Inner Peace*, author Diana Rosen writes about the importance of saying "no" to extra requests, so that we can spare 10 minutes in the afternoon to have a restorative cup of tea. "Each day, you can honor yourself when you prioritize your tasks in order of importance, and you stick to the priorities. You owe it to yourself, and to others around you, to honor yourself in this way. Taking care of yourself should always be on top of the list because if you are not well mentally, spiritually, and physically, you cannot be of help to anyone else." Rosen suggests taking a thermos of tea to a quiet corner, or sit near artwork or a tree. "Sip your tea, rest, relax, ruminate—now you are meditating!"



Evening Calming Practice

His Holiness the Dalai Lama tucks into bed each night around 7 p.m., but first, he starts to wind down with a cup of tea around 5 p.m. We might not go to bed quite as early as a Buddhist monk, but the concept of an evening ritual is universally soothing no matter what time you tuck in. The tea company Buddha Teas has some good suggestions for evening tea practices. First, turn off your electronic devices. "While many of them are undoubtedly important, they can function like weeds in the garden of our own well-being." Next, pick out your very favorite teacup or mug, and with intention and purpose, select a noncaffeinated tea, such as chamomile or hibiscus. As you enjoy your tea, blow on it, exhaling over the tea. Spend about 12 to 15 minutes enjoying this sensation, blowing and sipping. Now you're ready for a good night's rest.



Master brewer Hannah Crum with an unusually large SCOBY.

MATT ARMENDARIZ

Meet the Kombucha Mamma

WITH SOME HELP FROM HER MICROORGANISM FRIENDS,
HANNAH CRUM TURNS TEA INTO KOMBUCHA, A HEALTHY FERMENTED BEVERAGE
THAT HAS BEEN BUBBLING OVER IN POPULARITY.

Hannah Crum is as bubbly and zesty as the drink she's famous for brewing. Crum is a kombucha master brewer, and an educator who has been teaching classes on how to make this healthful, fermented tea for more than 10 years. She is also the co-author of *The Kombucha Book*, and founder of the Kombucha Kamp website. She talks with us about this tea-based drink and what it's like being "a mother to millions of bacteria around the world."

You are empowering and educating people to ferment kombucha at home, and this became a passion, a lifestyle and a career for you.

What do you most love about kombucha?

I love the SCOBY [Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast, the starter for the kombucha]. It looks really neat and it feels amazing to the touch. I love that it works in symbiosis, one feeding off the byproduct of the other.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER



GREENARTPHOTOGRAPHY / THINKSTOCK

It's a fermented food. The difference is that it's made with tea. There's a lot of research on tea. And it has the health benefits of vinegar. It's essentially a tea vinegar.

It's a culture that has adapted to work in harmony. We're on an interesting cusp of what it means to be a human and to be in a relationship with bacteria, the majority of which are good, and even the others, which can be harmful, you still may need some in balance. There's such a metaphor of the kombucha culture and how that relates to our greater culture as humans: we need diversity in our people, in our crops, and in our thoughts. That's what humans are, what our universe is. We inhabit symbiosis.

Why has kombucha gotten so popular? Is it mostly a West Coast thing or is it more widespread?

As with a lot of health trends, it started as a West Coast trend and then a bicoastal trend and then it fills in to the rest of the country. GT's Kombucha, the largest company, started selling in 1995, so as an industry, it is only 20 years old. But grocery stores are picking it up and it's in produce sections with other healthy juices, where people see it and get curious to try it. I'm a cofounder of the Kombucha Brewers International industry group and when we started in 2014, we only had 40 members. We already have more than 100 members and that speaks to how fast the industry is growing.

What was it like teaching about kombucha 10 years ago versus today?

Earlier it was a lot of education. Now we're moving beyond the basic questions about "what is kombucha?" and I get questions about brewing from people who are making it themselves. There's also more research out now. We've always had a lot of anecdotal information about kombucha, people saying it cured this or that, but it can be dangerous to put too much expectation on it. It's a fermented food. The difference is that it's made with tea. There's a lot of research on tea. And it has the health benefits of vinegar. It's essentially a tea vinegar. We believe kombucha also originated in China, like tea drinking. It is now made with green tea, black tea, white tea, and things that aren't tea, like hibiscus.

How hard is it to learn to brew kombucha? It seems so intimidating.

[The Kombucha Mamma breaks into a Michael Jackson song.] Easy as 1, 2, 3... You're making sweet tea. You're adding a SCOBY. You're tasting it with straw. You're adding a flavor if you wish, and that's it. Then you're done and

starting over. You can end up with geysers if you aren't mindful, but it's like canning. You have to educate yourself. It's very safe because it has an incredibly low pH. It's safe and very easy to do. We wouldn't have passed this on over generations if it wasn't a safe food.

Tell me about your book. What was the impetus in writing it?

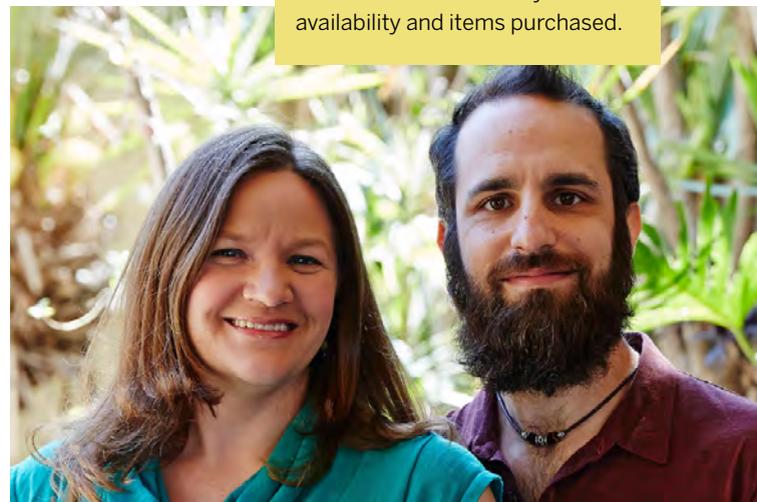
There's never been one that is as comprehensive. It's all the techniques and the how-to's we've learned from years and years of doing this. We tried to talk about the mythology, as well as the history.

Is kombucha drinking a ritual, like tea drinking, or do you view it more as a beverage to be consumed whenever and wherever?

I think the ritual is within the brewing. I really encourage people to honor the microorganisms. It's like a pet that gives you food. There's something sacred about engaging with that relationship.

Want to try brewing your own kombucha?

There's a free DIY guide available for download at Hannah Crum's website, kombuchakamp.com. She is also offering a free gift with purchase for Spirituality & Health readers. Enter "SpiritMag Free Gift" in the NOTES section of the checkout screen. Gifts will vary based on availability and items purchased.



The Big Book of Kombucha is written by Hannah and her partner, Alex LaGory.

MATT ARMENDARIZ

DID YOU KNOW? According to a **2015 study**, for every three cups of tea consumed per day, the risk of suffering from depression drops by 37 percent.

Journey to the World of Tea

TRAVELING TO THE BEST TEA-GROWING REGIONS ON EARTH CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH THE ADVENTURES OF A LIFETIME. HERE ARE THE PLACES TO PUT ON YOUR BUCKET LIST.

BY **LAVONNE LEONG**

Few things unite the human race quite so much as tea. Its long shelf life and ability to impart both energy and calm helped it spread from its birthplace in China along overland caravan routes to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and then by sea to the Americas. Soon, tea was being grown in subtropical regions around the globe, and enjoyed almost everywhere people lived.

SHUNJIAN123 / THINKSTOCK

LIJIANG, YUNNAN PROVINCE, CHINA:
On the Tea-Horse Road



China is the place where it all began.

SUCCESSFUL_NICK / THINKSTOCK

Everywhere tea goes, it weaves itself into the culture and history of the place, says Jane Pettigrew, a tea educator and specialist, and author of the forthcoming book *The World of Tea*.

And like wine, tea's *terroir* can be tasted in the final product. "The topography, the climate, the weather, the soil, the plant [varietal], they all make a difference." *Camellia sinensis*, the small, fragrant tree from which all true tea (white, green, black, red, or oolong) is made, can grow only within certain latitudes and growing conditions. They also happen to be some of the world's most congenial climates, scenic landscapes, and ancient cultures.

Combining a love of tea and a love of travel can be a journey for the senses and the spirit, deepening understanding and providing stories you'll treasure long after you're back on home ground.

CHINA

With a tea history stretching back thousands of years to the first harvest of the fragrant bush that would become the most widely consumed beverage in the world after water, China is the place where it all began.

The Tea Mountains and Tea-Horse Road of Yunnan Province

Yunnan, in China's subtropical southwest, is the birthplace of tea drinking. Part of the original "Himalayan tea corridor," a region stretching from Assam in India to North Vietnam that gave rise to the first indigenous tea plants, Yunnan's native cultures still harvest wild and cultivated tea from 26 distinctive "tea mountains," some of whose plants are said to be thousands of years old. Dark, earthy pu'er tea is a specialty of the region, made by fermenting and oxidizing fresh tea leaves and pressing them into bricks or cakes for long-distance trade.

Linking Yunnan Province and Bengal in India by way of the Tibetan Plateau, a network of routes collectively called the Ancient Tea-Horse Road is often called "the Silk Road of the South." Since the seventh century B.C., tea, sugar, and salt from China were traded for hardy Tibetan horses. Sections of the Ancient Tea-Horse road were paved with cobblestones, and can still be walked.



YUNNAN PROVINCE, CHINA:
Pu'er tea

KOZAK-SALO / THINKSTOCK



SIP, TO MAKE PRESSURE DIP A 2012 **Australian study** showed that regular, long-term use of black tea can result in significantly lower blood pressure in people with normal to high-normal blood pressure. The study looked at people drinking three cups a day for at least six months.



APHOTOSTORY / THINKSTOCK



APHOTOSTORY / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Wuyi Mountains

On the other side of China's vast empire, the Wuyi Mountains in Fujian Province are "one of my favorite places in the world," says Dan Robertson, whose company World Tea Tours organized the first tea-oriented travel from North America to China. Wuyi's limestone formations are home to some of the country's most spectacular natural environments, from its 32 limestone karst "Fairy Peaks," to the complex of rivers and waterfalls that honeycomb the area.

Growing on the limestone crags of this breathtaking region are wild and cultivated tea plants that produce the famous Wuyi Rock Oolongs. These semi-oxidized teas, subjected to the difficult and artful oolong production process, are said to taste faintly of the stone from which they grew, with a mellow complexity and a long, sweet aftertaste.

The teas of China have such a long and storied history that they have often acquired individual names that spring from their origin stories. One of the best known is Da Hong Pao ("Big Red Robe") tea, originally made from a small number of special tea bushes that grew on Wuyi Mountain. Legend has it that tea made from these bushes cured the mother of a Chinese emperor, who sent voluminous red robes to honor and clothe the bushes from which the tea leaves had come. Six of these venerated plants are still growing today in Wuyi's Dahongpao Scenic Area.

SOUTH KOREA

With a long history as a tea-growing region, South Korea provides one of the world's most pleasant, accessible, and multifaceted tea travel experiences. The country's handmade green and oolong teas are grown in the country's southernmost tip. Pettigrew describes Korean green teas as "intensely sweet and very special, a cross between Chinese and Japanese, as Korean culture tends to be."

A half-day's travel from Seoul, Boseong in South Jeolla Province is the country's tea-growing capital, producing about 40 percent of Korea's green tea. The most well known of Boseong's nearly two dozen "tea gardens" is the Daehan

Dawon Green Tea Plantation, known across Korea for its scenic beauty. In late spring and early summer, couples and families from across Korea come to stroll Boseong's immaculate lanes, lined with Japanese cedars, and wend their way around the misty, scenic tea trails. Stop in a plantation shop or restaurant to sample a refreshing bowl of green tea noodles—or sip the year's *ujeon*, the season's first-picked and most fragrant green tea, from the famous pale-green celadon tea ware of Korea. Then head to the seaside town of Yulpo, a few minutes away, where the Yulpo Haesu Nokchatang spa offers a bracing deep-seawater and green tea plunge.

Pettigrew describes Korean green teas as "intensely sweet and very special, a cross between Chinese and Japanese, as Korean culture tends to be."

BOSEONG, SOUTH KOREA



VINCENT ST. THOMAS / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



DARJEELING, INDIA:
Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

T PHOTOGRAPHY / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Darjeeling became one of the first of India’s “hill stations,” where the colonials of the British Raj flocked to escape the sultry summers of lower elevations.

INDIA

India’s tea history starts with the British Empire, whose bottomless appetite for tea led to the cultivation of vast tea plantations across the Indian subcontinent and the country’s current place as the second largest tea producer in the world.

Darjeeling

With crisp mountain air, wildflowers blooming in season, and a snowy backdrop of the Himalayas, Darjeeling became one of the first of India’s “hill stations,” where the colonials of the British Raj flocked to escape the sultry summers of lower elevations. Its altitude, sunshine, and excellent sloped drainage also produce what many call the “champagne of teas,” a pale golden, floral brew that often carries an otherworldly hint of muscat grape.

View some of Darjeeling’s 80 tea gardens with a ride on the antique Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, operating since 1881 and nicknamed the “Toy Train” for its narrow gauge. Or travel winding mountain roads lined with blooming rhododendrons, and climb Tiger Hill, with its famous view of Mount Everest and Kanchenjunga, the world’s third-tallest peak, together. “Everest is the tallest peak, but not necessarily the most beautiful,” says Robertson. “That’s Kanchenjunga.” “Staying overnight in a tea garden and getting up in the morning to watch the sun rising in the Himalayas,” he adds, is not to be missed.

The Tea Bungalows of Assam

Almost alone among major tea-growing regions, Assam, cleaved in half by the mighty Brahmaputra River, spreads out near sea level. But tea is native to these parts: in the 1800s, an Assamese nobleman led a Scottish trader through unbroken jungle to a stand of *Camellia sinensis* growing wild, establishing it as the westernmost end of the Himalayan indigenous tea corridor. The fast-growing, big-leaved teas of the region are robust, with an earthy or “gutty” brewed flavor the English have long favored as a breakfast wake-up-call. Today, Assam is the largest contiguous tea growing region on earth.

Tucked into India’s northeastern reaches and connected to the rest of the country by a slender neck of land, this isolated province can be an adventure to get to—but once there, visitors experience a lush and uncrowded side of India that few will ever see. A stay in an original tea-planter’s bungalow on one of Assam’s 800 working tea estates is a must; many are mansions, and some of these enchanting structures were built on stilts to rise above monsoon floods and deter wandering leopards. Two of the best known are Thengal Manor in Jorhat, and the Mancotta Chang Bungalows (on stilts), which host riding holidays that explore Assam’s tea plantations. You’ll also be sharing Assam with the rare white one-horned Asian rhino, Asian elephants, wild buffalo, and a rich array of primate and bird life, which can be viewed in the grasslands and jungle of Kaziranga National Park.



MORE RESEARCH NEEDED Many studies have been done on cancer risk and tea consumption, and results have been inconsistent, but according to the National Cancer Institute, some “have linked tea consumption to reduced risks of cancers of the colon, breast, ovary, prostate, and lung.” For details, visit the **NCI’s website**.

SRI LANKA:
Tea Plantation



SRI LANKA

The Tea Trails of Sri Lanka

Just off the southern tip of India, the nation until recently known as the Paradise Island of Ceylon offers good British infrastructure, an exotic melting pot of faiths and traditions, and a tea-growing culture all its own. Its cool, humid climate and volcanic soils have helped make Sri Lanka's the world's fourth-largest producer of tea, grown mostly in the birch-dappled uplands that once were the Buddhist Kingdom of Kandy. Sri Lanka is so compact, says Robertson,

that "you can have your toes in the sandy beach, ride an elephant, meet with a tea company, and be up in the mountains all in the same day."

For a taste of the full variety of tea plantation life, Ceylon Tea Trails, a Relais and Chateaux resort, offers tea planters' bungalows in four distinct zones, set in working tea gardens and connected by meandering planters' trails that showcase breathtaking vistas of mountain lakes, tiny villages, and hillsides planted with rows of tea that curve with the land's contours. A stay at Ceylon Tea Trails comes with a resident tea planter's tour, from planting to harvest to factory processing. Or just have a lie-in, as the Brits say, and let the butler bring you that long-cherished colonial tradition, "bed tea."

JAPAN

Uji and Makinohara

South of the cultural capital of Kyoto, on either side of the serene, misty Uji River, lies the town of Uji, home to the oldest cultivated tea gardens in Japan. Founded in the 1100s by Zen masters returning from China, the tea gardens of Uji and neighboring Wazuka have given their name to *ujicha*, a green tea prized throughout the country for its delicate vegetal notes and brothy, *umami* flavor. Walk along the river and cross graceful Uji Bridge, mentioned in *The Tale of Genji*, past centuries-old pagodas and cormorant fishing boats. Stop into one of the town's many teahouses, which showcase not

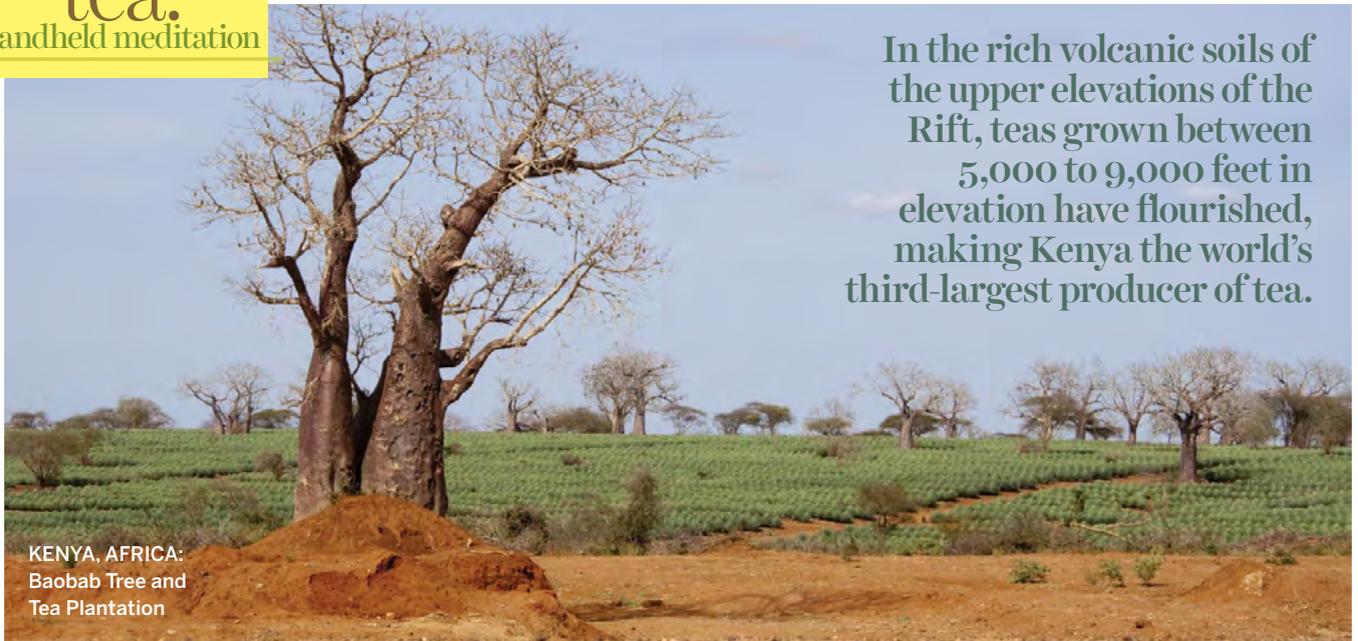
UJI, JAPAN:
Tea House



SEAN PAVONE / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



PREVENTING CAVI-TEAS White tea slows and fights the types of bacteria that cause strep infections, pneumonia, and cavities in teeth, according to **research** from Pace University. With these antiviral and antifungal effects, white tea extract may show up in disease prevention efforts in the future.



KENYA, AFRICA:
Baobab Tree and
Tea Plantation

IVAN KUZMIN / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

In the rich volcanic soils of the upper elevations of the Rift, teas grown between 5,000 to 9,000 feet in elevation have flourished, making Kenya the world's third-largest producer of tea.

only Uji's famous tea, but other Uji treats such as green tea soba noodles, tea-seasoned rice, tea-inspired bentos, and the beloved green tea ice cream.

An ocean of tea leaves seems to stretch in every direction at Makinohara, a tea-growing region on a coastal plain halfway between Kyoto and Tokyo. At the working plantation Makinohara Greenpia (sometimes spelled Gurinpia), visitors can have a tea picking lesson, pick a basket of tea to take home from April to October, and in season, watch the tea factory in operation before whisking back to Tokyo or Kyoto on the train.

HAWAII

Warm Hawaii is one of the last places you might think of as a good place to grow tea, traditionally associated with cool, upland regions. But on Hawaii Island, where the active volcano Kilauea has been continuously erupting since the 1980s, micro tea plantations are beginning to take hold on the volcano's fog-wreathed, high-elevation slopes. The charming town of Volcano Village, filled with art and gardens, is the epicenter for Hawaii's new tea movement, which emphasizes hand-picking and handcrafting for superlative black, green, and oolong teas.

The prices are superlative, too, but that's to be expected of artisanally made tea in a first-world nation, says Pettigrew, who works with artist and Hawaii Island plantation owner Eva Lee. Lee's forested tea garden produces exquisite shaded teas that are higher in theanine, the amino acid that produces a sense of calm. Lee has said: "Both the volcano and the forest are hugely powerful, and help to nurture the tea. And when Pele, goddess of fire, wind, lightning, and volcanoes, is active, the tea absorbs her energy. The character of the tea can magically change when she gives the earth a little shake!" Lee is also a founder of the Hawaii Tea Company, which offers tea products and tea garden tours.

Although the tea plantations of Hawaii Island are not

large, says Pettigrew, the locations, with immaculate tea gardens that look out across a limitless horizon of ocean and sky, "are absolutely glorious."

KENYA

Perhaps no tea-growing region is as geologically unique as equatorial Kenya. Divided by the Great Rift Valley, which runs the length of the African continent, Kenya hosts a richness of wildlife that most regions on earth can only dream of. Most of Kenya, including the floor of the Great Rift, is too hot and dry to grow tea. But in the rich volcanic soils of the upper elevations of the Rift, teas grown between 5,000 to 9,000 feet in elevation have flourished, making Kenya the world's third-largest producer of tea. Most Kenyan teas are hand-harvested and then prepared in a process known as CTC (crush, tear, curl). They are considered among the best CTC teas available.

At Kiambethu Farm, take a tour of the tea fields that segues into an easy walk through indigenous forest, where rare flowers bloom and Colobus monkeys call to each other from the treetops. Then, enjoy a drink and a farm lunch with a panorama of the legendary Ngong Hills, made famous in Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*. Although there is no truly dormant period of Kenya's tea harvest, Kenya's peak seasons are January through March and June through July.

No matter where you choose to have your adventure, "Every time you drink a cup of tea," says Pettigrew, "you're connecting yourself to 5,000 years of history, 61 tea-growing countries around the world, and the cultures that drink it, which is nearly all of them. You become part of a family."

Lavonne Leong spent almost a decade in England, where she learned to love the gutty black teas of Assam and the delicate brews of Darjeeling. Now she lives in Honolulu, where she is discovering the joys of green and white teas.

Beyond Tea and Crumpets

PAIRING YOUR FAVORITE FOODS WITH TEA OPENS UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF FLAVORS.

Sipping a cup of tea, like coffee, can be a soothing ritual, and one of life's simple pleasures. And, much like choosing a wine, there is an abundance of choice that stems from very basic elements. But when it comes to pairing food and beverages, wine is not the only game in town. Tea can flavor anything from spicy to savory foods, sweet desserts to fruity drinks; the key is to match flavor profiles, then experiment to your heart's content.

Before you begin, it's helpful to know your tea—or at least what tea you like. Tea's flavor and intensity naturally derives from oxidation, or how much oxygen the leaves are exposed to during cultivation and processing. Along the tea spectrum, white and green teas, gentle and light in both taste and aroma, are unoxidized. These teas are frequently paired with salads, fruit, and light fish. Oolongs fall in the middle of the spectrum; they are semi-oxidized and offer the widest range of flavors, depending on the method of cultivation and processing of the leaves. Light oolongs lend themselves nicely to fish and chicken, while darker oolongs can hold their own with grilled foods. Black teas are fully oxidized and, like their deep color, offer deep, dark flavors. One step beyond black tea is pu'er tea, which often undergoes an aging process; the fermentation of the leaves imparts an earthy, mellow taste. Black and pu'er teas are frequently paired with foods a red wine might accompany.

If you have a favorite type of tea, that can be great place to start your own pairing experimentation. Once you've identified the tea you'd like to use, the next step is to find a correlating flavor in what you cook. Of course, it works the opposite way, too. If you have selected a dish, identify the main component and work from there.

BY JENNIFER GLATT



ALL ART THIS STORY BY YULIYART / THINKSTOCK



“Once you feel a bit more comfortable putting together different flavors, try pairing opposites to add another layer of complexity.”

“Pairing like with like is usually a pretty foolproof way to go,” says Nicole Martin, a tea writer and consultant who also blogs at teaformeplease.com. Identifying complementary flavors between teas and food doesn’t require culinary expertise—simply let your mouth be your guide. “If the tea echoes an aspect of the food, they won’t be likely to clash,” Martin assures. “Try to identify flavor notes in the tea that remind you of a particular type of food. If your tea has fruity notes like melon, chances are that it would go well with something like cantaloupe or honeydew.”

As another guideline, the experts at mightyleaf.com suggest pairing teas with foods from the same geographic region. “Japanese green teas taste wonderful with many of the foods indigenous to that country,” the site explains. Excellent when paired with seafood, fish or rice, green teas can also be used to help balance a high-sodium meal, while oolongs’ light character complements shellfish such as lobster or shrimp. Darjeelings pair well with curry and lamb.

The darker the tea, the more it can stand up to more flavorful foods, such as meat or spicy dishes. But even within the black category, flavors can range from fruity to smoky to earthy. The high quantity of tannins that accounts for black teas’ color can work as a palate cleanser and enhance sweetness, so fruity black teas work well with desserts, while smoky ones pair well with blackened meat. Pu’er teas are a good choice to complement chicken or stir-fry, with the added benefit of neutralizing oily and greasy tastes, according to rivertea.com.

If you’d like to try tea-flavored dishes without the commitment of home cooking, you’re in luck. Restaurants the world over are leveraging culinary creativity to create tea-infused items, from appetizers to desserts and even cocktails. Green tea-infused steelhead trout, tea-smoked duck, and rice steamed with tea are just a few of the myriad entrée options available, while green tea sorbet or jasmine-seasoned custard could be the adventurous way to end your meal.

If you’re looking to try cooking with tea at home, it’s easier than you might think. Start out with high-quality ingredients, properly prepared. Brew tea according to the directions to ensure it isn’t bitter.

When assessing your menu, an easy place to begin is adding your well-brewed or steeped tea to a marinade or sauce. Think of dry tea leaves as any other herb and combine

them with spices and herbs to create a meat or poultry rub. Or, brew tea and use it to brine a turkey or chicken alongside garlic, salt, pepper and other spices. It also will work nicely as a poaching liquid for fish or as the liquid component to gravy. For a fresh take on red meat, try this recipe for **Tea-Braised Hangar Steak**.

To ease into baking with tea, you might consider beginning with a “blank slate” of sorts—bread or cookies, perhaps, where a touch of tea flavor can peek out from behind a trusted taste. An **Earl Grey tea latte pancake** sounds like a sublime way to start a fall morning, don’t you think? Or perhaps **Martha Stewart’s Earl Grey tea cookies** are more your style. Mr. Grey also makes a dapper appearance in **bittersweet chocolate cupcakes with Earl Grey icing**, but other teas certainly have made their mark on many a sweet tooth. White tea infused with rosebuds elevates this decadent **Meditative Crème Brulee**, adding an aromatic element pure vanilla could never achieve alone.

“Once you feel a bit more comfortable putting together different flavors, try pairing opposites to add another layer of complexity,” suggests Martin. “For example, sweet treats can help to tone down a tea that is very earthy.” Creating a taste counterpoint echoes the ancient yin/yang aesthetic, whether it’s spicy paired with something cool, or sweet paired with sour.

Don’t forget tea makes an ideal complement to a libation, as well. From **sangria** to **sweet tea granita**, **hibiscus mojito tea** to a **hot toddy**, tea can make a drink go from mundane to magnificent in a heartbeat.

Jennifer Glatt is a freelance lifestyle and travel writer based in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she finds that the only thing better than sweet tea is even sweeter tea.



*If you are cold, tea will warm you;
If you are too heated, it will cool you;
If you are depressed, it will cheer you;
If you are excited, it will calm you.*

—WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE



Tea for What Ails You

HOW TO USE HERBAL TEAS TO TREAT COMMON HEALTH MALADIES
AND GET BACK ON THE PATH TO WELLNESS.

BY SHEILA SARHANGI

Tea is more than a beverage; herbal teas contain many medicinal properties. The next time you're in need of health and healing, head to the pantry—or even your yard—for a cup of tea. Here, a go-to guide for nature's remedies.

Relieve Inflammation

Are you bothered by sore joints? Do as the Okinawans do and drink turmeric tea. The orange-yellow spice, used in Indian curry and to color mustard, contains curcumin, which has a multifaceted, anti-inflammatory agent shown to provide relief from stiffness and arthritis pain. For a sweet, soothing concoction, consider adding coconut milk and honey.

Fight Allergies

Allergy sufferers should reach for green tea. The brew contains a natural compound that may block the production of histamine—a chemical your body releases during allergic reactions, triggering sneezing or a runny nose. Steep the leaves for three minutes and sip in the morning, before symptoms begin.

Soothe Insomnia

Frustrated by counting sheep? There might be a better way to get your Z's. Studies have shown that valerian can help you fall asleep faster and even improve the quality of your sleep. Before you try it, the Mayo Clinic wants you to consider everything from the possible side effects to the underlying cause of your wakeful nights, such as a medical condition or stress. Fun fact: Though the root stinks, the plant's flower extracts were used as perfume in the 16th century.

* All teas aren't right for all bodies, so check with your health care practitioner.

Boost Memory

Good news. In a recent study, participants who drank green tea extract tested significantly better on short-term memory tasks. The reason? MRIs revealed that the age-old brew increased the brain's ability to connect one area (frontal lobe) to another (parietal lobe). Though you'd have to drink several cups to mimic the study, this is yet another reason to believe a few cups of green tea a day is good for your health—and head.

Improve Digestion

Dandelion is much more than a pesky weed. The root has been used to soothe an aching belly, excrete toxins from the liver and gallbladder, and relieve constipation. If you're bloated, opt for the leaves, which are touted as a diuretic, increasing urine output. Buy it in a tea bag, or find it in the yard—just make sure it hasn't been sprayed with pesticides.

Relieve Stress

Arabs, Greeks, Romans. For centuries, various cultures have used lemon balm—a member of the mint family—for a variety of ailments and annoyances, from depression to insect bites. To relieve stress and anxiety, pour one cup of boiling water over a handful of fresh leaves and steep for 5 to 7 minutes before straining. For easy access, add the plant to your herb garden.

Reduce Blood Pressure

It's official. Studies have confirmed that hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) can lower blood pressure. The reason? The plant appears to have a diuretic effect and can inhibit a natural angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE), which helps relax blood vessels. For a refreshing, tropical drink make it cold and consider adding pineapple slices and cane sugar.



Gynecological Concerns

Native Americans used black cohosh to address everything from kidney disorders to colds and coughs. In recent years, the root has gained popularity for treating premenstrual discomfort, menstrual cramps, and menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes and night sweats. For the latter, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends limiting its use to six months or less.

Boost Immunity

Want to stave off a cold? Brew a cup of chamomile tea. A study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* found that volunteers who drank German chamomile tea—five cups per day for two consecutive weeks—had increased levels of hippurate, which has been linked to antibacterial activity. Sniffles be gone.

Increase Energy—and Then Some

In the Ecuadorian Amazon, during the predawn hours, the Kichwa people gather around a communal fire and boil the leaves of the guayusa (gwhy-you-sa) tree, creating a drink central to their culture. Now, the traditional drink is gaining popularity in the U.S. since it has twice the antioxidants of green tea, 15 essential amino acids, and as much caffeine as coffee, among other traits.

Sheila Sarhangi is a Honolulu-based freelance writer specializing in social and environmental change. She sips rooibos tea, which is grown in South Africa.



Tea: The World's Meditation

BY PHIL AMERICA

The world was never fast enough for me, especially as a child. I was diagnosed with ADD in second grade and struggled with school until I was in my late teens. My twenties were a mix of cities, passions, friends, and something new every few weeks.

The life so many of us live is in 10-second increments. The only things somewhat structured for so many of us is our jobs, but even those are becoming more unconventional. Our sleep is often interrupted with the sound of a text message or notification, which we wouldn't dare avoid. All this, and we are still searching. All this, and I wonder if it is ADD or just life.

As a photographer, artist and activist, my journey into the slums of distant lands and in and out of cultures and villages around the world has exposed me to a terrific amount of variety and differences; however, there is one through line: tea. Tea leaves have been plucked and stirred into hot water for millennia, and that is no different today. Now that I am more often stateside, I order teas from around the world to try to take me back in my memories.

My favorite is raw pu'er tea, a tea from China picked from the trees planted in the 1800s, or even longer ago. I have tried so many pu'ers but now only drink Misty Peak teas. When I make my tea, I take time to be thankful to the leaves in my hand and especially to the farmers who went out early in the morning, leaving their family and comfortable home, to pick these leaves for me. I'm thankful to the boats that brought the tea to my land and thankful, too, for making this time for myself.

Pu'er tea calms me very quickly and activates the theta brain waves. It has huge amounts of GABA, which relieves stress. The tea warms my core and settles my mind. Great tea and a great cup to hold and meditate on—this is all one needs to find peace in a busy day.

Cups, mugs, glasses, pitchers, thermoses, and any other vessel for holding liquid, all these were handed to me in every part of the world, and they always slowed me down. I remember hiking in the cold nights over endless sand dunes in the Sahara desert, when a nomad guide throws a rug on the sand and starts to heat water. Minutes before, we were in a hurry. Now, we sit and watch the bubbles come to surface as he grabs a pouch of leaves from his side bag. He is making tea, and we are slowing down. The bells on the necks of animals and the swooshing of pants and bags has stopped, we hear only our breaths and the kettle.

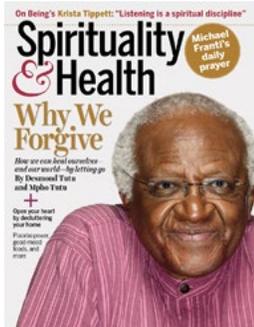
Let this be a testimony more than a thought. I challenge you to think of tea as a pastime, not merely as a beverage. When a moment gets too intense, or even when it is calm, begin to brew water and pull the tea from your side bag. Beauty and silence will follow.

I often think of those days when my second grade teacher told my mother that we should work on getting me a prescription. I often think of my friend who gave up a lifetime of alcoholism in exchange for the art of tea. How is it that this leaf is in the cup of billions of people's lives, yet we are only coming to it now? As with anything, let us focus not so much on the what, but the why. In the beginning, drinking any tea will do for a meditation, as long as it is done mindfully and quietly. Meditation is great, but can be discouraging to new practitioners. Let us not need meditation mats or a Vipassana center to find peace and quiet; let us carry it with us in our side bag. Let us pour tea because we want silence. Let us drink tea.

Phil America is an artist, writer, and activist based in California. He has worked with the UN, given three TEDx talks, and published three books.

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