CONTEMPORARY

Tea Time

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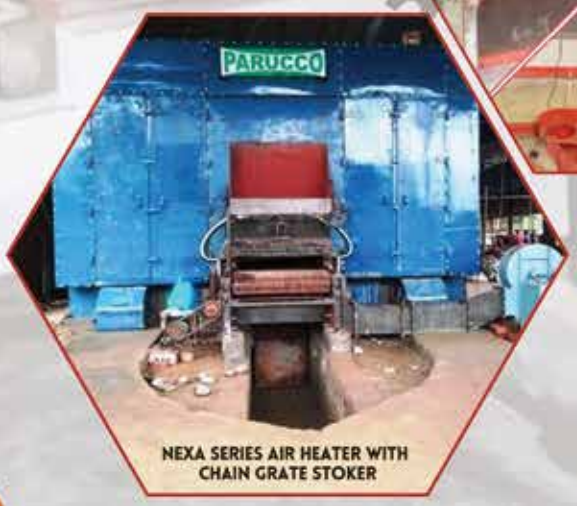


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First Flush

Brewing through the weather

Some quarters arrive like a rolling boil. July–September 2026 arrived more like a slow steep - patient, testing, but ultimately full-bodied. For Indian tea, this was a season of weathering small storms while quietly building the infrastructure of a bigger future, and it is that second, steadier current that this issue chooses to follow.

Yes, the leaf had its moods. Assam and the Dooars saw production ebb with the rains, and a brief fuel crunch slowed Darjeeling's factories at the very moment first flush needed them most. But what stood out this quarter was not the wobble - it was how quickly industry and government moved together to answer it. The Tea Board's push to fast-track GI branding for Darjeeling, Assam Orthodox, Nilgiri Orthodox and Kangra teas gathered real momentum, giving these estates a sharper, more defensible identity on shelves from Dubai to Düsseldorf. Alongside it, a tamper-proof traceability system now taking shape with C-DAC promises something the industry has long needed: proof of provenance that no imitation can borrow.

India held its place as the world's second-largest producer and consumer of tea, and exports for the year pushed toward the 300-million-kilogram ambition the Tea Board has set for 2026 - a target that, not long ago, would have sounded like optimism dressed as strategy. The UAE remained a steady anchor market, China's appetite for orthodox blends surged, and joint participation in international fairs and buyer-seller meets kept Indian tea in rooms where decisions get made. Even the tightening compliance landscape in Europe, rather than a wall, is increasingly being treated as a runway - with the Tea Board helping estates move faster toward certified, traceable, IPM-friendly practices that will serve them well beyond any single regulation.

There is still ground to cover, of course. Wages on the garden floor deserve to rise in step with the industry's ambitions, and smallholder growers - who now form the backbone of over half the nation's output - need the same access to testing and certification infrastructure as the larger estates. But these read less like warnings and more like the next items on a shared agenda, one the industry and its government partners appear genuinely committed to working through together.

It is fitting, then, that this issue's cover story turns outward. We travel across the world's great tea festivals - Berlin's sprawling autumn gathering, Seoul's matcha-forward showcase, the trade rigour of Las Vegas - and ask, gently but pointedly, why Indian tea does not yet anchor these stages the way it anchors the cup itself. It is less a complaint than an invitation: the world is gathering around tea, and India's seat at that table is only getting bigger.

Elsewhere, we follow the quieter thread connecting rainfall, paddy fields, and pesticide residue - a reminder that the finest cup begins long before the factory, in soil and season and care.

A quarter of small tests and steadier answers - of storms weathered without losing the aroma of ambition. Pour yourself a cup, settle in, and read on; the story of Indian tea this season is one worth lingering over.



Chitto Ghosh

Chitto Ghosh
Editor

WHERE TEA FINDS ITS NOTE

A guitar guru's morning ritual of listening, memory and discovery

Globally celebrated classical guitarist Debtar Debashish Bhattacharya has taken the language of Indian raga to concert stages across the world, yet his musical roots remain deeply planted in India. Beyond his own pioneering artistry and the unique instruments he has created, he is equally committed to passing the tradition forward. Through his gurukul, he provides dedicated tutelage and talim to a new generation of promising young guitarists, nurturing not merely their technique but their musical sensibility. For Debashishji, music - and perhaps tea - is as much a journey inward as it is a performance before the world.



Classical Guitars invented by Debtar Debashish Bhattacharya: Pushpa Veena, Chaturangui, Ghandharvi & Anandi

I have often thought that human life is a journey without a return ticket. We move from one experience to another, from one discovery to the next, never quite returning to the person we were a moment ago. Music has taught me to accept that movement. Every raga begins somewhere, unfolds through innumerable possibilities, and finally disappears into silence. Yet something remains - the memory of having travelled through it.

Tea, for me, belongs to that same world of movement and discovery. It is not simply a beverage I happen to drink every day. It is a ritual of arrival. Every morning, wherever I may be in the world, tea helps me arrive at myself. Before the first note is played, before the first exercise of the day, before I pick up my guitar, there is that familiar fragrance rising from the cup.

The first thing I experience is the aroma. The taste comes with the second sip. There is something beautiful about that sequence. Fragrance announces possibility; taste confirms experience. Music, in a way, behaves similarly. Before we fully hear a note, we often anticipate it within ourselves.

That is why I sometimes think of tea as **a second instrument in my musical life.** Not because it produces music, but because it prepares the space in which music can happen. The warmth, fragrance and quiet concentration of that first cup create an inner tuning. I may then pick up my guitar and begin with sa re ga ma pa dha ni, but something has already begun before my fingers touch the strings.

My entire musical life revolves around Indian raga music, but my understanding of it began by looking at Indian music through the larger window of universal music. Since the late 1970s, that search has taken me through many musical territories and also towards creating instruments of my own.

The Chaturangui, Ghandharvi, Anandi and Pushpa Veena are all my explorations of the classical guitar - different voices and personalities emerging from the same fundamental idea. They are principally six-string instruments, while the Ghandharvi has twelve strings. Each has been designed by me and handcrafted from premium wood and leather. To the best of my knowledge, there is nothing else quite like them anywhere in the world.

I am drawn to individuality - the character that distinguishes one thing from another. My favourites are Darjeeling first flush and Earl Grey, particularly Twinings Earl Grey. Darjeeling has a personality that I find difficult to describe without becoming poetic. It carries something of its mountain air, its light, its seasons. Earl Grey adds bergamot - a completely different fragrance, yet one that creates another kind of harmony.

I generally begin my day with a cup or two of Darjeeling. Earl Grey often belongs to the afternoon,

around three-thirty or four-thirty. A good second flush in the evening can accompany another session of riyaz. And sometimes I enjoy a fine CTC Assam tea, especially because my wife is Assamese and I have had the opportunity to experience the tea gardens around Dibrugarh.

Tea has travelled with me almost as faithfully as my instruments. When I am performing abroad, I carry Darjeeling or Earl Grey in my shoulder bag. Airlines and hotels cannot always provide the tea I want. So I simply ask for hot water, take out my tea and make it myself. It may sound like a small thing, but when you are far from home, such a familiar ritual can restore an entire inner landscape.

Suddenly, Paris or London or New York becomes less foreign. My association with Darjeeling also has a family memory behind it. My maternal grandfather, Prabodhchandra Bandyopadhyay, was a gifted singer of raga, bhajan and kirtan. A chance encounter at a Goenka household in Calcutta eventually took him to Darjeeling, where he became associated with the management of sixteen tea gardens. Our family therefore grew up with stories of Darjeeling, music and tea. Even after the great landslide of 1951 destroyed the house where my mother had been born, tea continued to arrive at our home from the gardens.

I remember those packages from my childhood - the carefully processed leaves, the beautiful brown-golden liquor. I did not drink tea then, but I was already looking at it.

Perhaps we begin loving certain things long before we know that we love them. Over the years, tea has also become part of my concert life. I have shared it with some extraordinary musicians - **Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pandit Shivkumar Khanna, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, John McLaughlin,** whom I consider one of the greatest classical guitarists of our time, and members of **Shakti.**

Zakir ji had an extraordinary affection for fine tea. I remember seeing how seriously he took it. Among musicians, tea is almost a language of its own. Before a concert, after the sound check, there is always a period when each musician prepares in a different way. Some sleep, some read, some eat, some simply withdraw into silence.

I drink tea. My requirements to concert organisers are therefore quite straightforward: Darjeeling and Earl Grey, good food and sometimes chocolate. Between the sound check and the concert, there may be two or three rounds of tea.

There is one amusing complication in India. When you say "tea", people often assume you mean milk tea. So I have learned to say, "Please give me red tea." Once, after a concert, the tea vendor actually appeared beside my car with a kettle of red tea. Someone had understood.

That gesture stayed with me. Because ultimately, tea is not only about taste. It is about attention. It is about hospitality. It is about the quiet recognition of another person's preference.

And perhaps that is where tea and music meet most deeply. A raga cannot be forced. A good tea cannot be rushed. Both ask us to listen - to notice the subtle difference between one moment and another, one fragrance and another, one note and another.

When I take that first sip in the morning, I am therefore doing more than waking myself up.

I am listening. The day has begun. My guitar is waiting.

And somewhere between the fragrance of Darjeeling and the first vibration of a string, I find my way back to music.



Debtar Debashish Bhattacharya with John McLaughlin, Zakir Hussain, L. Shankar, Ramnad Raghavan, Vikku Vinayakram, U. Srinivas & the members of Shakti Band



Debtar Debashish Bhattacharya
Classical guitar maestro

ONCE UPON A TIME

Ms Brinda Goradia traces the 127-year-old history of Andrew Yule & Co., which even in its early beginnings displayed the true liberal British attitude to India. Way back in 1888, company chairman George Yule was President of the Indian National Congress.

In the year 1863, 29-year-old Andrew Yule arrived in India as an importer for Horrocks' long-cloth and agent for three insurance companies. The young merchant had already made a name for himself in the world of commerce in Scotland. Andrew and his brother George were known as the 'warehouse men of Manchester'.

Later photographs in India show a face lined by sideburns as was the fashion of the times. The wide eyes glint with steely determination of the successful. And not without reason. His firm, Andrew Yule & Co., was now a member of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and had established headquarters on Clive Row, off Clive Street in Calcutta, 'the grand theatre of business with practically every public mart in it'.



George Yule: A Liberal Voice in India's Nationalist Movement, 1888

Five years before Andrew's landing on the Indian shores, the Mutiny had wound up the East India Company and Queen Victoria had assumed direct responsibility for the brightest jewel in her crown and commercially, Britain was poised for a golden age of overseas expansion. The Industrial Revolution on her shores had quickened the need for new sources of raw materials and larger markets for the ready-products. Dalhousie had opened up the Indian sub-continent by laying out the railway and telegraph. Howrah station had opened in 1855, Sealdah in 1862. The Hugli would soon be spanned by the Howrah Floating Bridge.

Calcutta had come a long way since those early days when Job Charnock had established a trading post on the banks of the village of Sutanati in 1690. As in London, the river breeze was now bringing an aroma of spice and tea. The Writers' Building on Tank Square had come up in 1780, Lord Wellesley's palatial new Government House was built in 1803. The British were rapidly creating for themselves a city of palaces on the bank of the Hugli. Huge gleaming neo-classical mansions and carefully cultivated gardens stood facing wide boulevards, exuding the power and the pomp of the empire. Jute, coal and tea were rapidly emerging as the three principal industries in the region. By 1833 Dundee had acquired power-driven factories to process raw jute. The Crimean War, by cutting supplies of Russian hemp, put the burden of providing raw jute on Bengal.

Seizing the opportunity, Andrew Yule was soon investing in two jute mills, Belvedere and Budge. Budge was later amalgamated into the Delta Jute Mill. By the early decades of the new century, Andrew Yule went on to possess eight jute mills on the Hugli.

Large deposits of coal had been found in Bengal and Bihar, and in 1873, Andrew established the new Beerbhoom Coal Co Ltd in conjunction with Samuel Bird and Octavius Steel. Interestingly, in 1908, Andrew Yule & Co. became managing agents of Bengal Coal Co Ltd., originally founded in 1843 by Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, the grandfather of Rabindranath.

Twelve years after his arrival in India, Andrew was joined by his brother George and the Yule family was soon blazing a trail on the industrial scene of India. By 1902 the firm managed fifteen tea companies, four jute mills, one inland navigation company, one cotton mill, four coal companies, two flour mills, one oil mill, a railway company, a jute press house and a



"Later photographs in India show a face lined by sideburns as was the fashion of the times. The wide eyes glint with steely determination of the successful."



K S B Sanyal transformed Andrew Yule into a leading public sector enterprise through dynamic leadership, rapid expansion, and effective management. His social commitment earned him the position of Sheriff of Calcutta.

zamindari company.

But even more significant was George Yule's impact on the nationalist scene of India. By becoming President of the Indian National Congress in 1888, he put forth the true liberal attitude to India implying that in the eventual analysis altruism was enlightened self-interest.

Though the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, with the tacit blessing of the Viceroy, its popularity had alarmed the authorities and a panicky Lord Dufferin was soon denouncing the organisation as the voice of a 'microscopic minority'. Sir Auckland Colin, Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces, was said to have created difficulties for the holding of the Allahabad Session. But such problems had not deterred the canny Scotsman.

In his presidential address at the Allahabad Session of the Congress in 1888, George Yule reminded the Congress that "it was Disraeli", as leader of the Tory opposition in the House of Commons, who criticised Lord Palmerston's original India Bill of 1858 on the grounds that it made no provision for the expression of the views of inhabitants of the country. George had gone on to add "the measures advocated by the Congress were such as would unite England and India, not by the hard and brittle bonds of arbitrary rule which might snap in a moment, but by the pliable and more enduring ligaments of common interests promoted with some regard to the principles of representative government".

On George's retirement, David Yule became the Chairman of the Company. In turn, when David was knighted and retired to England, the management of Andrew Yule & Co. passed over to Lord Cato of Cairncotto in 1919.

It was not until 1968 that the Company had its first Indian chairman in Mr. Bhaskar Mitter. Following difficult business conditions, the controlling interest was sold by London and in 1979 Andrew Yule & Co. Ltd became a Government of India enterprise. The Company limped along until 1983 when the dynamic Mr. K.S.B. Sanyal took over as Chairman & Managing Director and infused a new life into the old institution.

Today, the group boasts of 16 units, 12 tea gardens and three regional offices apart from a network of service centres. It employs a total of 20,000 people. In keeping with the times, the group has ten on-going collaborations with organisations of world renown. 1989 saw the launch of the Rs. 41 crore steel Cord Conveyor Belting Plant without any budgeting support from the Government.

But true to the tradition of its pioneering days, Andrew Yule has not forgotten its social responsibilities. In Assam, where the company has major tea interests, it has contributed to the development of Moran College and a school for blind children. In West Bengal it supports a number of social causes including women's welfare and slum development, education and the development of a school at Kalyani.



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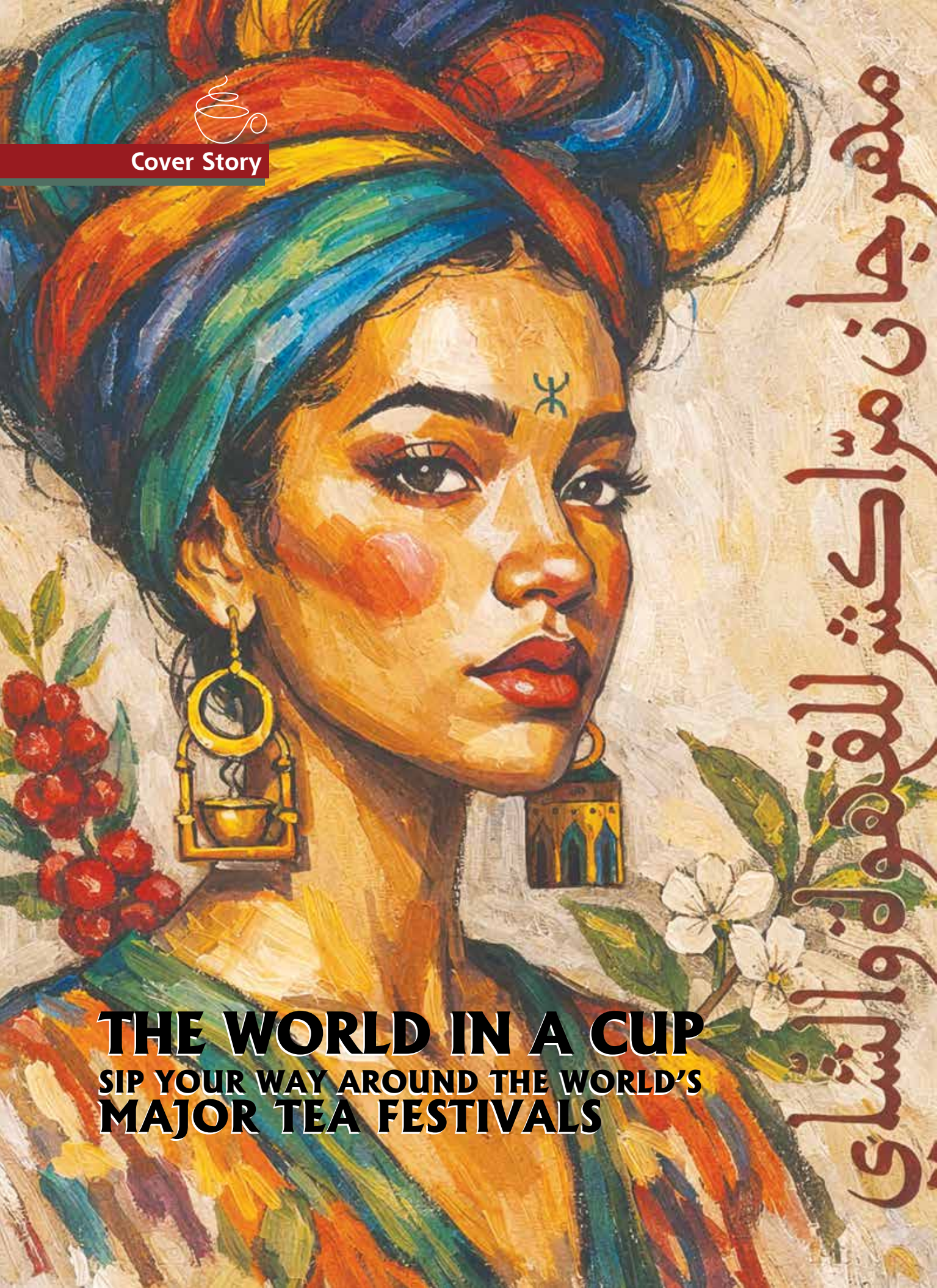
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THE WORLD IN A CUP

SIP YOUR WAY AROUND THE WORLD'S MAJOR TEA FESTIVALS

There is a particular hush when tea is poured well - water meeting leaf, aroma blooming, a collective exhale before the first sip. Multiply that by thousands of cups and dozens of cultures, and you have the world's great tea festivals: from misty Darjeeling honouring the "champagne of teas," to Kyoto's unhurried ceremonies, to the boisterous energy of gatherings in London and Taipei.

"Tea doesn't rush anyone," one longtime organiser reflects. "You expect a transaction. You leave having had a conversation - with the grower, the leaf, the stranger beside you. We're not selling tea. We're selling the pause."

Abhishek Ganguli - tea enthusiast, history buff, and inveterate wanderer — traces how a humble leaf became one of the world's great excuses to gather.

"There is something in the nature of tea that leads us into a world of quiet contemplation of life... It is a drink worth many celebrations, for it speaks to both the solitary soul and the great, gathering community of humankind."

Adapted from Lin Yutang, The Importance of Living

Tea is far more than an agricultural commodity; it is a civilisational current that has flowed through millennia, carrying with it the profound weight of heritage, agrarian philosophy, and the relentless engine of global trade. For the past 37 years, Contemporary Tea Time has meticulously chronicled the tectonic shifts within this industry - from the storied legacies of old-world brokerage firms and the delicate transitions of corporate leadership to the complex logistics of modern auction houses and export corridors. We have observed how the leaf acts as an enduring bridge between the misty, terraced hillsides of antiquity and the bustling, hyper-connected boardrooms of the present.

Yet, to truly grasp the living pulse of the international tea trade, one must periodically step beyond the familiar tasting rooms and commercial headquarters. One must plunge directly into the vibrant, sensory-rich, and dynamic environments of the world's major tea festivals. These global gatherings are the modern epicentres of a great retrieval - a deliberate convergence of time-honoured wisdom, regional identity, and cutting-edge commercial innovation. They serve as indispensable crucibles where growers, international buyers, artisan blenders, ceramists, and the philosophical stewards of the leaf unite. Here, they celebrate the harvest, negotiate the future of global supply chains, and continuously redefine what a single cup of tea means to a rapidly evolving society. Across continents, these festivals showcase the staggering diversity of tea culture, offering a macroscopic view of an industry that remains deeply rooted in local soil while aggressively reaching for global innovation.



From the sacred riverbeds of Kyoto and the heritage bungalows of Upper Assam to the high-mountain pavilions of Taipei and the neon-lit exposition halls of North America, this journey around the globe offers an unparalleled masterclass in terroir, trade, and tradition. Prepare your palate and ready your passports as we embark on an exhaustive tour of the world's eleven most significant tea festivals - exploring their unique specialties, their historical inceptions, and the seasonal rhythms that govern their occurrence.

Boseong Green Tea Festival, Boseong, South Korea

Year of inception: 1985,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually during the first week of May (typically 10:00 AM to 9:00 PM daily),

Speciality: Immersive first-flush harvesting, traditional hand-roasting methodologies, geographical indication (GI) heritage protection, and tea-integrated regional gastronomy.

Nestled in the southwestern reaches of the Korean Peninsula, Boseong County is revered as the historical birthplace of South Korea's commercial tea industry, boasting a cultivation history that stretches back over 1,600 years. It is here, amidst rolling hills that meander in mesmerising, undulating terraces, that the Boseong Green Tea Festival takes place. Initiated in 1985 to celebrate and protect the region's agricultural heritage, this event has matured into one of the most culturally significant agrarian festivals in East Asia. The festival is intentionally timed to coincide with the early days of May, perfectly aligning with the arrival of the crucial first-flush harvest (Ujeon and Sejak). During this precise window, the hillsides erupt into a luminous green, and the air is thick with the sweet, vegetative aroma of freshly plucked shoots. For trade professionals and tea enthusiasts



Boseong Green Tea Festival Boseong, South Korea

alike, the timing is paramount; the first flush represents the highest-quality yield of the agricultural year, commanding premium prices and dictating the market standard for subsequent harvests. What distinguishes the Boseong Green Tea Festival from conventional trade shows is its profound emphasis on experiential education and cultural immersion. The festival's speciality lies in its hands-on approach to the ancient art of tea making. Visitors and commercial buyers do not merely sample the final infusion; they are invited into the terraced fields to pluck tender leaves alongside veteran farmers. This is followed by participation in gamasot (traditional cast-iron cauldron) roasting - a labour-intensive process that halts oxidation and locks in the characteristic savoury umami flavour of Korean green tea.

Furthermore, the festival is a masterclass in regional branding and culinary integration. The local administration successfully registered Boseong Green Tea as a Protected Geographical Indication, guaranteeing quality and protecting the heritage of the terroir. During the festival, this regional pride is showcased through an extraordinary array of tea-infused gastronomy - from green tea cold noodles and matcha basque cheesecakes to traditional savoury dishes such as green tea freshwater-snail bibimbap. By evening, the terraced gardens are illuminated for moonlit walks, transforming the landscape into a visual narrative that connects the earth-bound labour of the grower with the high-impact aesthetics demanded by modern cultural tourism.

Uji Tea Festival (Uji Cha Matsuri) Uji, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan

Year of inception: 1931,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually on the first Sunday of October (ceremonies commence at 9:00 AM and conclude by 4:00 PM),

Speciality: Sacred water-drawing rituals, historical memorials to Japan's tea pioneers, supreme Gyokuro and Matcha preparation, and traditional Kyoto tea lineage preservation. To step into Uji is to step into the spiritual heart of Japanese tea culture.

Located just south of Kyoto, Uji is globally renowned for producing the finest shade-grown teas in the world: Matcha and Gyokuro. The Uji Cha Matsuri was formally established in 1931 by regional tea masters and civic leaders to honour the triad of historical figures who shaped Japan's tea tradition - the Zen monk Eisai (who brought tea seeds from China), the priest Myōe (who planted the first seeds in Uji), and Sen no Rikyū (who perfected the Wabi-cha tea ceremony). Held annually on the first Sunday of October, the festival is a solemn, breathtaking celebration of autumn that coincides with the traditional opening of aged tea jars (Kuchikiri). Unlike commercial expos, the Uji Tea Festival is deeply ritualistic, grounded in centuries of Zen Buddhist and Shinto heritage.

The festival's speciality centres on the iconic Meisui gui - the sacred water-drawing ceremony. At daybreak, priests in traditional robes draw crystal-clear water from the Uji River at the Ujigami Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This water, historically deemed the purest for brewing leaf, is consecrated and carried in a formal procession to Kōshō-ji Temple. There, masters from Japan's leading tea schools (including Urasenke, Omotesenke, and Mushakōjisenke) perform ritual tea offerings to the spirits of the tea pioneers. For visitors and connoisseurs, the grounds of Kōshō-ji and the banks of the Uji River transform into an open-air pavilion of exceptional hospitality. Attendees participate in authentic chakai (tea gatherings), tasting ceremonial-grade Matcha whisked with bamboo chasen and sipping exquisite, umami-laden Gyokuro brewed at precisely controlled temperatures. The festival serves as a vital reminder to the international trade that behind every grade of Japanese tea lies a rigorous philosophical discipline where hospitality, respect, purity, and tranquility converge.



Uji Tea Festival, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan



World O-CHA Festival, Shizuoka, Japan

World O-CHA (Tea) Festival, Shizuoka, Japan

Year of inception: 2001

Date and time of occurrence: Held every three years; divided into a Spring Festival (April to May) and a major Autumn Festival in late October (10:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily)

Speciality: Comprehensive global B2B/B2C trade exhibition, scientific symposia on tea and health, modern brewing technology, and international tea pavilion exchanges.

If Boseong and Uji represent the soulful, agrarian and ceremonial roots of East Asian tea, the World O-CHA (Tea) Festival in Shizuoka is its grand, international diplomatic summit. First held in 2001, this monumental event was established by the Shizuoka Prefectural Government as Japan's premier comprehensive tea exposition. Organised triennially, it is a massive undertaking designed to broadcast the multifaceted appeal of tea - spanning culture, industry, health sciences, and tourism - to a global audience. The festival operates on a unique bi-seasonal schedule to capture the full spectrum of the agricultural year. The Spring Festival kicks off between April and May, aligning with the highly anticipated Shincha (new tea) harvest across regional cultural venues such as the Fujinokuni Tea Capital Museum. However, it is the Autumn Festival, held in late October at the expansive Granship convention centre in Shizuoka City, that draws thousands of international trade delegates.

The speciality of the World O-CHA Festival is its sheer scale and its dual focus on preservation and modernisation. Shizuoka Prefecture produces roughly 40% of Japan's green tea, and the festival acts as an economic locomotive for the region's domestic and export ambitions. Walking through the World O-CHA Market hall, a buyer can interface with hundreds of producers offering an exhaustive catalog of regional Senchas, Fukamushichas (deep-steeped teas), and high-altitude mountain brews.

Yet, the festival is not strictly a domestic showcase. The "Experience World Street Tea Houses" section transforms the venue into a global village, offering attendees the chance to sample heavily spiced, sweetened, or uniquely fermented teas from nations as diverse as Morocco, Vietnam, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the festival heavily platforms academic research, hosting international symposia on polyphenols, catechins, and preventative health. Recent editions have placed a strategic emphasis on capturing younger demographics through innovative "SweeTEA Pairing" modules, proving that ancient traditions can evolve to meet the demands of a changing global marketplace.

Taiwan International Tea Show, Taipei, Taiwan

Year of inception: 2010,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually in mid-November (typically a four-day exhibition from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Centre)

Speciality: Supreme high-mountain (Gaoshan) Oolongs, Formosa Oriental Beauty (Dongfang Meiren), artisanal ceramic teaware, and advanced agricultural processing technology.

Taiwan occupies a legendary status in the world of speciality tea, celebrated globally as the undisputed champion of Oolong cultivation and processing.

The core speciality of the Tea Show is its unmatched concentration of premier Oolong terroirs. The exhibition floor is an encyclopedia of Formosa craftsmanship: buyers can evaluate floral, unroasted high-mountain teas from Lishan, Alishan, and Shanlinxi; deeply roasted, mineral-rich Dongding Oolongs; and the honey-sweet, insect-bitten Oriental Beauty from Hsinchu. The fair also highlights Taiwan's growing dominance in premium black teas, such as the ruby-red Sun Moon Lake No. 18 (Hongyu). Beyond the leaf, the show is an international benchmark for ceremonial teaware and agronomic innovation.

Taiwan is home to some of the world's most revered ceramists, and the fair features dedicated galleries of handcrafted clay teapots, porcelain cups, and bamboo accessories essential for Gongfu Cha (the art of tea brewing). For the serious trade professional, the event also provides critical access to Taiwan's cutting-edge agricultural machinery, from precision optical sorting machines to automated rolling and vacuum-packaging systems that set global standards for quality control.



Taiwan International Tea Show, Taipei, Taiwan

HKTDC Hong Kong International Tea Fair, Hong Kong

Year of inception: 2009,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually in mid-August (typically a three-day event from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre)



HKTDC Hong Kong International Tea Fair, Hong Kong

Speciality: High-volume B2B trade networking, rare and vintage aged Pu-erh auctions, luxury branding, and global supply chain logistics.

Transitioning from the agrarian and artisanal, we arrive at the absolute epicentre of high-stakes global tea commerce: the Hong Kong International Tea Fair. Launched in August 2009 by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), this fair was designed to capitalise on Hong Kong's historic position as the free-trade bridging point between the vast tea gardens of mainland China and the affluent consumer markets of the West. It routinely runs concurrently with the HKTDC Food Expo and the International Conference of the Modernisation of Chinese Medicine, creating a massive, synergistic hub for the broader food, beverage, and wellness industries.

The speciality of the Hong Kong International Tea Fair lies in its authoritative grasp of aged and dark teas (Heicha). Hong Kong has long been the world's primary aging and trading vault for Pu-erh tea from Yunnan. The fair features exclusive tasting pavilions and high-profile auctions where decades-old tea cakes are evaluated, traded, and treated with the same financial reverence as fine Bordeaux wines or rare art.

In addition to rare vintages, the fair is a comprehensive sourcing platform for international brand managers and hospitality chains. Exhibitors from China, India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Japan present commercial-grade CTC teas, botanical blends, and ready-to-drink (RTD) raw materials. The event is complemented by the prestigious Hong Kong International Tea Competition, where international panels of judges blind-taste hundreds of submissions to set benchmark standards for commercial excellence. For the modern trade executive, navigating Hong Kong is essential for grasping the complex financial, branding, and packaging realities that drive the global industry forward.



Assam Tea Festival, Assam, India

Assam Tea Festival, Jorhat, Assam, India

Year of inception: 1998,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually in late November to early December (festivities span three days across Jorhat and surrounding heritage estates)

Speciality: CTC and Orthodox black tea supremacy, heritage plantation tourism, planter-led technical sessions, tea garden golf tournaments, and indigenous Assamese cultural integration.

No global exploration of tea is complete without paying homage to the mighty Brahmaputra Valley. Assam is the world's largest contiguous tea-growing region, producing robust, malty black teas that form the strong backbone of breakfast blends consumed across the globe. To honour this monumental agrarian heritage, the Assam Tourism Development Corporation instituted the Assam Tea Festival in 1998 in Jorhat—often hailed as the Tea Capital of the World. Held annually during the cool, dry winter months of late November or early December, the festival provides a rare, authentic immersion into the world of the Indian tea planter. While urban trade shows take place in convention centres, the Assam Tea Festival takes place amidst historical colonial-era bungalows, sprawling manicured tea estates, and the historic research corridors of the Tocklai Tea Research Institute.

The festival's speciality is its celebration of Assam's dual strength: industrial CTC (Crush, Tear, Curl) production and fine, golden-tipped Orthodox manufacture. Visiting trade delegates and buyers are given access to factory floors to observe the high-capacity machinery that fuels India's domestic consumption and global export trade. Planter-led technical sessions address pressing contemporary challenges, including climate resilience, small tea grower (STG) integration, and sustainable pest management.

Yet, the festival is equally celebrated for its grand lifestyle and cultural showcases. Attendees experience "tea tourism" at its most authentic—residing in restored heritage bungalows, participating in the traditional Jorhat Gymkhana Club tea golf tournament, and embarking on wildlife safaris to nearby Kaziranga National Park. Evening festivities feature indigenous Assamese Bihu dance performances, community feasts, and curated tastings of rare artisanal white and speciality green teas now being crafted by progressive Assamese estates. It is a powerful reminder of the deep sociological and economic bond between the leaf and the people of Northeast India.

Darjeeling Tea Festival, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

Year of inception: 2001,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually during late November to December (coordinated across Darjeeling town and historic mountain estates)

Speciality: First, Second, and Autumnal flush tastings, Geographical Indication (GI) heritage protection, Darjeeling Himalayan Railway heritage, and mountain estate terroir education.

Perched high in the misty foothills of the Himalayas, Darjeeling occupies a singular, revered niche in the global beverage trade. Often crowned the "Champagne of Teas," Darjeeling tea is celebrated for its exquisite Muscatel character, delicate floral notes, and complex seasonal flushes. The Darjeeling Tea Festival (often organised in collaboration with regional tourism boards and the Darjeeling Tea Association, with roots tracing back to late 2001) was created to safeguard and promote this irreplaceable cultural and agricultural treasure. Timed during the late autumn and winter tourism season, the festival celebrates the culmination of the tea year following the prized Autumnal flush. Surrounded by panoramic views of snow-capped Mount Kanchenjunga, the festival brings together veteran estate managers, estate workers, international blenders, and discerning connoisseurs in one of the



Darjeeling Tea Festival, West Bengal, India

most picturesque settings on earth.

The core speciality of the Darjeeling Tea Festival is sensory terroir education and GI advocacy. In 2004, Darjeeling tea became the very first product in India to receive Geographical Indication (GI) status, legally protecting its name and geographical boundaries on the global stage. During the festival, comparative tasting sessions allow participants to decode the stark sensory differences between the brisk, vegetal First Flush of spring; the warm, grape-like Muscatel of the Second Flush in summer; and the mellow, copper-hued Autumnal harvest.

The festival is deeply intertwined with the heritage of the region. Events frequently connect with the historic Darjeeling Himalayan Railway - a UNESCO World Heritage "Toy Train" - allowing visitors to wind through historical estates such as Makaibari, Castleton, and Jungpana. Cultural programmes highlight the rich Gorkha, Nepali, and Bhutia heritage of the plantation workforce, emphasising that true Darjeeling tea is the result of a delicate, harmonious balance between high-mountain climate, heritage China-bush genetics, and generations of skilled artisanal plucking.

Paris Tea Festival (Festival du Thé), Paris, France

Year of inception: 2019,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually in late October (typically a weekend exposition from 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM)

Speciality: European gastronomic pairings, sensory terroir appreciation, literary tea salons, and French luxury tea-house culture.

While European tea history was long dominated by the mercantile traditions of London and Amsterdam, modern Paris has quietly transformed into the Western world's capital of sophisticated tea gastronomy. The Paris Tea Festival represents the intellectual and sensory elevation of tea within continental Europe, treating the leaf with the same gastronomic reverence historically reserved for grand-cru wines and speciality perfumes.

Held annually in late October - as Parisian trees turn amber and the city's salon culture comes alive - the festival gathers inside elegant exposition spaces such as the Espace Blanc de Blancs or regional cultural halls. It serves as a meeting ground for Europe's most esteemed tea houses, independent importers, published authors, and sensory experts. The speciality of the Paris Tea Festival is its refinement and culinary sophistication. The French approach to tea is deeply rooted in l'art de vivre - the art of living well. Consequently, the festival moves away from industrial bulk-trading and focuses intently on single-origin terroirs, rare organic micro-lots, and poetic flavour blending. Visitors explore the distinct philosophies of storied French institutions like Mariage Frères, Palais des Thés, and Dammann Frères alongside contemporary avant-garde blenders.

A hallmark of the festival is its structured educational programme. Attendees can book masterclasses on olfactory profiling, the water chemistry of infusion, and gourmet tea-and-cheese or tea-and-chocolate pairings led by Michelin-starred pastry chefs and certified tea sommeliers. Furthermore, the festival revives the historic European tradition of the literary



Paris Tea Festival, Paris, France

tea salon, hosting panel discussions on tea history, travel literature, and philosophical aesthetics. For the global trade, Paris offers a vital window into the high-value luxury retail sector, where storytelling, aesthetic packaging, and sensory elegance command the top tier of the market.

World Tea Expo, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA



World Tea Expo, Nevada, USA

Year of inception: 2003,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually in late March (a three-day convention from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Las Vegas Convention Centre),

Speciality: North American market expansion, beverage innovation, functional wellness blends, hospitality integration, and professional industry certification.

If Hong Kong represents the established trading powerhouse of the East, the World Tea Expo in Las Vegas is the energetic, aggressive frontier of Western commercial expansion. Founded in 2003, the World Tea Expo has spent over two decades cementing its position as the most vital B2B trade event for the North American tea industry. Held annually in late March within the expansive halls of the Las Vegas Convention Centre, the Expo perfectly mirrors the dynamism and commercial pragmatism of the American marketplace. Organised by Questex—a powerhouse in hospitality and healthcare publishing—the Expo is strategically designed to intersect with the broader foodservice sector, routinely running concurrently with the Bar & Restaurant Expo.

The World Tea Expo's core speciality is its focus on the future of beverage consumption. The North American market is highly agile, often eschewing traditional pot-brewing in favor of ready-to-drink (RTD) formulations, nitrogen-infused cold brews, functional botanical adaptogens, and sophisticated tea-based mixology. The Expo caters to this by featuring dynamic "Tea & Coffee Experience" zones and live innovation labs where flavour chemists and brand founders showcase emerging product formats.

Furthermore, the Expo is celebrated for its robust professional education track. It offers unmatched seminars and certification courses that cover the practicalities of modern commerce—from navigating shifting import regulations and ethical Fairtrade certification to leveraging artificial intelligence in supply chain forecasting and e-commerce marketing. It is a gathering place for a new generation of tea entrepreneurs who are focused on building scalable, sustainable, and highly profitable brands. Las Vegas, with its unapologetic focus on hospitality and entertainment, provides the ideal high-energy backdrop for an industry actively reinventing its public face.

Toronto Tea Festival, Toronto, Canada

Year of inception: 2013,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually during late January to early February (a two-day weekend event from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM)

Speciality: Grassroots consumer democratisation, speciality loose-leaf education, direct-to-consumer tasting cups, and multicultural tea appreciation.

To balance the high-stakes B2B arenas of Las Vegas and Hong Kong, let's turn to a festival that beautifully bridges the gap between trade professionals and the passionate enthusiasm of the everyday tea lover. The Toronto Tea Festival, founded by a collective of Canadian tea sommeliers and cultural advocates, has grown into Canada's premier consumer-facing tea celebration. Held annually during the depths of winter—when the freezing Canadian climate makes the prospect of a warm, aromatic cup irresistibly appealing—the festival takes over the elegant spaces of the Toronto Reference Library. Unlike trade-only conventions, Toronto was explicitly created to connect end-consumers directly with the farmers, importers, and blenders behind their favourite cups.



Toronto Tea Festival, Toronto, Canada

The speciality of the Toronto Tea Festival is democratisation and accessibility. It strips away the intimidating veneer of connoisseurship and replaces it with a welcoming, highly educational environment. Upon entry, every attendee is handed a ceramic tasting cup, empowering them to sample hundreds of speciality teas directly from dozens of independent vendors representing origins from Taiwan and Nepal to Kenya and Colombia.

For the trade professional, observing a consumer-focused festival like Toronto is an invaluable exercise in real-time market research. It provides unfiltered insights into shifting consumer palates, sustainability demands, and purchasing behaviour. The festival's lecture stages host world-renowned authors and tea masters who demystify complex subjects such as pu-erh fermentation, clay teacup acoustics, and ethical smallholder sourcing. The Toronto Tea Festival proves that an educated, engaged consumer is the tea industry's most valuable asset—an engine of grassroots demand that echoes all the way back to the auction rooms of Kolkata and Colombo.

Melbourne Tea Festival, Melbourne, Australia

Year of inception: 2015,

Date and time of occurrence: Annually in May / mid-year (typically a single-day Sunday festival from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM during Australian autumn),

Speciality: Urban speciality cafe culture integration, artisanal small-batch blending, ethical sustainability, and interactive tea-market tasting experiences.

Australia possesses one of the world's most vibrant, discerning coffee and cafe cultures, and over the past decade, that same uncompromising culinary obsession has transformed its relationship with tea. Founded by speciality tea advocates Sarah de Witt and Blake Nielsen, the Melbourne Tea Festival was established to elevate speciality loose-leaf tea to the same cultural heights as third-wave coffee and boutique wine. Timed during the cool Australian autumn in May, the festival has been hosted at iconic urban venues such as the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre or historical industrial sheds. The event captures the quintessential Melbourne aesthetic: effortlessly stylish, community-focused, and deeply committed to culinary excellence.

The core speciality of the Melbourne Tea Festival is artisanal blending and the integration of tea into modern urban gastronomy. Australia is home to a thriving ecosystem of independent boutique blenders who utilise native Australian botanicals (such as lemon myrtle and strawberry gum) alongside premium single-origin leaves imported directly from gardens in Assam, Sri Lanka, and China.

The festival features a vibrant "Tea Market" where thousands of attendees use custom tasting cups to explore small-batch infusions. Additionally, the "Tea School" hosts intensive, immersive workshops on Gongfu tea brewing, matcha whisking, and sensory evaluation. What truly sets Melbourne apart is its rigorous focus on sustainability and ethical transparency; Australian consumers demand clear provenance, biodegradable packaging, and direct-trade fairness. For the international producer, Melbourne represents a sophisticated, high-margin market where quality, storytelling, and environmental stewardship are rewarded above all else.



Melbourne Tea Festival, Melbourne, Australia

As we trace this extraordinary circuit across continents - from the sacred, mist-veiled temples of Uji and the rolling green terraces of Boseong to the high-stakes trade pavilions of Hong Kong, Taipei, and Las Vegas, and finally to the warm, community-driven halls of Toronto and Melbourne—a profound truth emerges. The international tea trade is not a sterile mechanism for moving bulk agricultural weight across borders. It is a vibrant, ongoing civilisational dialogue. These eleven festivals demonstrate the unifying philosophy of the leaf that the global tea industry is simultaneously protective of its ancient heritage and courageously forward-looking. They underscore the delicate equilibrium required to honour the epistemological traditions and regional terroirs of the leaf while adapting to the ruthless logistical demands, climate realities, and shifting consumer aesthetics of the twenty-first century.

For those of us who have dedicated our lives to navigating, documenting, and shaping this trade, these seasonal gatherings serve as a renewing source of inspiration. They remind us that whether evaluated in a colonial planter's bungalow in Assam, auctioned in a high-rise office in Hong Kong, or shared among friends in a Parisian salon, every cup of tea is the culmination of a vast, interconnected human endeavor. The world is truly in the cup—waiting to be explored, celebrated, and savoured, one steep at a time

Post-Conclusion: While the eleven festivals detailed above represent major structural pillars of the global trade and cultural calendar, the universal passion for tea ensures that exceptional gatherings occur year-round. For industry insiders and dedicated travellers looking to expand their itineraries, several other significant events command attention:

India International Tea Convention (IITC): Moving periodically between major Indian tea hubs (such as Kolkata, Kochi, and Ooty), this is the premier summit for grappling with the industrial scale of Indian tea, addressing plantation labour reforms, climate adaptation, and global export policies.

Global Dubai Tea Forum (Dubai, UAE): Organised by the Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC), this biennial gathering is a critical junction for global trade executives, focusing on Middle Eastern, African, and South Asian re-export logistics, blending facilities, and market finance.

Northwest Tea Festival (Seattle, USA): Founded in 2008 and held annually in autumn, this beloved American festival is a cornerstone for the Pacific Northwest's speciality community, emphasising artisan pu-erh appreciation, teaware craftsmanship, and consumer workshops.

National Tea Day & The London Tea Festival (London, UK): Celebrated annually around April 21, these modern British gatherings reinterpret Britain's historic afternoon tea legacy for a contemporary audience, showcasing independent blenders, ethical sourcing, and modern tea mixology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Lorna Ables Reeves (ed.), Teatime Parties Around the World: Globally Inspired Teatime Celebrations (TeaTime magazine, 2018) - offers table settings, menus, and tea pairings inspired by tea traditions across countries with strong tea heritage, including China, Japan, India, Russia, Kenya, and Morocco. (Goodreads) The editor herself speaks regularly at tea festivals across the US and Canada, (Amazon) so it's written with real festival-circuit knowledge.

Denyse Waissbluth, Teatime Around the World (Greystone Books)

Angel Adoree, The Vintage Tea Party Book





Abhishek Ganguli
Corporate & Institutional Filmmaker

Flavour from far

BREWING NEW HORIZONS
How Indian tea exporters can win the US speciality and wellness market

The $3.5 billion U.S. tea market is undergoing a massive shift. As cheap commodity tea bags flatline, health-conscious American consumers are demanding premium single-origin orthodox leaves, wellness botanicals, and artisanal cold brews.

For Indian producers, the days of relying on low-margin bulk trade are over. This feature maps the essential blueprint for Indian estates to leverage their historic terroirs, conquer strict regulatory hurdles, and capture America's lucrative premium beverage boom.

And the message on the wall is bold and clear - evolve or get left behind.

For decades, the story of Indian tea in international trade has been defined by bulk volume. As the world's second-largest producer, India has historically fed the global appetite for Crush, Tear, Curl (CTC) black tea, serving as the backbone for conventional blended tea bags and export commodity markets.

However, in the lucrative and rapidly evolving United States beverage market, a tectonic shift is underway. American consumers are actively trading down from generic commodity blends and moving upward into premium speciality orthodox teas, wellness-centric botanicals, and high-convenience ready-to-drink (RTD) cold brews.

For Indian tea producers, blenders, and exporters, this change represents a historic opportunity to move up the value chain. Transitioning from low-margin bulk trade to high-margin, brand-led speciality exports requires understanding consumer shifts, leveraging regional terroirs, modernising supply chains, and adopting consumer-centric storytelling.

The US market landscape: Premiumisation and functional wellness

The US tea market is experiencing structural growth, expanding past $3.5 billion in annual revenue with long-term forecasts pushing toward multi-billion-dollar gains driven by premiumisation. While volume consumption of standard legacy tea bags has remained flat, value growth is accelerating in two distinct categories: Speciality Loose-Leaf/Orthodox and RTD Functional Teas.

The driving force behind this change is a young demographic of American consumers aged 18 to 44 who view tea not merely as a morning caffeine fix, but as an affordable daily luxury and functional wellness beverage.

The wellness premium: US consumers prioritise clean labels, zero sugar, high antioxidant levels, and gut-health benefits.

Third-wave beverage culture: Mirroring the craft coffee revolution, consumers want to understand harvest flushes, cultivar varieties, and extraction methods.



Unlocking India's terroir: Beyond commodity black tea

To succeed in the speciality segment, Indian exporters must showcase the unique geographical and flavour profiles of their distinct growing regions.

Region	Flavour Profile & Elevation	US Market Fit
Darjeeling	Floral, muscatel, delicate; high elevation (Himalayas)	Premium loose-leaf; & tasting sets seasonal flushes; luxury gifting & tasting sets
Assam (Orthodox)	Malty, robust, brisk, rich; low elevation (Brahmaputra)	Cold brews, kombucha bases, artisan breakfast blends
Nilgiri	Fragrant, fruity, bright; high elevation (Blue Mtns)	Clear iced teas, single-estate functional, blends; RTD extraction
Kangra & Sikkim	Subtle sweetness, green/white artisanal variations	Ultra-speciality organic, loose-leaf; clean-label wellness niches

Darjeeling: The single-origin champion

Often called the 'Champagne of Teas,' Darjeeling's protected Geographical Indication (GI) status positions it naturally as a high-end luxury item. In the U.S., first- and second-flush Darjeelings command significant price premiums in direct-to-consumer (D2C) channels and speciality tea rooms.

Assam orthodox: Redefining strength for craft brewing

While Assam CTC remains the bedrock of chai, Assam Orthodox whole-leaf teas have seen rising demand. Its rich, malty character and natural sweetness provide a clear, non-clouding foundation for cold extractions and ready-to-drink formulations.

Nilgiri: The undervalued gem for iced innovations

Because Nilgiri teas grow at high elevations throughout the year, they do not cloud when iced and carry bright, fragrant top notes. With roughly 75–80% of all tea in America consumed iced, Nilgiri is an ideal fit for the country's craft iced-tea and cold-brew boom.

Capturing the cold brew and RTD revolution

Ready-to-Drink formulations account for nearly half of total U.S. tea category revenues. The typical American tea drinker often engages with tea through a refrigerated grab-and-go bottle or can rather than a teapot.

Unsweetened Cold-Extract RTDs: American shoppers are increasingly avoiding high-fructose corn syrup and artificial flavourings. Exporters that partner with U.S. co-packers to bottle pure, cold-brewed orthodox teas offer a clean-label alternative.

Ayurvedic and Functional Botanicals: India possesses a natural advantage by marrying green and orthodox teas with native herbs such as tulsi (holy basil), turmeric, and ashwagandha to serve the functional beverage market.

Kombucha and Fermented Bases: American kombucha manufacturers require high-nitrogen, pesticide-free black and green tea bases with consistent quality to sustain fermentation cultures.

Brand equity, traceability, and digital direct channels

Historically, the traditional export model added multiple layers of intermediaries between Indian estates and overseas consumers. As a result, primary producers received limited margins while the originating gardens lost their connection to the end product. Modern digital infrastructure and cold-chain logistics have enabled single-estate and digitally native tea companies to disrupt this paradigm. To spearhead the mission, essential marketing strategies have to focus on:

Radical transparency: Use packaging with estate names, harvest dates, elevation markers, and QR codes that link directly to farm profiles.

Origin storytelling: U.S. consumers respond strongly to agricultural narratives that celebrate estate workers, biodynamic farming practices, and family heritage.

Sustainable packaging: Shift away from petroleum-based packaging toward compostable plant-based tea bags, recyclable canisters, and nitrogen-sealed pouches that preserve delicate aromatics during transit.

Overcoming supply chain and market entry challenges

While the upside is considerable, Indian exporters must navigate clear operational and regulatory *requirements to scale sustainably in the U.S.*

Challenge	Strategic Response
Regulatory Compliance	Adhere strictly to U.S. FDA Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), FSMA rules, and obtain USDA Organic / Fair Trade certifications.
Global Competition	Differentiate on single-estate identity, complex terroir, and ethical sourcing rather than competing purely on price.
Logistics & Shelf Life	Use vacuum-sealed, nitrogen-flushed barrier packaging to prevent humidity and flavour degradation over long sea legs.

Strategic roadmap for exporters

Shift Focus from CTC to Speciality Lines:

Rebalance factory production toward high-grade whole-leaf orthodox, green, and white teas tailored to Western tastes.

Build Direct Commercial Alliances:

Partner directly with U.S. speciality retailers, artisan distributors, and ready-to-drink brands instead of relying entirely on standard auction systems.

Promote the Indian Tea Identity:

Take advantage of export promotion schemes through the Tea Board of India to participate in global food shows, run trade education campaigns, and champion geographical indications.

To conclude, the American tea market is no longer satisfied with standard, untraceable tea bags. Today's consumers are seeking authenticity, exceptional flavour profiles, and wellness benefits.

India is uniquely positioned to meet this demand. By pairing centuries of tea-making heritage with modern quality controls, sustainable packaging, and targeted branding, Indian producers can reshape their international presence - moving from a legacy volume supplier to a recognised leader in the global speciality tea movement.

Source:

Tea Association of the U.S.A.
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Cincinnati, USA

SMALL SIPS, BIG VALUE
Inside the US tea industry's 2025 premiumisation wave

Mr Sachen Verma's expert eye brings this column into focus: America isn't drinking more tea - it's drinking smarter. As volumes plateau, value is surging on the back of premium sachets, functional wellness, and sustainable sourcing - proof that the modern tea drinker is buying an experience, not just a beverage. For an industry watching every emerging market, the US offers a preview of where global tea is headed: less about quantity, more about intention.

The US loose-leaf and teabag market in 2025 is mature but far from static. Premiumisation, wellness, sustainability, and shifting consumption habits are reshaping the category - even as overall volume growth stays modest, value keeps climbing on the back of price hikes, premium formats, and functional innovation.

For the 52 weeks ending in 2025, combined loose-leaf and bagged tea sales hit roughly USD 1.7 billion, up 1.5–3.6% year-on-year depending on channel. Premium sachets, organic blends, functional teas, and D2C channels are driving the gains. The US imported an estimated 110,000 metric tons of black tea and 20,000 metric tons of green tea in 2025, sourced primarily from Argentina, India, China, Japan, and Sri Lanka.

Performance overview

Premiumisation leads the story: consumers are trading up to pyramid sachets and whole-leaf teas for better flavour extraction and a more elevated experience. Bagged and loose tea (up ~3.6%) is outpacing single-cup formats, which declined alongside instant tea mixes. RTD and refrigerated teas, meanwhile, are thriving. But the headline



growth masks a simpler truth: dollar sales are climbing mostly on price, while Americans drink somewhat less tea overall.

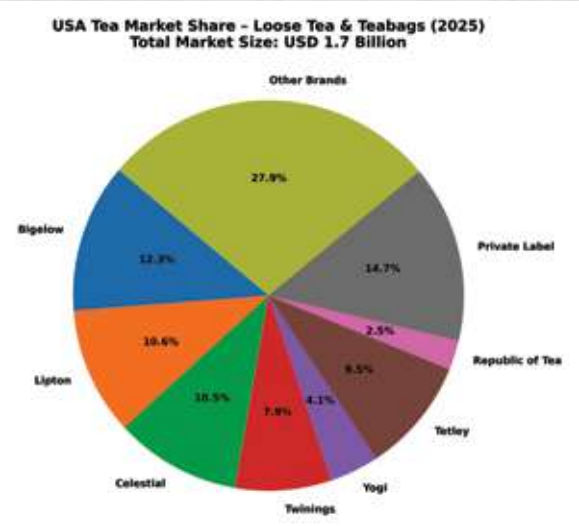
Category dynamics

Black tea still rules US imports at ~86% share - though nearly 85% of its revenue now comes from RTD and refrigerated formats rather than the kettle. Herbal teas dominate the bag segment, riding demand for caffeine-free wellness options, while functional blends targeting sleep, digestion, immunity, and energy account for almost 38% of new launches. Green tea, matcha, rooibos, yerba mate, and speciality botanicals are gaining ground across every format, with kombucha and yerba mate riding the digestive-health and natural-energy wave.

Private label on the rise

Private label is a growing engine of category growth fuelled by supermarket, e-retail, and convenience expansion. Organic, Non-GMO, and unsweetened claims are pushing unit and dollar sales higher. Key players include Harris Tea Company, Custom Co-Pak, Special Tea Company, Davidson's Organics, Global Tea Solutions, and Caraway Tea Company — with Walmart, Kroger, Trader Joe's, Costco, Whole Foods, Aldi, and Target all expanding private-label lines.

Competitive landscape



Flavour and innovation

Flavour remains a core growth lever, especially among 18–35-year-olds, 40–50% of whom favour flavoured or herbal variants. Citrus, berry, chai, and cinnamon lead fruit and spice trends, while turmeric, ginger, lemon, hibiscus, adaptogens, and probiotics push tea further into functional wellness territory.

Distribution

The US tea trade spans over 125,000 retail outlets, including 35,000 speciality stores. Grocery and mass retail still dominate, but online and D2C - powered by subscriptions, curation, and personalised wellness positioning - are growing fastest.

Sustainability and regulation

Sustainability is now a genuine differentiator; roughly 72% of tea sachets use biodegradable or compostable materials. Brands continue investing in sustainable packaging, traceable sourcing, and organic/non-GMO certification, even as evolving FDA rules on food-contact materials and labelling add compliance pressure.

Bigelow, Lipton, Celestial Seasonings, Twinings, and private labels anchor the mainstream market, while The Republic of Tea, Yogi Tea, Harney & Sons, Teavana, and Tazo differentiate on organic credentials, functional positioning, and premium sachet innovation.

Outlook

Inflation and flat volumes aside, US tea remains resilient. Flavour innovation, functional wellness, sustainable packaging, and D2C growth will keep driving value — though skilled labour gaps in quality control and blending (despite 88% operational capacity) and tightening FDA compliance requirements remain watchpoints. The category's future: premium, wellness-led, sustainable, and increasingly omnichannel.



Sachen Verma

Chief Business Strategy Advisor

Indoviking Beverages Worldwide & on Board of Directors of several overseas Tea companies

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Executive Summary: 2-Year (2023-2024) field study in Assam and West Bengal by TRA Tocklai

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- BIOKAD application significantly enhanced chlorophyll content in tea leaves.
- Tea made from treated bushes showed improved biochemical quality, indicating better liquor characteristics.
- Recommendation: Apply BIOKAD at 300–350 ml/ha for enhanced tea yield, quality, and chemical residue reduction in NE Indian tea estates.

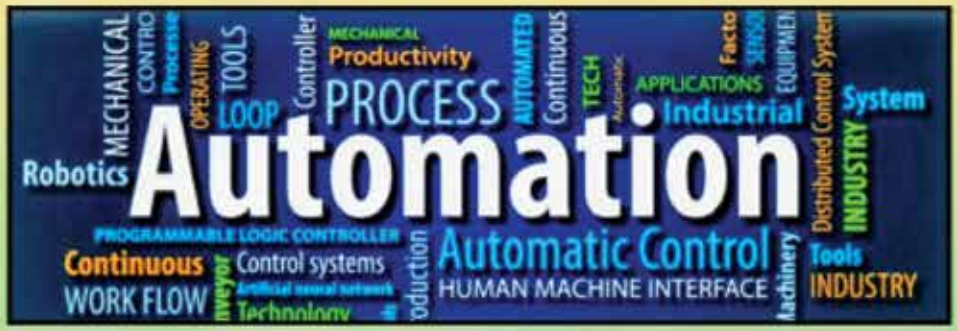


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WOMEN IN THE TEA GARDENS
The backbone of India's tea industry

India's tea industry is one of the country's oldest and most significant sectors, with iconic varieties like Assam, Darjeeling, and Nilgiri shaping its global reputation. For millions, a day begins and ends with a cup of tea. Yet behind this everyday ritual lies the tireless labour of women, who have long been the backbone of tea plantations.

From Assam to West Bengal, Tamil Nadu to Kerala, women have historically formed the majority of the workforce in tea gardens. Their role begins at the very first stage of tea-making - plucking tender leaves and buds. This delicate task directly determines the flavour, quality, and market value of tea. Generations of women have honed the skill of selecting the finest leaves without harming the plants, ensuring that Indian tea maintains its high standards.

Beyond plucking, women shoulder responsibilities like weeding, pruning, fertilising, watering seedlings, planting new bushes, and carrying heavy baskets during harvest. Their labour sustains not only the plantations but also their families, often making them the primary breadwinners in rural communities.

While plantation work reflects a long-standing tradition, women in India are increasingly stepping into entrepreneurship. From running small businesses to leading start-ups, they are reshaping economic landscapes. Though the larger share of Indian tea plantations is still owned and run by men, new-generation women heirs are now seen taking charge, bringing fresh vision and leadership to the sector. In the tea economy, this spirit of enterprise is equally visible in women who establish their own stalls, blending resilience with independence.

At the other end of the spectrum are women like Sunita Devi, who run makeshift tea stalls on city pavements or roadside corners. Their stories reflect both struggle and empowerment. Rising costs of essentials and unpredictable weather challenge their livelihoods, yet their stalls remain spaces of warmth and community. For Sunita, her tea stall has meant financial independence, the ability to educate her children, and the confidence to stand tall in society.

I spoke to her on a rain-drenched Kolkata afternoon while taking small sips from the bhar I bought from her:

What inspired you to start this tea shop?

Sunita Devi: My family needed a steady source of income. My husband had irregular work, so I decided to start a small tea stall. At first, I was nervous, but my customers encouraged me, and the business slowly grew.



25th birthday celebration of Dolly's - The Tea Shop, at Dakshinapan Shopping Complex



Snigdha Manchanda, founder of Tea Trunk

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What does a typical day look like for you?

Sunita Devi: I wake up at around 4:30 a.m. to prepare fresh tea, snacks, and ingredients. I open my stall by 6:00 a.m. and serve customers throughout the day until the evening.

Who are your regular customers?

Sunita Devi: Most of my customers are office workers, auto drivers, delivery workers, college students, and people passing by. Many have been coming here for years.

What are the biggest challenges you face?

Sunita Devi: Rising prices of milk, tea leaves, sugar, and gas make it difficult to earn a good profit. Weather is another challenge because heavy rain or extreme heat reduces the number of customers.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Sunita Devi: I enjoy meeting different people every day. Many customers have become friends. Their appreciation for my tea motivates me to keep working hard.

How has this business changed your life?

Sunita Devi: It has made me financially independent. I can contribute to my family's expenses and support my children's education. It has also increased my confidence.

What advice would you give to women who want to start a small business?

Sunita Devi: Believe in yourself and don't be afraid to start small. Hard work, honesty, and good service help build trust with customers. Success comes gradually.



To sum up, spanning the vast tea gardens to the bustling roadside stalls, women remain the invisible yet indispensable force behind India's tea culture. Their labour, knowledge, and entrepreneurial courage sustain every step of the journey - from leaf to cup. As India advances, it becomes essential to acknowledge their contributions, ensure fair wages, improve facilities, and create stronger opportunities. Only then will the backbone of the tea industry be truly supported, respected, and celebrated for generations to come.



Swarupa Das
Contemporary Brokers
Kolkata



BEYOND THE CUP
An aroma that lingers at Chaichun's Tea Experience Room

For Ms Ena Bandyopadhyay, tea has never been just a beverage; it is a world shaped by gardens, seasons, craftsmanship and stories. Her visit to Chaichun's Tea Experience Room in Siliguri became a sensory and emotional rediscovery of that world - one that lingered far beyond the cup.

As someone who has spent a considerable part of professional life around tea, I have always felt that there is so much more to it than what finally reaches our cup. Behind every tea lies an origin, a garden, a season, a method of manufacture and, of course, a story.

That belief sprang to life when I visited Chaichun's Tea Experience Room in Siliguri. I went as a tea enthusiast and someone familiar with the industry, but what I experienced there made me look at the familiar world of tea from a slightly different perspective.

The first thing I noticed was that this was not designed like a conventional tea store. It was created to make you experience tea through your senses.

We could see the teas, explore them and, most importantly, smell them. For a tea lover, aroma is an experience in itself - the fragrance of a dry leaf tells you so much before you even taste it. Being able to pause, take in those aromas and explore the differences between teas made the visit feel deeply personal.

The Chaichun Tea Wall is particularly fascinating. With teas sourced from 82 Darjeeling gardens, alongside selections from other Indian tea-growing regions, it brings together an incredible range of origins in one place. As someone from the industry, I found myself naturally drawn to this garden-level approach. We often speak of Darjeeling or Assam as regions, but every garden has its own identity and character. Seeing that diversity laid out for the consumer makes the idea of origin and traceability feel far more tangible.

There is also a dedicated Organic Tea Wall featuring authentic organic Darjeeling teas, including single-estate selections. I appreciated that the emphasis wasn't simply on the word "organic," but on authenticity and provenance.

Then there is the World Tea Wall, which opens up an entirely different side of tea - from Japanese Sencha and Matcha to Blooming Tea and speciality teas from around the globe. It gives you the chance to step outside the Indian tea landscape and appreciate how differently tea is grown, processed and enjoyed across cultures.



One of the experiences I enjoyed most was creating my own blend. There was something deeply satisfying about choosing ingredients and flavours to build a tea around my own preferences. It makes you pause and consider what you actually enjoy: floral, fruity, spicy, refreshing, or simply comforting. For me, this was one of the most interesting parts of the visit, because it turned tea from something we purchase into something we participate in.

The little details around the room only deepened that feeling. I particularly loved the tea music box, such a charming touch, carrying a sense of nostalgia, and warmth. It reminded me that tea isn't only about taste; it's about atmosphere, ritual, and the small moments woven around it.

The teaware caught my attention too. As tea enthusiasts, we often become as fascinated by the ritual of brewing and serving as by the tea itself. The collection of teapots, cups and accessories added another layer to the experience, showing how the right teaware can turn a simple cup into something intentional and special.

I also enjoyed exploring the Signature Blends collection - Green, Herbal, Classic, Masala, Floral and Fruit. There was real pleasure in moving between such different flavour profiles and realising just how broad the world of tea can be.

The Celebration Gift Room was another thoughtful touch. Tea is deeply tied to hospitality and gifting in India, but a premium tea gift becomes far more meaningful when the recipient, the tea and the presentation are all chosen with care. The Make Your Own Gift experience lets visitors select their own teas, accessories and presentation - creating something personal rather than off-the-shelf.

What stayed with me most was how Chaichun brings the consumer closer to the tea itself. Within the industry, we naturally think in terms of gardens, grades, manufacture, seasons, auctions and markets. But consumers often see only a packet on a shelf. There's a whole world in between that usually stays unexplored - and the Tea Experience Room makes that invisible world a little more visible.

You can smell the tea. Explore its origin. Compare styles. Discover teas from across the globe. Create your own blend. Admire beautiful teaware. Put together a gift that feels entirely your own. And through all of it, you begin to realise that tea doesn't have to be experienced only through the cup.

For Siliguri, the concept feels especially fitting. We sit surrounded by some of the world's most celebrated tea-growing regions - Darjeeling, Dooars, Assam and Sikkim, with Nepal and Bhutan within our larger geographical landscape. To have a space here that brings together such a wide world of tea feels both timely and deeply relevant.

It is truly refreshing to see Rajeev Baid Sir, whose vision, ideas and spirit of innovation continue to shape this space and bring a distinctive perspective to the world of tea.

To Roshan Petrie Sir, thank you for thoughtfully walking us through this experience and making it so engaging and enriching.

I went to Chaichun expecting to explore tea. Instead, I found myself experiencing it - through aroma, taste, sight, craftsmanship, creativity, and even a little nostalgia. Perhaps that's what makes the concept special. It reminds us that tea is not merely something we drink. It is something we can discover, understand, create, collect, share and experience.

From tea to experience. From product to discovery. From a cup of tea to a world waiting to be explored.







Ena Bandyopadhyay
Contemporary Brokers, Siliguri

WHEN THE SOIL STOPS BREATHING

Why tackling soil compaction could be the key to healthier, more resilient tea plantations!

What if one of the biggest threats to the future of tea is hiding beneath our feet? Soil compaction rarely makes the headlines, yet it quietly suffocates roots, impedes water, accelerates erosion and weakens the very foundation on which a tea plantation depends. In this thought-provoking piece, Mr. Harkirat Sidhu asks planters to look beyond conventional remedies and rediscover the soil as a living ecosystem - where weeds, earthworms, organic matter and plantation waste could become allies in rebuilding healthier, more resilient tea gardens.

A few weeks ago, I was in discussion with a tea company about several issues confronting its estates. Two stood out: soil compaction and a noxious weed that was proving difficult to control with permissible herbicides.

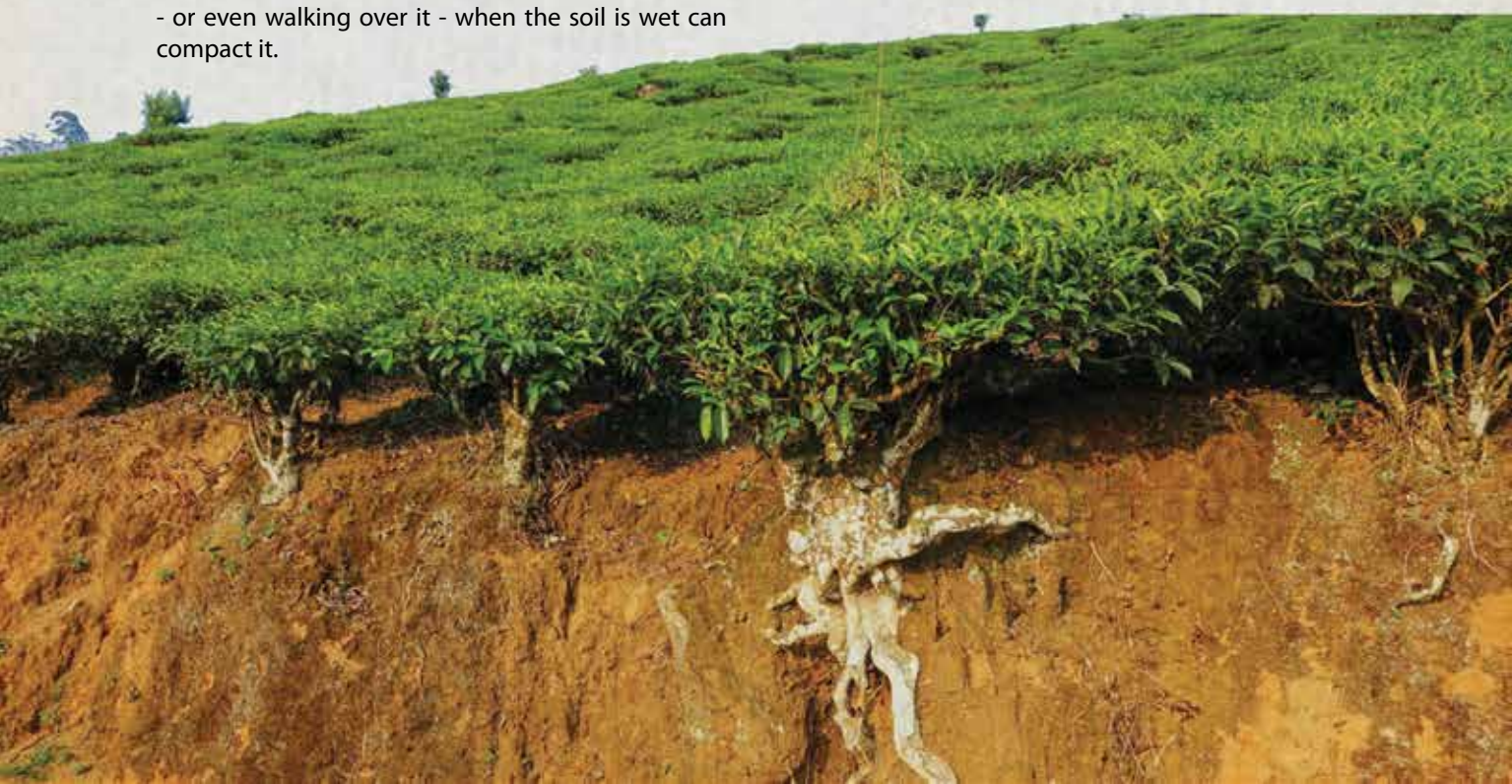
I have written and spoken extensively about Integrated Weed Management, so I shall leave that subject aside for now and focus on soil compaction - a massive and often overlooked problem across tea-growing regions. The problem is also widespread in other plantation crops such as coffee and cocoa, though its impact can be particularly acute in tea.

What causes soil compaction?

The most fundamental rule is simple: do not apply pressure to wet or moist soil. Tilling, digging, hoeing - or even walking over it - when the soil is wet can compact it.

I learnt this lesson as a schoolboy. Around 1965, while visiting my grandfather in Amritsar, he stopped me from walking across a moist field. A professor at the university, he explained that pressure squeezes soil particles together, reducing the pore spaces that hold air and water. I was in Class VIII, but I have remembered that lesson ever since.

Heavy rainfall, flooding, silting and overhead sprinkler irrigation can further aggravate the problem. Low organic matter reduces the soil's structural stability, while fine-textured, clay-heavy soils compact more readily than coarse, sandy soils. Once heavily compacted, such soils require considerable time, labour and money to restore their tilth.



Why is tea particularly vulnerable?

Tea plantations present a peculiar combination of conditions that progressively encourage compaction.

When I joined the plantations, an incident with my manager taught me another lesson. Following spring showers, I was broadcasting fertiliser while the soil was moist. He stopped me because there were a few weeds in the field. His argument was that the fertiliser would feed the weeds rather than the tea.

The accepted principle at the time was simple: there should be no weeds when fertiliser is broadcast. Consequently, even a small amount of weed cover was treated with herbicide, much of it inevitably falling on otherwise bare soil. That was in 1975.

We have carried this mindset forward. Tea fields are often kept virtually bare through repeated herbicide applications. Yet during the rainy season, the soil remains wet for long periods. Pluckers walk through the planted area repeatedly on the seven-day plucking cycle, while spraying teams move through the fields to control weeds, pests and diseases. All this traffic, particularly on wet soil, progressively increases compaction.

Bare soil comes at a cost

Most plantations today are deficient in soil organic carbon (SOC), partly because organic-matter inputs can be expensive. At the same time, weeds - which can contribute organic matter and whose roots can help loosen compacted soil - are routinely eliminated.

The consequences go beyond compaction. Where natural drainage outlets have become choked by silting, paddy cultivation or construction, subsoil water remains high for longer during the rainy season. This further prolongs soil wetness and aggravates compaction.

Compacted soil reduces percolation, increasing runoff and soil erosion. Persistently high subsoil water can also cause tea roots to rot below the waterlogged layer. New roots then hesitate to penetrate deeper. The resulting shallow root system leaves tea bushes particularly vulnerable during dry spells, when they are unable to access moisture deeper in the soil.

Labour shortages make matters worse. Operations such as forking and subsoiling are increasingly difficult to undertake - and expensive even when labour is available.

Beyond conventional remedies

The standard recommendations for correcting compaction are well known. But given the industry's growing cost pressures, we need to look beyond labour-intensive and expensive solutions towards methods that are simpler, more sustainable and cost-effective.

1. Uncut grass/ weeds keeps the ground temperature at 19.5° C

2. Grass/weeds cut 10 cms maintains temp at 24.5° C.

3. Bare ground in the middle of summer rises to more than 40° C



One promising approach is Integrated Weed Management (IWM). Instead of attempting to eliminate every plant from the field, noxious weeds can gradually be replaced by softer, innocuous vegetation. These can then be managed with brush cutters at appropriate heights.

The benefits are considerable: greater organic-matter addition, improved percolation, reduced soil wash, higher SOC, increased biodiversity and better habitat for natural enemies. There may be additional labour requirements initially, but once the weed flora changes, brush cutting can reduce labour and provide valuable mulch. Properly implemented, this can become an important step towards regenerative agriculture.

Let the earthworms do the work

Earthworms may be among the most underestimated allies in restoring plantation soils.

Charles Darwin observed their extraordinary role in moving and transforming soil. Their movement aerates the soil, while their feeding and casting processes help alter its structure.

For tackling compaction, Endogeic earthworms are particularly relevant. They inhabit the mineral soil horizon, feed largely on soil rather than organic matter, and move horizontally through it, helping to break up compacted layers.

Earthworm casts, along with their cocoons, can be collected from open areas of plantations. In vacant patches, mulch can be laid down, followed by semi-decomposed cow dung and earthworm-rich casts. A further layer of green mulch can be added, and the area kept moist. Within several weeks, the worms can establish themselves and begin working through the mineral soil.

Turning plantation waste into biochar

Biochar offers another opportunity. A porous, charcoal-like material produced by heating organic biomass under low-oxygen conditions, it can help improve soil health and water retention while providing a productive use for agricultural waste.

Tea plantations generate substantial quantities of pruning material that can serve as feedstock. Shade-tree loppings, undergrowth and other agricultural residues - including coconut and areca-nut shells - can also be utilised.

Simple, low-cost methods of biochar production are already possible at farm level, while the Tea Research Association has developed equipment for larger-scale preparation.

Regeneration, not merely correction

Ultimately, soil compaction should not be treated as an isolated problem. It is part of a larger question of soil health.

This is where regenerative agriculture becomes relevant. It seeks to rehabilitate and enhance the entire farm ecosystem, placing soil health at the centre while integrating water management, nutrition, pest and disease management, soil biology and biodiversity.

The objective is not simply to correct damaged soil but to create a system in which the soil continuously regenerates its own health and productivity.

Among the practical measures are increasing organic matter through groundcover, mulch and compost; encouraging above- and below-ground biodiversity; protecting microbial life; using biological fertilisers; maintaining vegetation intelligently; minimising soil disturbance; and retaining crop residues.

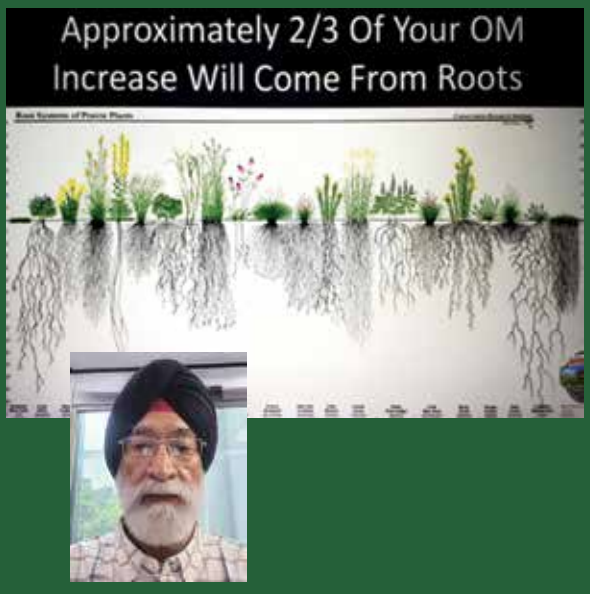
Most importantly, we should aim for continuous groundcover rather than bare soil.

And we should not forget the basics: soil fertility and pH need to be tested periodically - ideally every three or four years - to ensure that corrective measures are based on actual soil conditions.

Healthy tea begins beneath the bush. If we want resilient plantations, perhaps it is time to stop viewing the soil merely as a medium in which tea grows - and start treating it as a living system that must itself be nurtured.







Harkirat Sidhu
Sr. Consulting Program Coordinator
Rainforest Alliance, India

RAINWATER, PADDY FIELDS, AND THE TEA PLANT
What the science actually says

A myth about rain and rice fields has shaped how the tea world talks about residues for years. Mr Sujoy Mukherjee went past the folklore to the actual biochemistry - and found a story more useful than the one everyone's been telling. If you grow, buy, or simply drink tea, this changes what you should actually be watching for.

Read on, in Contemporary Tea Time.

A persistent claim circulates among growers and tea drinkers alike: that rainwater running off nearby paddy fields somehow triggers tea plants to manufacture new chemical compounds of their own. It is an appealing story - water carries something from one field to another, and the tea bush responds by synthesising something new. But it does not hold up against what plant biochemistry and residue science actually show. Rainwater and paddy fields can shape the environment a tea bush grows in, sometimes substantially, but neither one reaches into the plant's metabolism and switches on new biochemical pathways. The real story is more interesting, and considerably more consequential for growers and consumers: it lies not in mythical new syntheses but in the well-documented persistence, movement, and occasional interaction of chemical residues within the tea plant itself.

Rainwater and soil dynamics

Rainwater's role in a tea garden is primarily physical and nutritive rather than biochemical. It moves nutrients through the soil profile, sustains the moisture regime that root systems depend on, and can carry trace elements or dissolved substances picked up from the surrounding landscape, including adjoining paddy fields. What rainwater does not do is instruct a tea plant's cells to begin producing compounds outside its normal metabolic repertoire. Nothing in the current literature on tea physiology supports water itself acting as a biochemical trigger of novel synthesis; its influence is indirect, working through soil chemistry, nutrient availability, and moisture stress rather than through any direct signal to the plant's biosynthetic machinery.

What rainwater can do, and what deserves far more attention from growers, is act as a transport medium for existing pesticide residues. Research on pesticide



runoff around paddy fields has repeatedly shown that agrochemicals move off-site during rainfall and irrigation events. Studies of streams adjacent to paddy fields have found dozens of pesticides in surface water, with concentrations spiking sharply during rain — one survey across ten streams over seven months detected fifty-five distinct pesticides, with neonicotinoids among the compounds reaching the highest peak concentrations. Separate work in Japan and Vietnam has documented the same pattern: paddy runoff is a recognised non-point source of pesticide contamination in adjacent waterways, particularly during the monsoon or rainy season when storm events mobilise residues that would otherwise remain bound to soil. For a tea garden situated downslope or downstream of paddy cultivation, this is the pathway that matters — not a mysterious biochemical signal, but the mundane, well-characterised physics of runoff carrying existing chemicals from one field to another.

Paddy fields and soil fertility

The agronomic relationship between paddy cultivation and neighbouring tea gardens is better understood through the lens of intercropping and

soil ecology than through any notion of compound transfer. Multiple field studies on tea intercropping with legumes, soybean, rapeseed, and other companion plants show measurable benefits to tea garden soil: increased nitrogen cycling, greater microbial diversity, improved organic matter, and in several cases direct improvements to tea quality markers such as catechin and amino acid content. One study of soybean-tea intercropping recorded increases in tea polyphenols and amino acids alongside improved soil nitrogen and phosphorus availability. These findings describe genuine, measurable pathways: root-zone interactions, shifts in soil microbial communities, and changes in nutrient cycling that plant physiologists can trace and quantify.

Paddy fields operate on similar ecological logic when they sit near tea gardens - enriching or altering the shared soil and water environment but this is fundamentally different from the claim that bioactive compounds pass from rice to tea and get incorporated into new tea chemistry. No study reviewed here, or in the broader literature on tea-adjacent cropping systems, supports direct compound transfer of that kind. The more defensible and, frankly, more useful framing for growers is that paddy fields are simply one more feature of the local agroecosystem whose water and chemical inputs deserve monitoring, in the same way any adjacent land use would.

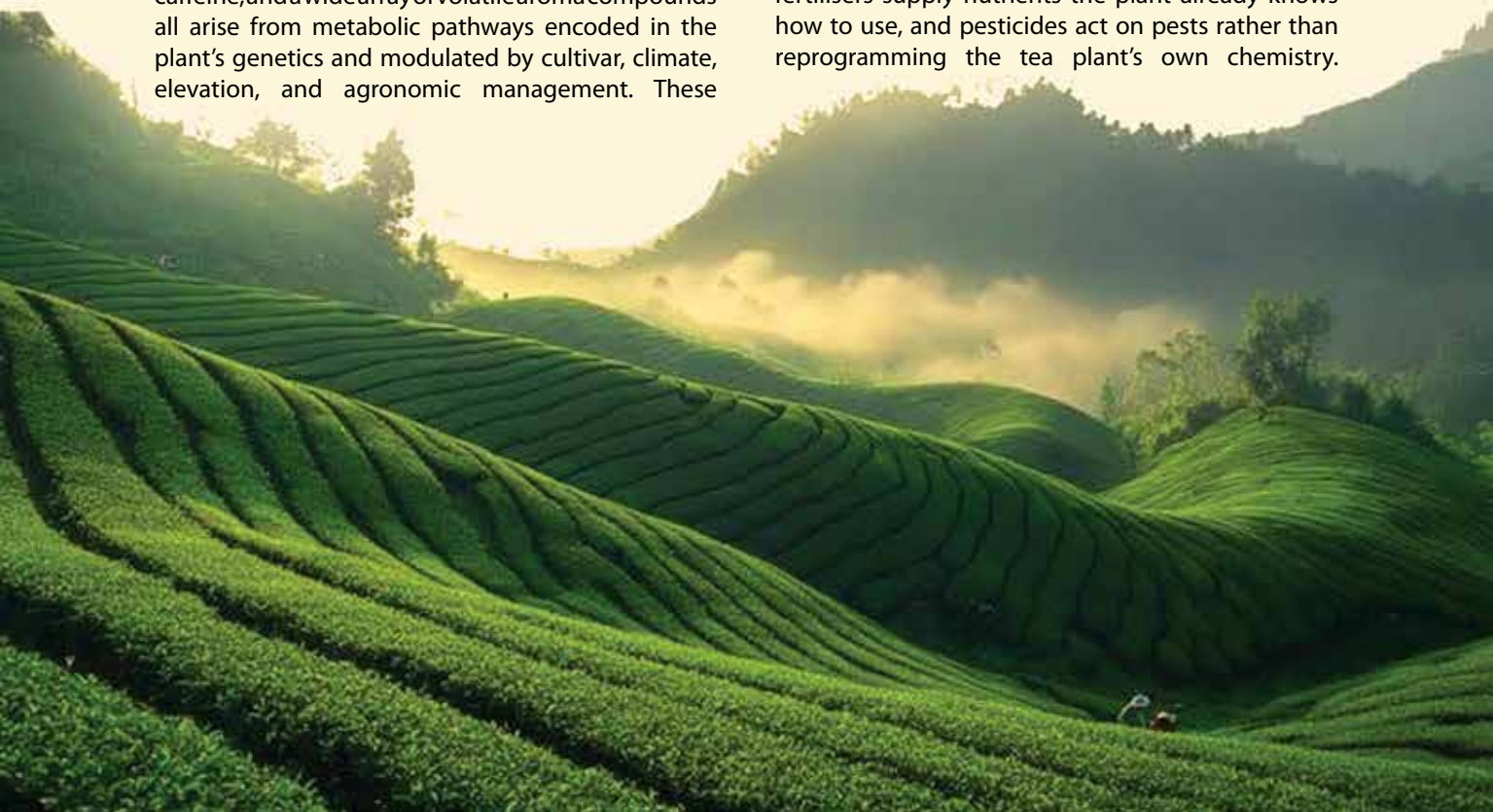
Tea plant metabolism

Tea plants are prolific biochemists in their own right. Catechins, theaflavins, amino acids like L-theanine, caffeine, and a wide array of volatile aroma compounds all arise from metabolic pathways encoded in the plant's genetics and modulated by cultivar, climate, elevation, and agronomic management. These pathways are internally regulated; they respond to environmental stress, light, temperature, and nutrient status, but they are not switched on by an external source of water or by proximity to another crop. This is worth stating plainly because it closes off a persistent misconception: whatever changes tea's chemical profile - and plenty does - happens through modulation of existing pathways, not through the introduction of biochemical machinery from outside the plant.

That said, the plant's own defence chemistry is far from static, and this is where the story of "new compounds" actually has scientific grounding, just not the one popularly assumed. Recent omics research on tea plants exposed to the herbicide glufosinate found that the chemical stress redirected the plant's own biosynthesis: nitrogen metabolism shifted, L-theanine synthesis dropped, and the plant reallocated resources from primary flavour compounds toward defensive phenolic acids and lignin. In other words, the tea plant does alter its internal chemistry in response to an external chemical challenge — but the mechanism is stress-induced metabolic reallocation within the plant's existing genetic toolkit, not the acquisition of some new pathway from rainwater or a neighbouring paddy.

Pesticide and fertiliser use

Fertilisers and pesticides remain essential tools for tea cultivation, supporting growth and managing the pest pressure that tea gardens face in warm, humid climates ideal for insects and mites. Their function is agronomic rather than biosynthetic: fertilisers supply nutrients the plant already knows how to use, and pesticides act on pests rather than reprogramming the tea plant's own chemistry.



Judicious, code-compliant use - guided by national plant protection standards and maximum residue limit (MRL) frameworks such as those maintained by China's national food safety standards or the EU's pesticide residue regulations — remains the primary safeguard against both ecological harm and residue accumulation in the finished leaf.

Persistence and interaction of chemical residues

This is where the more substantive risks in tea cultivation actually lie, and where the evidence is considerably stronger than anything supporting rainwater- or paddy-induced synthesis.

Systemic pesticides and their persistence

Systemic insecticides - particularly neonicotinoids such as imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, and acetamiprid, along with organophosphates like dimethoate - are absorbed into plant tissue rather than sitting on the leaf surface, which makes them resistant to removal by washing or standard processing. Research on neonicotinoid behaviour has found these compounds can persist in soil for months or even years, from where they are taken up by roots and translocated into new growth, creating an ongoing internal reservoir of residue long after the original application. Notably, only a small fraction of any pesticide applied - often estimated around 0.3 percent - actually reaches its target pest; the remainder disperses into the surrounding soil, water, and air, becoming the long-tail source of contamination that shows up in residue testing years later.

Airborne and waterborne contamination

Tea plants do not need to be sprayed directly to pick up pesticide residues. Reviews of organic pollutant uptake in Camellia sinensis describe both spray drift and atmospheric deposition as recognised exposure routes, alongside root uptake from contaminated soil and irrigation water. Combined with the runoff dynamics discussed earlier — where paddy-field pesticides travel through rainwater into adjacent streams and soils — this gives tea gardens near paddy cultivation a genuine, evidence-based reason for residue vigilance that has nothing to do with mysterious compound synthesis and everything to do with ordinary environmental transport of existing agrochemicals.

Interaction with the plant's own chemistry

Once inside the plant, some pesticides do not remain chemically inert. Metabolic studies using tea cell cultures have shown that certain systemic insecticides - thiamethoxam among them - are actively metabolised by tea plant tissue into a range of breakdown products, with researchers identifying several distinct metabolites of a single parent compound. The toxicological profile and concentration ratios of these metabolites relative to the parent pesticide remain incompletely characterised, which researchers themselves flag as an open question deserving further study. Separately, tolfenpyrad has been shown to accumulate preferentially in leaf tissue while triggering the plant's own reactive oxygen species and antioxidant responses — a genuine biochemical interaction between an external residue and the plant's internal defence chemistry, distinct from anything rainwater or paddy proximity could cause on their own.

Dilution and accumulation.

As new leaf tissue forms, residue concentrations present in older growth can appear diluted relative to the plant's expanding biomass — a genuine effect, but not a form of detoxification. Persistent compounds continue to accumulate in mature leaves, root tissue, and soil, meaning the apparent dilution in young shoots can mask an accumulating burden elsewhere in the plant and its growing environment. This has direct implications for harvest timing and plucking practices, since younger flushes and older leaf are not equivalent from a residue standpoint.



To say the least on the subject, rainwater and paddy fields shape the tea-growing environment in real, measurable ways — through soil moisture, nutrient cycling, and shared water systems — but neither one reaches into a tea plant's metabolism to manufacture new compounds from nothing. That idea does not survive contact with what is actually known about plant biochemistry.

What does survive contact with the evidence is a more sobering picture: systemic pesticide residues can persist in tea tissue and soil for months or years, arrive at tea gardens through airborne drift or waterborne runoff from neighbouring farmland including paddy fields, and in some documented cases undergo genuine metabolic interaction with the plant's own compounds — altering flavour chemistry, nitrogen metabolism, or antioxidant activity in the process. Dilution in new growth offers no real reprieve, since residues continue to build up in older tissue and soil.

For growers, buyers, and quality control programmes, this points toward a clear set of priorities: careful residue monitoring attentive to both parent compounds and their metabolites, awareness of runoff pathways from adjacent land use, and cultivation practices that account for how long systemic chemicals actually persist rather than assuming a single season's abstinence from spraying is sufficient. The science does not support fear of rainwater or paddy fields themselves — but it strongly supports rigorous, ongoing attention to what is already in the soil, the water, and the plant.

References:

Sources drawn from peer-reviewed research published in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, Science of the Total Environment, Environmental Science and Pollution Research, Pest Management Science, and related agricultural science journals, alongside national pesticide residue standards.









Sujoy Mukherjee
Contemporary Brokers, Siliguri

THE CUP IS THE FINAL JUDGE

Pallav Jalan on the character of Assam tea, the changing market, and the road to stronger brands

In a tea market increasingly shaped by premiumisation, provenance, and changing consumer expectations, Mr Pallav Jalan, in conversation with Amarjit Sarmah of Contemporary Brokers, brings a perspective grounded in experience rather than fashion. For him, a tea brand's strength begins long before it reaches the shelf - in the leaf, the people who nurture it, and the decisions that shape the final cup. As he looks at Assam's opportunities and the industry's challenges, his message is clear: quality may attract attention, but it is the cup that earns trust.

How did your journey with tea begin?

My journey began with my late father, Mr. Lalit Kumar Jalan, a pioneer in the tea industry and a man of high principles. I started under his guidance right after high school at Don Bosco School, Guwahati, and continued through my time at Gauhati Commerce College.



Mr Pallav Jalan

Even early on, I was fascinated by the trade. Once I entered the industry, I began enjoying every aspect of it - sipping, tasting, buying, selling, and understanding the leaf. What started under my father's mentorship gradually became my own passion. Today, at 43, I am just as happy being around tea as I was on day one; I still consider myself a partner in crime with this amazing beverage.

What were the biggest challenges you faced when you first took on the business?

To be honest, I never really viewed those early years as a period of hardship. Because I was so passionate, I thoroughly enjoyed the learning process.

Of course, there was a steep learning curve - understanding different grades, qualities, seasons, market dynamics, pricing, and the people involved. My father was instrumental in instilling the core values behind the business. When you are genuinely interested in something, even the steep challenges become engaging.

How has your relationship with tea evolved over the years?

Tea evolved from a fascination into my profession, then my passion, and ultimately a core part of my identity.

Today, I do not just drink tea; I try to read it. Every cup tells a story about its origin, the season of production, how it was processed, and the care invested in it. The more you learn about tea, the more you realise how much there is still to discover.

Your heart is clearly with Assam tea. What makes the region's teas so distinctive?

Having spent almost my entire professional life in Guwahati, I have naturally developed a deep connection to Assam teas. For me, they stand out for their malty profile, rich cup colour, strength, and distinct aroma. Depending on the season, garden, and manufacturing style, Assam tea offers remarkable character and versatility. I genuinely believe Assam produces some of the finest, most adaptable teas for consumers worldwide.

How do seasonal changes influence your approach to tea?

The weather, rainfall, temperature, and sunshine directly dictate the quality of the leaf and the cup. I have a soft spot for summer-flush teas due to their strong character, but I also enjoy the unique

qualities of autumnal flushes. The key is to work with what nature provides rather than forcing the leaf to behave a certain way. We must adapt our processing to bring out the best in what the season yields.

What is one aspect of tea cultivation that is often misunderstood or overlooked?

We often focus too much on what we want from the tea plant rather than what the plant needs from us. Tea is a living entity with specific requirements based on soil, climate, rainfall, cultivar, and season. If we prioritise the health and needs of the plant, quality will naturally follow.

How closely are you involved in processing and quality decisions?

I am personally involved in tasting and evaluating teas before making key decisions. While experience helps, there is no substitute for tasting the tea yourself.

For me, the cup is the final judge. Regardless of what is written on the packaging or said about a brand, the tea ultimately has to perform when brewed.

In your experience, what impacts cup quality more than branding or presentation?

The tea itself. Branding creates the initial impression, but the product creates a lasting one; a brand is made by its product. Good tea speaks for itself, much like the roar of a lion. You can present a tea beautifully, but if the quality inside the packet falls short, consumers will notice. Quality deserves just as much attention as presentation, if not more.

How do you balance consistency with the natural variations that come from origin and season?

Consistency comes with experience. Because tea is an agricultural product, variations across seasons and origins are natural. The goal should be to understand and work with these variations rather than eliminate them entirely. Over time, you learn how different teas behave and how to maintain a desired profile.

How important are workers and small growers in shaping the final cup?

They are crucial. Every person in the supply chain - from the field hands tending and plucking the bushes to those handling manufacturing, sorting, grading, and logistics - contributes directly to the quality of the final cup. Behind every good tea is a team of dedicated people.

What are the most pressing challenges faced by operations on the ground today?

Rising costs, labour constraints, unpredictable weather patterns, and the ongoing struggle to maintain high quality while remaining economically viable.

Because we rely heavily on nature, weather remains



an uncontrollable variable. The people working at the ground level must receive proper recognition and fair returns for their efforts, as the industry cannot survive without them.

How do auctions, private sales, and direct trade fit into your business model?

Auctions suit my model well because of the sheer variety and choice they provide in grades, qualities, and price points. It is also an invaluable tool for reading broader market trends.

While private sales and direct relationships are important for building long-term trust with specific partners, the auction system remains central to how I source and view the trade.

How has buyer behaviour changed over the last decade?

The most positive shift has been a heightened awareness of quality. Buyers are increasingly recognising the connection between price and standard. A market where consumers are willing to pay for true quality is a mature one, and it encourages producers to maintain high standards.

What gap do you see between market expectations and production realities?

The market naturally demands high quality and consistency at competitive prices. However, producing fine tea requires substantial investment in labour, inputs, processing, and garden maintenance. Market expectations do not always reflect these operational realities. There needs to be better alignment between buyers and producers: if we want exceptional tea, we must be willing to pay a fair price for it.

What does sustainability realistically mean in your day-to-day operations?

Sustainability means ensuring that the land, the people, and the business can thrive long-term. It involves responsible resource management, respect for workforce welfare, and maintaining economic viability. Environmental responsibility, human

welfare, and financial health must move forward together.

Have you introduced any new practices, cultivars, or processing styles in recent years?

I am open to evolution and new ideas, but I do not believe in changing things merely for the sake of novelty. Any new practice or processing technique must demonstrably improve the experience in the cup, which remains the ultimate test.

How open is the Indian tea industry to change and experimentation?

The industry is becoming progressively more open to innovation, speciality processing, and exploring unique origins. Curiosity from buyers is pushing producers to think differently.

However, we should experiment without diluting our heritage. India has a rich tea legacy, and we must preserve the core identity that makes our teas distinct.

What is the biggest misconception consumers have about premium tea?

A common misconception, particularly among domestic consumers, is that the finest Indian teas are reserved for export and unavailable locally. That is simply not true. India produces world-class teas, and Assam has immense potential. I would love to see Indian consumers develop greater confidence in and appreciation for the premium teas produced in their own country.

What do you wish tea drinkers paid more attention to while tasting a cup?

I wish consumers focused more on the overall character of the tea rather than relying solely on cup colour. While colour matters, aroma, flavour, strength, body, balance, and aftertaste are equally vital. A dark cup does not automatically mean a superior tea; it should be judged by its full sensory profile.

What concerns you most about the future of the tea industry?

My primary concern is the temptation for producers to chase volume at the expense of quality. Sacrificing quality for short-term gain damages the reputation of the entire industry. Quality must remain our core focus.

What gives you hope for the future?

Fair price realisation. When good tea fetches a strong price, producers have the resources and confidence to reinvest in their gardens, processing equipment, workers, and quality control. Furthermore, growing consumer awareness regarding quality is a very encouraging sign.

Where do you see your brand in the next five to ten years?

My immediate focus for the next five years is expanding into international markets. Assam tea has a compelling history, strong identity, and distinct character that offer great global appeal. My goal is to build long-term international relationships and foster a deeper global appreciation for high-quality Assam tea.

What is your personal favourite tea, and why?

Assam CTC remains my personal favourite. Despite tasting countless varieties over the years, I always return to a good cup of Assam CTC for its strength, maltiness, colour, and comforting aroma. It carries a strong emotional connection for me, as it has been a constant presence throughout my life and career.

Is there a specific cup of tea that has stayed with you over the years?

Again, a classic cup of Assam CTC. The most memorable cups are often tied to people and moments rather than rarity or price. For me, a good Assam CTC evokes memories of my early days in the trade, my father, and my journey so far.

Tea, for you, in one sentence!

Tea is my soulmate.

Postscript

What began as a conversation about tea gradually became a reflection on a lifelong relationship with it. Pallav Jalan's memories of his father, his early days in Guwahati and his continuing fascination with Assam tea offer a glimpse into the personal journey behind his professional convictions.





Amarjit Sarmah
Contemporary Brokers, Guwahati

Jalpaiguri Gala









An Evening in Jalpaiguri

The Siliguri Branch of Contemporary Brokers hosted a Corporate Dinner for its valued clients on Saturday, 11 July 2026, in Jalpaiguri. The evening offered a relaxed setting for meaningful conversations beyond the usual pressures of schedules, transactions and daily business. Warm exchanges, familiar faces and new introductions created an atmosphere of cordiality and camaraderie. Such occasions provide an opportunity to strengthen relationships and foster mutual understanding. The dinner celebrated enduring partnerships built on trust and reliability, while reaffirming the Siliguri Branch's commitment to continued collaboration and stronger engagement with its valued clientele.









SCIENCE AND COLLABORATION
Key to sustaining the Tea Industry amid climate crisis



Mr M M Venkatachalam delivering the 9th DN Barua Memorial Lecture at Tocklai

The 9th annual DN Barua Memorial Lecture, held on July 11, 2026, at the Tocklai Tea Research Institute in Jorhat, brought together researchers and industry stakeholders to address the pressing challenges facing tea production.

Delivering the keynote address, agribusiness leader M M Venkatachalam, Chairman of EID Parry and Parry Agro Industries, emphasised that climate change, marked by shifting rainfall and rising temperatures, remains the industry's greatest threat. He stressed the enormous responsibility of sustaining the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands dependent on the sector.

Mr Venkatachalam urged that scientific research must transition from laboratories into practical solutions. He called upon the industry to open its facilities for collaborative experimentation, noting that science is the ultimate driving force for revitalising tea from the garden to the cup.

The event, commemorating legendary tea scientist Dr. DN Barua, featured remarks from former TRA Chairman PK Bezboruah, who recalled Dr. Barua's prophetic warnings about waterlogging in Assam. TRA Director Dr. Venkatesan Selvaraj noted the invaluable insights this lecture offered Tocklai's young scientists.

Source : TRA Tocklai

SUNEEL SINGH SIKAND TAKES HELM OF INDIAN TEA ASSOCIATION

KOLKATA: The Indian Tea Association (ITA) has elected Mr Suneel Singh Sikand, CEO of Rossell Tea, as its new Chairman at the association's 143rd Annual General Meeting, held virtually.

Mr Atul Rastogi, Director of Luxmi Tea Co. (Pvt) Ltd, was elected Vice-Chairman, while Mr Suresh Kumar Bansal, Director of New Tea Company Ltd, took charge as Additional Vice-Chairman.

Outgoing Chairman Mr Hemant Bangur highlighted the industry's mounting challenges, including rising input costs, squeezed margins, weak price realisations, climate risks and geopolitical uncertainties. He stressed that innovation, quality and compliance would be crucial to keeping Indian tea competitive and sustainable.

Bangur also underlined the need to respond to changing consumer preferences, particularly among younger consumers, through greater innovation, convenience, quality and responsible production. He highlighted the ITA's White Papers on the Dooars-Terai and Darjeeling tea sectors and noted that a similar exercise is under way for Assam.

Calling for a special support package for West Bengal tea, particularly Darjeeling, Bangur urged recognition of its distinctive seasonal production characteristics. He also welcomed Tea Board initiatives on Minimum Sustainable Price, National Tea Tourism and National Tea Silviculture policies, assuring the ITA's support.

He further appreciated ITA member companies for contributing to the Assam Chief Minister's Relief Fund following the devastating floods in the state.

Source : PTI



EL NIÑO BREWS TROUBLE FOR KERALAM'S TEA GARDENS

KERALAM: El Niño is casting a long, dry shadow over Keralam's tea sector. With rainfall erratic and drought-like conditions tightening across the State's plantation belt, tea output has slipped for the first eight months of the year - and plantation authorities warn that worse may follow if rainfall does not improve.

According to data compiled by the United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI) Tea Research Foundation, Keralam's tea production fell by 2% during the January-to-August period. Total output dropped from 31.274 million kg in the corresponding period of 2025 to 30.624 million kg this year.

Wayanad bears the brunt. The report identified Wayanad as the worst-hit district, grappling with a staggering 53% rainfall deficit through mid-September. Tea production in the district declined by 8.11% between January and August, with average yields falling from 1,233 kg per hectare in 2025 to 1,133 kg per hectare this year - a drop of 100 kg per hectare.

In Munnar, the yield held steady and even edged upward, rising from 1,558 kg per hectare in 2025 to 1,578 kg per hectare this year. The Peerumade hills, however, saw a decline, with output slipping from 1,091 kg per hectare to 1,069 kg per hectare. Central Travancore recorded a 3.8% fall in average production, dropping from 1,008 kg per hectare to 970 kg per hectare.

One estate bucks the trend. Defying the wider downturn, Penshurst Estate in Wagamon posted a 4.4% growth in output over the same period. Joshiba Joseph, manager of the estate, noted that productivity climbed from 2,149 kg per hectare in 2025 to 2,243 kg per hectare in 2026 — an increase of 94 kg per hectare.

Across the border, the Nilgiris suffers too. In Tamil Nadu's Nilgiris district, drought conditions linked to El Niño have led to an 11.8% decline in yield, with average output sliding from 2,315 kg per hectare in 2023 to 2,042 kg per hectare in 2025, according to a separate UPASI report.



Landslide in a tea estate

Plantation authorities cautioned that if the current low rainfall and drought-like conditions persist, the adverse effects on yields will only deepen. As one industry representative observed, a multitude of people depend - directly and indirectly - on earnings from the tea industry, and any further decline in output due to climate challenges will have a significant impact on estate operations and the livelihoods tied to them.

BREWED BY THE BRAHMAPUTRA

Tea Board's wellness campaign dawns on Guwahati



Shri Devajit Saikia, Secretary of BCCI, during the India Tea Wellness Campaign, Guwahati

GUWAHATI, September 5, 2026: As the first light of dawn settled over the Brahmaputra, Tea Board India brought its India Tea Wellness Campaign to Guwahati, inviting the city's early risers to experience Indian tea in an altogether new way. From 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM, two of the city's most beloved public spaces - the Sati Radhika Shanti Udyan on the Uzan Bazar riverfront and the Walking Zone in front of the Assam Public Service Commission at Khanapara - transformed into vibrant hubs of tea, wellness, and community.

The Guwahati morning was part of a broader nationwide initiative aimed at redefining how people experience Indian tea. The campaign set out to familiarise consumers with the journey of tea from the garden straight to the cup, to celebrate the rich heritage, craftsmanship, and diversity of Indian tea varieties, and to highlight the health and wellness benefits of making fresh, premium tea a part of daily life. Its central message - "The Goodness of India, Brewed for You" - celebrated the passage of Indian tea from misty gardens to millions of cups, while underscoring its deep-rooted connection with people across the country.

At the Uzan Bazar riverfront, the Sati Radhika Shanti Udyan provided a fitting backdrop of natural beauty and tranquillity along the Brahmaputra. At Khanapara, the Walking Zone in front of the APSC drew fitness enthusiasts and tea lovers alike, blending the rhythms of morning walks with the aromas of freshly brewed tea. Together, the two venues offered a special morning tea experience that brought together tea, wellness, nature, and shared moments.

Mr Devajit Saikia, Secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), graced the Uzan Bazar riverfront venue as chief guest, lending the campaign's fitness and wellness message a sporting spotlight. His presence underscored the natural synergy between an active lifestyle and the wholesome rituals of tea.

As part of its grassroots promotional strategy, Tea Board India distributed branded garden umbrellas and work aprons emblazoned with the official Tea Board and Tea Mark logos to street chaiwallahs around Khanapara. The initiative aimed to ensure authentic tea presentation and to uplift local vendors, recognising the humble chai stall as the beating heart of India's tea culture.

The Guwahati event followed similar large-scale tea-tasting sessions and health camps organised by Tea Board India at Victoria Memorial and Rabindra Sarovar in Kolkata, as well as at Janeshwar Mishra Park in Lucknow. Following this launch, the campaign continued its journey to major commercial hubs such as City Centre later in the month, carrying the message of Indian tea's goodness to ever wider audiences - one cup, one city, one morning at Guwahati.

TEA KONNECT 2026
A shared forum



Tea Konnect 2026

On 21 and 22 August, the North Bengal Tea Planters' Association organised Tea Konnect 2026, bringing together members of the tea fraternity for two days of interaction, networking and exchange. In a sector facing evolving consumer preferences, cost pressures, sustainability demands and changing trade realities, such collective spaces have particular value.

Tea Konnect 2026 reaffirmed the importance of conversation across the industry's many constituencies. It created room for participants to reconnect, share perspectives and explore ideas that may help shape the sector's future. The event's significance lay not only in the meetings it facilitated, but in the spirit it represented: that the challenges and opportunities before Indian tea are best addressed through greater collaboration.

TECHBREW 2026 SPOTLIGHTS INDIA'S NEW-GEN TEA INNOVATORS



The Tea Research Association's Tocklai Institute has announced winners of TechBrew 2026, a national hackathon launched on International Tea Day. Students from top institutions, as premium as IITs and IARA etc., showcased AI-based monitoring systems, robotics tools, and prototypes designed to strengthen India's tea value chain. TRA Secretary Joydeep Phukan said TechBrew brings "the best young minds" to industry challenges, with Tocklai preparing to take standout ideas from lab to field. TRA congratulated all winners and thanked jury members and partner institutions for supporting this technology-driven push.

DILMAH BETS $15 MILLION ON INDIA
Luxury tea, lounges and a new hospitality experience

Sri Lankan tea major Dilmah is stepping up its India ambitions with a planned $15 million investment seeking to tap into the country's expanding premium tea market and the growing consumer interest in wellness, flavour discovery and experiential dining. At the centre of the strategy is Thambapanni, a luxury tea collection developed exclusively for India and designed to move tea



Mr Dilhan Fernando, Chairman and CEO of Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company

beyond the cup and into the realm of gastronomy and hospitality.

The collection will be introduced through a curated network of luxury hotels, speciality cafes and fine-dining restaurants, rather than conventional retail channels, and will be offered in pyramid tea bags and loose-leaf formats.

"The idea is to launch tea-inspired hospitality, where tea will be paired with different foods to elevate the experience of both the tea and the food, linking it to a holistic experience for the guest," Dilhan Fernando, Chairman and CEO of Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company, said in Mumbai.

Thambapanni brings together single-region Indian teas with specially selected spices and herbs. The collection has undergone more than 12 months of tasting and refinement and comprises 13 luxury pyramid tea-bag flavours, including Saffron Valley Kashmiri Kahwa, Alpine Meadow Chamomile Flowers and Night Jasmine Green Tea. Its loose-leaf range features four speciality teas, four infusions, five green teas and seven black teas. Among the distinctive offerings is Monsoon Voyager Spice Tea, a robust black tea blended with black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, clove, ginger, nutmeg and fennel—an interpretation of India's deep-rooted spice-and-tea tradition.

Dilmah plans to integrate the teas into multi-course dining experiences, pairing different teas with starters, salads, cheeses and desserts to enhance flavours and refresh the palate. "What we want to bring to India is a fresh perspective on tea," Fernando said, pointing to growing consumer receptiveness towards wellness, excitement, flavour discovery and experiential dining.

The initiative is being supported by 26 growers of tea, herbs and spices, with Dilmah already working with several Indian tea estates. The company is also set to collaborate with major hospitality groups including IHG, Hilton, Accor and Marriott, introducing curated tea pairings across their hotels and dining experiences.

Dilmah has deliberately refrained from setting initial revenue or volume targets, noting that Thambapanni is entering a market without an established precedent.

Founded by Merril J. Fernando, Dilmah pioneered the modern concept of single-origin tea in 1985 and today has a presence in more than 105 countries. Its latest India strategy signals a larger industry shift—from tea as a commodity or everyday beverage towards premiumisation, provenance, wellness and experiential consumption.

With Thambapanni, Dilmah is seeking to make tea not merely a beverage, but an integral part of the dining experience - and a new expression of luxury hospitality.

SIKKIM'S TEMI TEA PURSUES A GLOBAL AMBITION



Ms Radha Pradhan, MD of Temi Tea

Sikkim's sole tea estate is reaching for the world. Temi Tea is targeting overseas markets including Japan, Germany, the United States, and South Korea, while exploring a franchise model and new product lines designed to draw younger consumers into the fold, its Managing Director Radha Pradhan said on Monday.

Pradhan emphasised that the estate remains firmly committed to maintaining its quality standards even as it ventures into new territory. The brand is developing innovative products and marketing strategies aimed squarely at the youth demographic, alongside a franchise model intended to broaden its footprint and make Temi Tea more accessible across diverse markets.

The push comes on the heels of a three-year marketing and distribution partnership signed last October with Mumbai-based MRC Agrotech, and the launch of an e-commerce platform earlier this year — steps that have already widened Temi Tea's reach from its Himalayan home to select Indian states, Japan, and parts of Europe.

SHATTERING THE GLASS CEILING IN SRI LANKAN TEA INDUSTRY

Nuwani Dissanayake has brewed up a historic milestone, becoming the first woman to win Sri Lanka's prestigious Tea Tasting Championship. Breaking the glass ceiling in a fiercely male-dominated profession, Dissanayake claimed the top prize at the Tea Exporters Association AGM in Colombo.

The competition tested her elite palate, requiring the rapid identification of complex aromas, flavours, and distinct tea characteristics under intense time constraints. An Agricultural Entrepreneurship graduate from Uva Wellassa University, she currently brings her expertise to Anverally & Sons as a Tea Taster and Business Development Manager. With her, a bold new chapter in Ceylon tea history has officially been poured.



Ms Nuwani Dissanayake, winner of Sri Lanka's prestigious Tea Tasting Championship

OBITUARY



Piyush Desai
(1939 – 2026)

A TEA TITAN who believed tea can dissolve differences.

The tea fraternity mourns Piyush Desai, Chairman of Wagh Bakri Tea Group, who passed away on September 15 at 86. A master tea taster and philanthropist, Desai embodied his brand's iconic logo of a tiger and a goat sharing a cup. For him, the belief that tea can dissolve differences was a lived conviction, famously standing as a rare corporate voice for communal harmony and leading relief efforts during crises. Under his six-decade stewardship, Wagh Bakri grew into a ₹2,000-crore global enterprise. Yet, his enduring legacy remains his boundless generosity and courageous humanity.

WRITE TO READER'S MAIL BOX

We'd love to hear from you!

Share your thoughts on tea, ideas for stories, or suggestions to make Contemporary Tea Time even better. Your cup of words might just feature in our next issue. Write to us at: editorteatime@gmail.com



Coming Next

Contemporary Tea Time
Oct- Dec 2026

TEA, TASTE AND TOGETHERNESS
Brews in the life of Indian festivals

From Bihu to Baisakhi, Durga Puja to Pongal, from the first cup offered to a guest to the endless cups shared over festive adda, tea is woven into the way India celebrates.

Our forthcoming Cover Story explores tea's deliciously understated role in India's festival life across regions, rituals, kitchens and communities.

CONTEMPORARY TEA TIME, Where the tea world meets



THE SIX-FINGERED GENIUS WHO PLAYED WILLOW AND RED BALL LIKE LIVING THUNDER

There have been great batsmen, great bowlers, and, on rare occasions, great fielders. But cricket has produced only one man who was all of these at once, and produced them not with grim discipline, but with a joyous, reckless abandon that made the extraordinary look like play. That man was Sir Garfield St. Aubrun Sobers, and to write about him is to write about the outer limits of what one human being could do with a bat, a ball, and an unshakeable love of life.

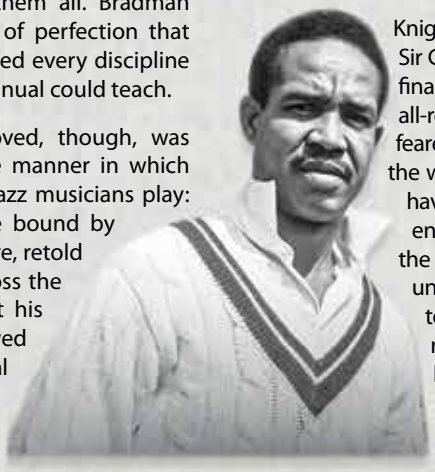
Born on July 28, 1936, in Bridgetown, Barbados, Sobers arrived in the world already marked as unusual, with six fingers on each hand, a rare congenital condition surgically corrected in infancy. It is tempting to read this as an omen - a boy assembled with just a little more than the rest of us, destined to do more on the cricket field than anyone before or since. Whether nature intended it or not, that is precisely how his career unfolded.

Don Bradman, a man not given to hyperbole about anyone but himself, called Sobers "five cricketers in one"- an opening batsman, a strokemaker of the middle order, a slip catcher of uncanny reflex, a genuine fast bowler, and a wrist-spinner capable of turning a match on its head. No higher praise exists in the game. The English writer Neville Cardus went further still, offering perhaps the most quoted line in cricket's literature: while Bradman remained the greatest batsman the game had known, Sobers, in Cardus's eyes, was the greatest cricketer of them all. Bradman mastered one discipline to a degree of perfection that may never be equalled; Sobers mastered every discipline at once, with a flourish no coaching manual could teach.

What made Sobers' batting so beloved, though, was never just the runs; rather it was the manner in which they were made. He batted the way jazz musicians play: instinctively, fearlessly, refusing to be bound by the rules others lived by. Cricket folklore, retold in dressing rooms and rum shops across the Caribbean for generations, holds that his most murderous innings often followed nights of music, laughter, and liberal hospitality that stretched into the small hours, with barely a wink of sleep before he strode out to the middle the next morning, and yet it was on these very mornings that the bowling was dispatched with the most devastating ease, boundaries struck with a lazy, effortless power, as though fatigue itself dared not touch him. True or embellished, the stories capture something essential about Sobers: a man who lived as freely as he played, who treated life and cricket as things to be enjoyed rather than merely managed.

His numbers, when set down plainly, still stagger. In 93 Test matches for the West Indies, Sobers scored 8,032 runs at an average of 57.78, including 26 centuries, anchored by his then world-record 365 not out against Pakistan in 1958... an innings played, fittingly, before he had even turned twenty-two. But to speak only of his batting is to tell half the story. He took 235 Test wickets, bowling fast-medium with the new ball one session and probing left-arm wrist-spin the next, a versatility that baffled batsmen who never knew which bowler they would face. Add 109 catches, taken at short leg or in the slips with a predator's reflexes, and the picture of Bradman's "five cricketers in one" comes vividly into focus.

Beyond the Test arena, Sobers' cricketing life carried him to every corner of the globe where the game was played, including a lesser-known but cherished chapter connected to India's Assam tea gardens. In the tea-growing districts of Assam, where cricket had long been woven into the social fabric of the planter community, Sobers's visits and associations became the stuff of local legend - impromptu matches and exhibitions played out against the misty backdrop of the tea estates, where planters and workers alike would gather simply to catch a glimpse of the great man in whites. For a region far removed from the sport's grand stadiums, these moments were treasured all the more, a reminder that greatness, when it travels, leaves its mark even in the quietest corners of the cricketing world.



Knighted in 1975 for his services to the game, Sir Garfield Sobers remains, decades after his final Test innings, the standard against which all-round excellence is measured. Bowlers feared him, batsmen envied him, and captains the world over would have given anything to have him on their side. But perhaps what endures most is not the runs, the wickets, or the catches; it is the spirit in which he played: unafraid, unhurried, and utterly unwilling to let the game become a burden. He reminded the world that cricket, at its highest level, could still be fun.

In an era of analytics, protective gear, and meticulously managed workloads, the story of Sobers feels almost mythical...a man who batted like a dream after nights that would fell mere mortals, who bowled fast and slow with equal menace, who fielded like a man half his age, and who did it all without ever losing his smile. Cricket has seen many great players. It has seen only one Garfield Sobers.

Chitto Ghosh



CHASING THE DAWN
A 9-day chronicle from Kolkata to the land of the Rising Sun

Travel-freak Prasanta Kr. Ghosh of Contemporary Brokers - fondly known to friends as PKG - hears the Eastern Himalaya calling. Nine days, seventeen souls, and a road that climbs from the Howrah platforms through orchid valleys and frozen passes to the very edge of the map, where the road ends and the sky begins.

There are journeys one plans for years, and then there are journeys that plan themselves -quietly assembling the right people, the right season, the right stretch of road until all that remains is to say yes. This was one of those. When the idea of a Northeast loop first surfaced over evening tea, it seemed ambitious: nine days, four states, altitudes ranging from sea level to over fifteen thousand feet. But ambition, as we discovered, has a way of dissolving into wonder once the wheels begin to turn. What follows is a day-by-day account of that passage from the echoing platforms of Howrah to the snow-dusted frontier of Arunachal Pradesh and back - told not as a guidebook, but as a chronicle of seventeen travellers who went looking for the dawn and found considerably more.

May 12, 2026: The rhythm of the rails

Our journey began under the echoing domes of Howrah Station. Sixteen fellow travellers - an eclectic mix of childhood friends, seasoned storytellers, and enthusiastic photographers - stood beside me, the anticipation almost tangible. As the Vande Bharat Express glided into the platform, we boarded our coaches, ready for the long-awaited loop into the Northeast. The journey to Guwahati was a blur of changing landscapes, good meals, and the laughter of a group realising that the trip was finally underway. By the time we reached the gateway of Assam, the plains had given way to the soft whisper of distant hills.

May 13, 2026: The gateway to the hills
(Guwahati to Bhalukpong)

Waking up to the fresh air of Assam, we traded the rails for our rugged mountain vehicles. The drive from Guwahati quickly shed the urban rush, opening into emerald-green stretches of tea gardens. As we crossed the border into Arunachal Pradesh, the air grew crisp and cool. We arrived in Bhalukpong, a quiet town on the banks of the Kameng River. The evening was spent by the rushing water, listening to the river crash against smooth boulders, with our group of seventeen gathered around, mapping out



Mr Prasanta Ghosh with family in front of Dirang Monastery

the high altitudes waiting for us.

May 14, 2026: Orchids and valleys

(Bhalukpong to Dirang)

Leaving Bhalukpong behind, the roads began to coil upward into the sky. The tropical greenery slowly gave way to alpine woods as we reached Dirang, a valley nestled in the West Kameng district. The town welcomed us with its sprawling kiwi and apple orchards, traditional Monpa stone houses, and a quiet sense of peace. We walked through the valley, letting our bodies adapt to the rising elevation, taken by the sight of the fast-flowing Dirang River glistening under the mid-May sun.

May 15, 2026: Frozen passes and eternal guardians

(Dirang to Tawang via Sela Pass and Jaswant Garh)

This was the day the mountains showed their scale. The climb to Sela Pass at 13,700 feet felt otherworldly. The temperature plummeted into the single digits, and fog drifted across the windshield. When the mist cleared, the frozen Sela Lake revealed itself — a stark sheet of ice surrounded by snow-dusted peaks that left all seventeen of us in silence.

Moving forward, the mood turned solemn as we arrived at the Jaswant Garh War Memorial. Standing before the brass bust of Rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat, MVC, we listened to the tales of his bravery during the 1962 Indo-China War. It was a sobering reminder of the sacrifices made to guard these frontiers. Cresting the final ridges, we rolled into the fortress town of Tawang just as twilight began to ink the sky.

May 16, 2026: At the edge of the frontier

(Bumla Pass and Madhuri Lake)

An early morning start took us straight to the edge of the nation: Bumla Pass, at 15,200 feet along the Indo-China border. Walking on the wind-swept, snow-patched terrain, we exchanged greetings with the Indian Army jawans, whose resilience matched the harsh environment.

On our descent, we detoured to Sangetsar Lake, better known as Madhuri Lake. Formed by an earthquake in 1950, the sight of dead tree trunks standing upright out of the still water against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains carried a strange beauty. We walked the perimeter, taking a group photo that captured seventeen smiles against the highest backdrop any of us had known.

May 17, 2026: Roaring Waters and Farewell to Tawang

(Tawang to Bomdila via Jung Falls)

Before turning back, we dedicated our morning to exploring Tawang's cultural soul. We stood in awe within the massive courtyard of the Tawang Monastery, the second-largest in the world, watching young monks in maroon robes go about their prayers.

As we began our return journey toward Bomdila, a thunderous roar echoed through the mountains. It was Jung Falls (Nuranang Falls). Dropping a spectacular 100 metres, the sheer volume of milk-white water crashing into the valley below sprayed a cold, refreshing mist over us from hundreds of feet away. It was a wild, untamed display of nature's power that served as the perfect farewell to the high altitudes. Terraced fields, apple orchards, and cascading mountain streams replace the stark grey peaks. By evening, the distant twinkling lights of Bomdila town welcome us through the cool, pine-scented dusk.

May 18, 2026: From the Peaks to the Plains

(Bomdila to Kaziranga National Park)

We descended from the clouds back into the lush, low-lying plains of Assam. The dramatic mountain walls slowly flattened out into the vast, tall elephant-grass meadows of Kaziranga National Park. Arriving at our jungle lodge by evening, the crisp mountain air was replaced by the deep, rhythmic sounds of the forest. The night was alive with the calls of crickets and the distant trumpet of wild herds, setting the stage for our upcoming wildlife adventure.



Sangetsar Lake, better known as Madhuri Lake

May 19, 2026: Rhinos in the Mist

(Kaziranga Safari Adventure)

At the crack of dawn, the jungle was cloaked in thick fog. We set out on an early morning safari, moving silently through the tall grass. As the morning sun broke through the canopy, the shadows resolved into the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceroses grazing peacefully just yards away. Our open-top jeeps tracked further into the core zones, rewarding our group with sightings of wild water buffaloes, swamp deer, swamp birds, and fresh tiger tracks pressed into the mud. It was a day that contrasted sharply with the quiet spirituality of the mountains we had just left behind.

May 20, 2026: The Final Flight Home

All good things must come to an end. After a final, hearty Assamese breakfast, we drove back to Guwahati and boarded our afternoon flight back to Kolkata. As the aircraft lifted off and the Brahmaputra shrank to a winding silver ribbon below, I looked around at my 16 travel companions. We were going back to our daily lives sunburnt, exhausted, and carrying bags heavy with local tea and Monpa weaves - but more importantly, we carried with us the quiet afterglow of Arunachal Pradesh.

Some journeys are measured in kilometres; others, in the distance they open inside you. Arunachal Pradesh gave us both. We had gone seeking landscape - the frozen passes, the monasteries, the rhinos in morning mist, and we found them, of course. But what we brought back was harder to pack: the silence of Sela Lake at thirteen thousand feet, the weight of a soldier's name spoken aloud at Jaswant Garh, the cold spray of Jung Falls on sunburnt faces, the distant trumpet of elephants through the dark jungle. Nine days is not long. It is barely enough to learn the names of rivers. But it is long enough to understand that the Northeast is not a destination... it is a conversation between road and mountain, river and frontier, and once you have entered it, you do not quite stop listening. We returned to Kolkata with bags heavy with Monpa weaves and Arunachal tea, but lighter in the ways that matter. The dawn we chased was not only in the east. It was in the waking itself.



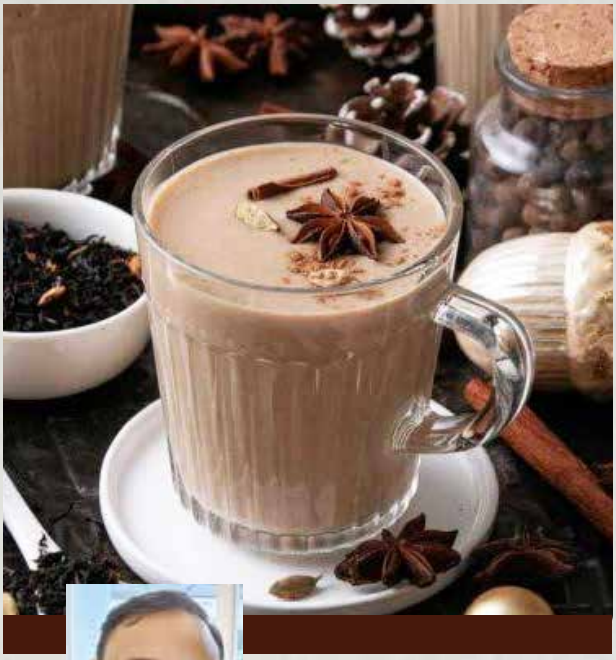
Jung Falls (Nuranang Falls)





Prasanta Kr Ghosh
Contemporary Brokers, Kolkata

TEANOG





Niladri Saha
Contemporary Brokers, Kolkata

Eggnog became popular in the United States in the 1770s. It is essentially a blend of milk, raw eggs, and sugar. Cream may be used instead of milk. Various essences can be added to eggnog for flavouring. The eggnog served at Christmastime usually contains brandy, rum, or wine.

1 tea bag,
1/2 cup hot water,
Brown sugar or honey (optional),
2 eggs,
1 cup chilled milk,
1/4 tsp. vanilla.

Infuse tea bag in water for 5 minutes. Remove tea bag and sweeten tea essence with brown sugar or honey if desired. Put tea essence and remaining ingredients in a blender. Blend until eggs develop a light, bubbly froth on top of the liquid. Serve in a tall glass, in a teacup, or in a punch glass.

Orange Teanog: To the teanog recipe, add 2 tbsp. or more of frozen orange-juice concentrate. Omit the vanilla.

Note: The teanog recipes may be doubled or tripled. For varied tastes, sprinkle any one of the teanogs with ground aniseeds or ground cardamom.



Calling All Tea Lovers, Food Enthusiasts & Creative Cooks!

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So, put on your chef's hat, get creative, and let tea take centre stage in your kitchen!

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Poetea

THE BERGAMOT TEMPEST

Tea has always offered poets more than refreshment... it invites ritual, reflection, companionship and, as Ms. Nandini Mitra demonstrates in The Bergamot Tempest, a delightful opportunity for high comedy. In this mock-heroic miniature, the orderly ritual of Earl Grey becomes a nautical emergency with bergamot-scented currents swirling, porcelain quivers, and a solitary tea leaf seems imperilled. The poem's 14-line, Shakespearean-sonnet-inspired rhyme pattern 'ABAB CDCD EFEF GG' gives the domestic drama an elegant formal frame before the fallen sugar cube brings the tempest to its comic close.

Kolkata-based poet, educator and trained classical singer, Ms. Nandini Mitra brings to the poem a sensibility shaped by literature, music and the close observation of everyday life. A postgraduate in English Literature from Jadavpur University, she has spent more than twenty-five years in education, combining accomplished teaching with institutional leadership. Her school's film, Web Wiring the World, on Assamese women's introduction to the internet, won second prize at the UN Secretariat. She has also performed regularly for All India Radio and Doordarshan.

Ms. Mitra is the author of The Road to Tranquility, The Echoes of Our Inner Sanctum and Emotions Wrapped in Words. Her work has appeared in Indian and international anthologies and e-magazines, and has been translated into several languages. In this poem, her literary polish meets a tea lover's intimate knowledge of aroma, colour and ceremony...an awareness enriched by her family's long association with the Indian tea industry. The result is a graceful reminder that even a spilled cup may contain an entire storm.

Poet's Preamble

"This poem is a playful exercise in mock-heroic verse. It deliberately recasts a minor domestic mishap - the making and spilling of a cup of Earl Grey as an immense, life-or-death storm at sea. By using the elevated diction, turbulence and grandeur of epic poetry to describe a teacup, a saucer and a sugar cube, it finds high drama in one of life's quietest, most familiar rituals".

A sudden wind begins to stir and shake,
As fragile clay contains a rising gale,
A tempest brews inside a miniature lake,
Where silver spoons and bergamot prevail.
The swirling amber currents of the deep,
Meet splashes of a milky white relief,
While anxious eyes their troubled vigils keep,
Above a single, drowning Earl Grey leaf.
A cracked and rattled saucer starts to give,
A grand disaster on a tray of dust,
The porcelain survivor tries to live,
Against the drama of the howling gust.
But with a napkin, everything is stopped,
The moment that a sugar cube is dropped.



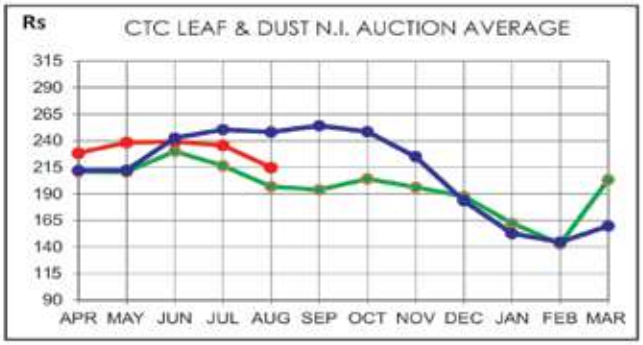
Nandini Mitra
Poet & Author

N. India Market Graphs April to August

North India - CTC Leaf & Dust

Months	2026/27	2025/26	26 vs 25	2024/25	26 vs 24
APR	228.33	211.10	17.23	211.91	16.42
MAY	238.35	210.52	27.84	212.11	26.24
JUN	239.06	230.03	9.03	242.39	-3.34
JUL	235.60	216.50	19.10	250.47	-14.88
AUG	214.63	196.78	17.86	248.17	-33.53
SEP		193.79		254.06	
OCT		204.03		248.46	
NOV		196.22		224.91	
DEC		187.60		183.59	
JAN		162.37		152.62	
FEB		142.95		144.69	
MAR		203.40		159.87	
April to August	230.57	212.29	18.27	240.79	-10.22

 # Dust : Excluding Orthodox Dust



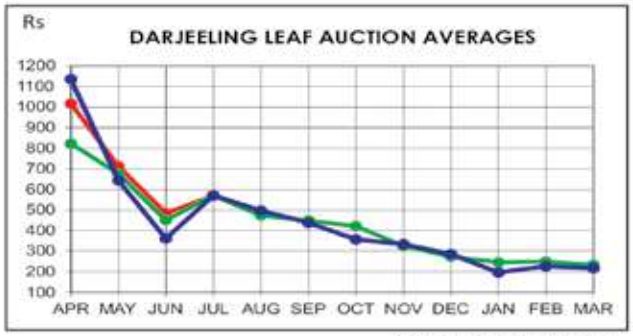


North India - Orthodox Leaf

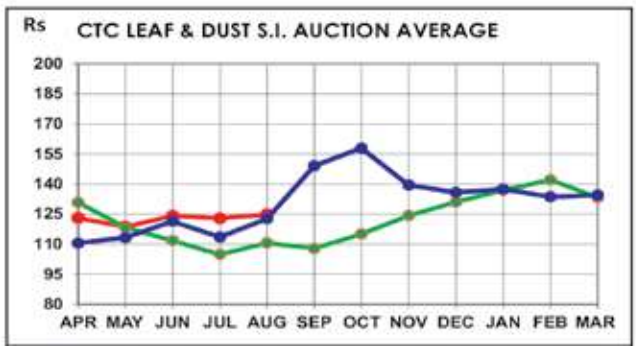
Months	2026/27	2025/26	26 vs 25	2024/25	26 vs 24
APR	316.28	311.30	4.98	303.93	12.35
MAY	330.42	311.79	18.63	287.69	42.73
JUN	323.64	297.24	26.40	299.80	23.84
JUL	325.10	299.77	25.33	304.22	20.88
AUG	293.15	301.03	-7.88	314.61	-21.46
SEP		277.10		332.59	
OCT		286.79		302.23	
NOV		279.66		279.92	
DEC		258.06		254.20	
JAN		225.00		225.13	
FEB		224.18		205.14	
MAR		202.08		205.08	
April to August	315.84	302.55	13.29	303.05	12.79

Darjeeling Leaf

Months	2026/27	2025/26	26 vs 25	2024/25	26 vs 24
APR	1017.78	822.49	195.29	1136.32	-118.54
MAY	711.94	676.24	35.70	643.20	68.74
JUN	484.59	450.20	34.39	361.23	123.36
JUL	568.79	570.74	-1.95	569.62	-0.84
AUG	477.75	473.40	4.35	496.89	-19.14
SEP		448.17		437.16	
OCT		420.75		356.69	
NOV		325.06		333.80	
DEC		273.01		285.33	
JAN		245.22		195.45	
FEB		248.61		226.14	
MAR		232.77		216.11	
April to August	571.48	535.86	35.62	503.74	67.74



*(*Subject to minor revision)*



South India - CTC Leaf & Dust

Months	2026/27	2025/26	26 vs 25	2024/25	26 vs 24
APR	123.01	130.71	-7.69	110.55	12.47
MAY	118.67	118.29	0.39	113.26	5.41
JUN	124.02	111.78	12.24	121.40	2.62
JUL	122.85	104.85	18.00	113.45	9.39
AUG	124.77	110.59	14.18	122.70	2.07
SEP		107.86		149.00	
OCT		115.04		157.80	
NOV		124.19		139.38	
DEC		130.96		135.77	
JAN		136.88		137.40	
FEB		142.06		133.58	
MAR		133.29		134.42	
April to August	122.78	113.84	8.91	116.96	5.79

 # Dust : Excluding Orthodox Dust

Month-wise District-wise Auction averages

CTC Leaf & Dust

Assam : Estate

Months	2026/27	2025/26	Diff (+/-)
APR	310.02	275.79	34.23
MAY	282.03	266.49	15.54
JUN	297.78	292.78	5.00
JUL	292.68	279.80	12.89
AUG	255.41	243.07	12.33
SEP		232.87	
OCT		244.22	
NOV		231.85	
DEC		211.41	
JAN		183.39	
FEB		165.04	
MAR		189.29	
April to August	282.76	269.11	13.65

Dooars & Terai : Estate

Month	2026/27	2025/26	Diff (+/-)
APR	271.74	257.10	14.64
MAY	271.92	243.14	28.78
JUN	267.89	265.72	2.17
JUL	244.71	241.23	3.48
AUG	219.62	211.95	7.66
SEP		201.43	
OCT		212.53	
NOV		216.71	
DEC		209.59	
JAN		200.87	
FEB		174.74	
MAR		315.29	
April to August	250.80	240.45	10.35

Cachar : Estate

Month	2026/27	2025/26	Diff (+/-)
APR	275.87	210.13	65.74
MAY	238.20	213.55	24.65
JUN	236.04	205.70	30.35
JUL	224.57	214.32	10.24
AUG	219.11	196.38	22.73
SEP		179.51	
OCT		187.87	
NOV		186.29	
DEC		185.74	
JAN		171.61	
FEB		165.56	
MAR		180.45	
April to August	229.05	206.43	22.62

Tripura : Estate

Month	2026/27	2025/26	Diff (+/-)
APR	269.34	237.77	31.57
MAY	203.48	179.93	23.55
JUN	197.21	171.48	25.72
JUL	189.56	161.86	27.69
AUG	178.57	155.09	23.48
SEP		140.61	
OCT		144.94	
NOV		163.78	
DEC		159.02	
JAN		142.53	
FEB		124.88	
MAR		127.31	
April to August	193.64	165.96	27.68

Assam : BLF

Month	2026/27	2025/26	Diff (+/-)
APR	228.19	187.11	41.08
MAY	214.48	177.69	36.80
JUN	222.70	197.15	25.55
JUL	217.42	189.66	27.75
AUG	201.38	170.77	30.61
SEP		161.86	
OCT		169.57	
NOV		163.97	
DEC		161.21	
JAN		144.41	
FEB		136.28	
MAR		131.28	
April to August	214.30	184.45	29.84

Dooars & Terai : BLF

Month	2026/27	2025/26	Diff (+/-)
APR	147.53	134.53	13.00
MAY	154.45	129.45	25.00
JUN	143.58	122.54	21.04
JUL	153.16	115.00	38.16
AUG	146.14	110.99	35.16
SEP		112.92	
OCT		122.32	
NOV		126.61	
DEC		130.57	
JAN		124.17	
FEB		121.55	
MAR		134.26	
April to August	148.93	119.95	28.98

Dust : Excluding Orthodox Dust

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GUARANTEE QUALITY GUARANTEE

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