Taiwanese Tea: The Oolong Country

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Taiwanese tea, in summary:** Taiwan is the world-class oolong country; gao shan from Lishan, Alishan, Shan Lin Xi, Dong Ding; Qing Xin cultivar gold-standard; bubble tea 1980s Taiwan.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in May 2026.

Taiwan produces some of the world's finest oolong tea, High Mountain Oolong, Tieguanyin (a different cultivar than the Anxi original), Bao Zhong, Oriental Beauty, Jin Xuan (Milk Oolong). The combination of mountain terroir, traditional processing, and modern quality control has made Taiwanese oolong a premium global category.

Taiwan's tea industry

Tea production in Taiwan dates to the 19th century. Taiwan's:

- Mountainous terrain (excellent terroir)
- Subtropical climate
- Strong tradition of small farm specialty production
- Modern quality control standards

These combine to produce exceptional oolong. The country also produces some black tea (Sun Moon Lake), small green tea production, and emerging specialty categories.

Major Taiwanese teas

High Mountain Oolong (Gao Shan)

Tea grown above 1,000 metres altitude. The cool mountain air, slow growth, and intense sunshine produce floral, refined cups. Premium category. £30-100+ per 100g.

Tieguanyin (Taiwanese)

Same name as Anxi, China original, but Taiwanese cultivar produces a different cup. Roastier, fuller bodied, more autumn leaning. Distinct from Chinese Tieguanyin.

Bao Zhong (Pouchong)

Lightest oolong style. Twisted leaves, very lightly oxidised. Almost green tea like. Floral, aromatic.

Oriental Beauty (Bai Hao Yin Zhen / Bai Hao Wulong)

Heavily oxidised oolong (60-70%). Distinctive, partially eaten by leafhopper insects whose bites trigger the plant's defensive response. Honey fruit flavour. Premium specialty.

Jin Xuan (Milk Oolong)

Specific cultivar with naturally creamy milky character (no actual milk added). Distinctive sweet character.

Da Yu Ling

One of the highest altitude tea regions globally (2,000-2,500m). Premium High Mountain Oolong. £80-300+ per 100g.

Alishan

Famous tea growing region. Premium High Mountain.

Lishan

Another premium high altitude region.

Sun Moon Lake (Ruby Black)

Taiwan's specialty black tea. Cultivar Taiwan Tea #18 (Ruby Red). Distinctive cinnamon mint flavour.

The terroir advantage

Taiwanese mountain tea benefits from:

- High altitude (slow growth, concentrated character)
- Cool foggy mornings (slow photosynthesis)
- Volcanic soils
- Subtropical sunshine
- Generations of accumulated processing skill

The combination produces oolong of exceptional aromatic complexity.

How Taiwanese oolong is made

1. Pluck (often hand picked at premium tier).
2. Wither outside under sunshine.
3. Wither inside.
4. Bruise the leaves (tossing in bamboo baskets).
5. Allow partial oxidation (10-70% depending on style).
6. Fix by heat (pan firing).

7. Roll into ball or twist shapes.
8. Dry; sometimes roast for darker variants.

What Taiwanese oolong tastes like

High Mountain Oolong (light)

Floral (often orchid like), slightly creamy, refined, long sweet finish. Premium grades have remarkable aromatic complexity.

Roasted Taiwanese oolong

Toasty, mineral, full bodied. Closer to black tea character.

Oriental Beauty

Honey, fruit (peach, apricot), distinct cinnamon hints. Distinctive, unlike anything else in tea.

Jin Xuan (Milk Oolong)

Naturally creamy, sweet, distinctive milk vanilla aromatic.

How to brew Taiwanese oolong

Gongfu brewing (recommended)

1. 5-7g leaves per 100ml gaiwan.
2. Water at 90-95°C.
3. Brief rinse infusion (5-10 seconds; pour out).
4. First infusion: 15-20 seconds.
5. Subsequent infusions: 20-30 seconds increasing.
6. Quality oolong yields 6-10 infusions.

Western brewing

1. 1 heaped tsp per 200ml.
2. Water at 90°C.
3. Steep 3-5 minutes.
4. Multiple infusions yield (2-3 typical).

Caffeine

30-50mg per 200ml cup. Standard oolong range.

Buying Taiwanese tea in the UK

- **Mei Leaf (London).** Strong Taiwanese selection.

- **Postcard Teas.** Smaller premium.
- **What Cha (online).** Wide Taiwanese range.
- **Direct Taiwan importers.** Some small UK importers.
- **Asian groceries.** Sometimes carry everyday Taiwanese oolongs.

The "Formosan" naming

Older European tea trade used "Formosan" (from "Formosa," the Portuguese name for Taiwan) for Taiwanese tea. The name persists in some specialty contexts but "Taiwanese" is now standard.

Storage

Light Taiwanese oolong (High Mountain, Bao Zhong) is more delicate, best within 12-18 months. Roasted darker oolongs are more stable, 2-3 years.

Cautions

- **Caffeine sensitivity.** Standard oolong range.
- **Iron absorption.** Tannins; drink between meals.
- **Pregnancy.** Within NHS caffeine limits.

FAQ

What's special about Taiwanese tea? High altitude mountain terroir + traditional processing + modern quality control = exceptional oolong.

Best Taiwanese tea for beginners? Tieguanyin (Taiwanese) or High Mountain Oolong. Distinctive without extreme premium pricing.

Caffeine? 30-50mg per cup standard.

Where to buy in UK? teas.co.uk, alongside trade friends like Mei Leaf, Postcard Teas and What Cha for specialty; some Asian groceries.

Is "Milk Oolong" real? Yes, Jin Xuan cultivar has naturally creamy character. No actual milk added.

Curator's note: Taiwan produces some of the world's finest tea. High Mountain Oolong is the gateway, once you've had real Lishan or Da Yu Ling brewed gongfu style, mainstream tea drinking shifts. Worth investing in. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

The essentials: Taiwanese tea

Aspect	The note
Specialism	World-class oolong; gao shan high-mountain premium
Premier regions	Lishan, Alishan, Shan Lin Xi, Dong Ding, Wenshan
Premier cultivar	Qing Xin; the Taiwanese gold-standard cultivar
Other cultivars	Jin Xuan (Milk), Cui Yu, Si Ji Chun, Hong Yu
Style range	Lightly-oxidised gao shan to heavily-roasted Dong Ding

Aspect	The note
Lao Cha	Aged Taiwanese oolong; rare and revered
Bubble tea origin	Taiwan 1980s; a global modern phenomenon
Buying signal	Named cultivar + named region + named elevation + harvest year

Worth picking up: the loose leaf range and worldwide teas.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

FROM THE CURATOR

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Taiwanese tea reading

Continue with oolong tea, Qing Xin cultivar, Formosa oolong, Dong Ding oolong, Alishan tea and bubble tea.

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