Black Tea by Origin: A Practical Map

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Black tea by origin, in summary:** Black tea by origin, a practical map: Assam and Darjeeling, Ceylon, Keemun and Yunnan, Kenya, what each tastes like and how to choose by origin not brand.

Our black tea guide covers the category; this page is the origin map it points to, because once you can taste origin you stop being dependent on brand names.

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

India: Assam and Darjeeling

Assam is the strong, malty, milk-friendly powerhouse from the Brahmaputra valley, the backbone of breakfast blends. Darjeeling is the light, floral, grapey Himalayan tea best drunk without milk, and it changes by season, see the four flushes. Two Indian teas that could not be more different, which is why the three-way comparison is worth reading.

Sri Lanka: Ceylon

Ceylon is bright, brisk and citrusy, with character that shifts by elevation: high-grown is delicate and lively, low-grown is darker and stronger. It is the great all-rounder and the best of the classic blacks for iced tea, covered in the Ceylon guide.

China: Keemun and Yunnan

Keemun, from Anhui, is the elegant one: smooth, lightly smoky, cocoa and stone-fruit notes, the traditional base of an English Breakfast in its original sense and a tea to drink without milk. Yunnan black (Dian Hong) is malty, sweet, peppery and gold-tipped, rich enough to enjoy alone. Chinese blacks are generally smoother and less brisk than Indian ones, a different idea of what black tea is.

Africa: Kenya

Kenyan black tea, mostly made by the brisk CTC method, is bold, brisk, colour-heavy and consistent. You rarely see it named because it is the unsung bulk of countless teabag blends, the reason your everyday brew is strong and quick. It is not glamorous, but it is clear, reliable strength and the workhorse of the British cuppa.

How to use this map

Choosing by origin instead of brand: want strong and milky, look for Assam or Kenyan-heavy blends. Want bright and versatile, Ceylon. Want smooth and milkless, Keemun or Yunnan. Want delicate and seasonal, Darjeeling by flush. Most supermarket "English Breakfast" is an Assam/Kenya/Ceylon blend tuned for strength and milk, which is why the breakfast blends page reads the way it does.

Why origin beats brand

Brand tells you a recipe and a price point; origin tells you what the tea will actually do in the cup, how strong, how it takes milk, whether it suits iced or afternoon drinking. Learn the half-dozen origins above and you can walk into any tea aisle, read the back of the pack, and predict the cup before you buy it. That is the whole point of the black tea guide this map supports.

Black tea by origin, at a glance

Origin	Character	Best for
Assam (India)	Strong, malty, milk-friendly	The backbone of breakfast blends
Darjeeling (India)	Light, floral, grapey, seasonal	Drunk without milk, by flush
Ceylon (Sri Lanka)	Bright, brisk, citrusy, elevation-driven	The all-rounder and best for iced
Keemun (China)	Smooth, lightly smoky, cocoa, stone-fruit	Milkless, the original English Breakfast base
Yunnan / Dian Hong (China)	Malty, sweet, peppery, gold-tipped	Rich enough to drink alone
Kenya	Bold, brisk, colour-heavy, CTC	The unsung workhorse of teabag blends

The format and grade layer the map does not show

Origin sets the character, but two more dials decide how much of that character you can taste. The first is manufacture: orthodox whole-leaf keeps the origin nuance and re-steeps, while CTC (crush, tear, curl) trades nuance for a fast, strong, colour-heavy cup that suits milk and a quick bag, which is why most supermarket blends taste of strength rather than place. The second is leaf grade: a fine fanning brews faster and harsher than the same leaf left whole, so a Ceylon in a teabag and the same Ceylon as loose orange pekoe can read very differently. Neither changes the origin signature; they change how loudly it speaks. Brew any origin at a full boil for three to four minutes with enough leaf and the place comes through.

Related on the wiki: Black Tea vs Coffee, Explained.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. A black tea you drink daily is worth more than a famous origin you keep for best.

Tea reading

- Black tea guide
- Darjeeling vs Assam vs Ceylon
- Black vs green tea, the practical difference

Quick take

Black tea makes more sense by origin than by brand: Assam is the strong milky powerhouse, Darjeeling the light seasonal one drunk black, Ceylon the bright all-rounder and best iced, Keemun the smooth milkless Chinese classic, Yunnan the malty gold-tipped sipper, Kenya the brisk CTC workhorse hidden in most teabags. Choose by what the cup should do, and you stop being dependent on the label. See the black tea pillar and the best British tea bags guide.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/