Tereré: Cold Yerba Mate

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tereré, cold yerba mate, in summary:** Tereré explained: cold-water yerba mate preparation, Paraguayan national drink, how to make it with citrus and herbs, UK starter guide.

Our yerba mate guide and the traditional hot method describe mate as a hot ritual. Tereré is the cold counterpart, and in Paraguay it is arguably the more important of the two.

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

What tereré is

Tereré is yerba mate prepared with cold or iced water instead of hot. It uses the same gourd and bombilla idea, often a wider cup and a sturdier bombilla, but everything about it is built for heat: it is refreshing, hydrating and social, the default daily drink through the fierce Paraguayan summer rather than a novelty.

How it differs from just "cold mate"

Two real differences. First, the water is genuinely iced, often kept in a thermos with the ice, and frequently infused with citrus, mint or medicinal herbs (*yuyos*) crushed into it; tereré is commonly a herb and citrus cold infusion, not just mate gone cold. Second, because the water is cold, extraction is gentler, so the bitterness that scalding water draws out of hot mate is largely absent. Tereré tends to taste cleaner and more thirst quenching than hot mate, which is exactly the point in 40-degree heat.

How to make it

Fill the cup with yerba as for hot mate. Prepare a jug of very cold water with ice, and if you like, muddle in lime or lemon and a handful of fresh mint. Pour a little over the yerba, insert the bombilla into the wet hollow, and drink it down, refilling from the iced jug and passing it on. The same do not stir the bombilla rule applies, see the gourd and bombilla guide. The herbs and citrus are not optional extras culturally; they are most of what makes tereré tereré. Cold water extracts slowly, so the first cup is mild and the gourd lasts longer than a hot session, comfortably 60-90 minutes across many refills.

Why it deserves to be better known here

In a British context tereré is a genuinely good answer to "what do I drink, caffeinated, in hot weather, that is not iced coffee or a soft drink". It is refreshing, naturally low in calories, gently energising and endlessly customisable with citrus and herbs. It sits alongside cold brew tea and iced tea as a hot weather option, delivering the same caffeine that makes mate functional in a format that works at 28C as well as at 8C.

In short: Tereré (cold yerba mate)

Field	Detail
What it is	Cold-water yerba mate preparation, predominantly Paraguayan, prepared with iced water rather than hot
Origin	Paraguay (national drink and cultural anchor); also widely drunk in Argentine and Brazilian summer
Equipment	Same gourd and bombilla as hot mate, plus a thermos or jug of iced water (sometimes with citrus or herbs added)
Cup character	Cool, refreshing, less bitter than hot mate; the citrus or herb additions give bright fresh top notes
Caffeine per session	70-150mg, same as hot mate
Cultural role	Paraguayan tereré is daily summer drink; tereré-pasting (gathering with friends to drink tereré) is core social practice in Paraguay
Best for	Hot summer days, post-exercise hydration, drinkers who want yerba mate's caffeine but find hot preparation too intense
UK starter cost	£20-£60 for gourd and bombilla; add £5-£15 for fresh herbs and citrus

Why Paraguay specifically

Paraguay is the spiritual home of tereré. The country's very hot summers make hot mate uncomfortable for much of the year, so tereré evolved as the dominant daily preparation, and tereré-pasting (gathering with friends to drink it) is a foundational social ritual: groups of friends, students, workers and families share a gourd in parks, on benches and at work. The national congress declared tereré an intangible cultural heritage in 2010. Argentine, Uruguayan and Brazilian drinkers also take it, mostly as a summer alternative to their dominant hot mate.

Herbs and citrus

Standard Paraguayan tereré uses fresh lemon or lime juice and crushed mint, sometimes coriander; traditional drinkers add local herbs (menta'i, burrito, cedrón) that are hard to find outside South America. For UK drinkers, ordinary supermarket mint and citrus work fine, the principle being "fresh, bright, complementary to the grassy yerba" rather than authenticity to specific herbs. Ginger, cucumber or rosemary all work too; the cold extraction is so gentle that off-balance combinations rarely turn bitter the way they would in hot brewing.

Tereré vs Western iced tea

UK and US iced tea usually means brewed-then-chilled black tea, often heavily sweetened. Tereré is structurally different: cold-water-extracted yerba mate drunk in continuous gourd-and-bombilla refills across a session. The caffeine is higher (70-150mg across a session vs 30-80mg a glass), the pattern is shared and continuous rather than individual, and the flavour stays grassy and citrus-fresh rather than sweet and tannic. For UK drinkers it offers something genuinely different rather than a yerba-mate version of what you already know.

Reference noted

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

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Tea reading

For the related hot preparation see the traditional gourd preparation. For the broader category see the what is yerba mate guide. For category context see the cold brew tea overview and the caffeine guide.

The bottom line on tereré

Cold yerba mate is one of the underrated daily-drinker discoveries available to UK tea explorers. Worth learning if you've adopted yerba mate or want to; tereré gives you the same caffeine and similar cup-evolution rhythm as hot mate but in a format that works in summer and after exercise. The herb-and-citrus additions are simple and forgiving. For Paraguayan cultural enthusiasts, tereré is the national drink; for UK drinkers, it's a useful summer alternative to iced tea that delivers meaningful caffeine without coffee.

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