Uncle Iroh: Fiction’s Most Beloved Tea Drinker

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Uncle Iroh and tea, in summary: A UK guide to Uncle Iroh: Avatar's retired general, the Jasmine Dragon tea shop, his jasmine and ginseng favourites, and why fiction shapes tea culture too.

Our Tea People section is not only history and founders; it is also the cultural figures who shape how people feel about tea. Few do it better than a fictional retired general.

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

Who he is

Uncle Iroh is a character from the animated series Avatar: The Last Airbender, a retired military general who, given the chance, would rather brew and serve tea than do almost anything else, and who eventually runs a tea shop. He is written as wise, warm, patient and quietly funny, and his love of a good cup is treated as a sign of character, not a quirk.

Why tea drinkers adopt him

Iroh resonates because he embodies the thing tea culture actually values and rarely articulates: that slowing down to make and share a hot drink properly is a serious, dignified act, not a waste of time. His most quoted lines treat tea as comfort, hospitality and presence. For a lot of people he is, only half jokingly, the patron saint of taking a tea break unapologetically, a modern, fictional echo of what Lu Yu argued in earnest twelve centuries ago.

The reality

He is a fictional character and we are not going to pretend he sourced an estate or invented a bag. The point of including him is real though: pop culture shapes how a nation feels about a drink at least as much as history does. Captain Picard is "tea, Earl Grey, hot", Mrs Doyle’s relentless pot, Arthur Dent’s doomed quest for a proper cup, and Iroh is the unflappable, generous heart of the genre. Those cultural touchstones are why people reach for the kettle in the first place.

What to take from him

Nothing to buy, nothing to brew differently. Just the reminder underneath this entire wiki: the cup is worth doing properly and worth sharing. If a cartoon general makes that land for someone in a way a brewing table does not, that is a perfectly good route to the same place. Then, when you are ready for the practical version, the brewing guide is waiting.

What you need to know: Uncle Iroh

Detail	Fact
Source	Avatar: The Last Airbender (Nickelodeon, 2005-2008)
Status	Fictional character
Profession	Retired Fire Nation general, later tea shop owner
Tea shop name	The Jasmine Dragon (Ba Sing Se)
Signature tea	Jasmine tea (also fond of ginseng)
Voice actor	Mako Iwamatsu (then Greg Baldwin)
Character archetype	Wise, warm, patient, quietly funny mentor
Cultural impact	Patron-saint-of-tea-breaks meme since c. 2010
Fan affection	One of the most universally loved animated characters

The Jasmine Dragon tea shop

The Jasmine Dragon is Iroh's tea shop, established in the Ba Sing Se Upper Ring in season 2 of the series. The shop is treated as a serious establishment with elevated tea-making standards; Iroh's reputation as a tea master is part of the plot machinery. The Jasmine Dragon has spawned real-world fan tributes including pop-up tea shops, fan-made menus, and cosplay events. The fictional shop's elevation of tea-making to a serious profession is part of what makes Iroh-as-tea-icon work; tea isn't a hobby for him, it's a vocation.

The "Leaves from the Vine" connection

The most emotionally resonant Iroh moment in Avatar is his episode-end performance of "Leaves from the Vine", a song he sings while making tea in memory of his deceased son Lu Ten. The song became one of the most beloved scenes in the series and is regularly cited as the most affecting moment in any animated children's show. It also crystallised the tea-as-grief, tea-as-memory, tea-as-comfort association in fan culture. Iroh isn't just patient and wise; he's a grieving father using tea-making as a meditative practice. This layer of depth is part of why Iroh transcends the "quirky old man" stereotype and resonates so strongly with adult viewers.

Iroh's most quoted tea lines

Several Iroh tea-related quotes have entered fan-culture vocabulary. "Sharing tea with a fascinating stranger is one of life's true delights" is the most quoted, often appearing on tea mugs, infusers, and Etsy embroidery. "Even a tea-novice like myself can appreciate the difference between fine, full-bodied tea and the dregs of dishwater" appears in the famous "Tales of Ba Sing Se" episode. "Life happens wherever you are, whether you make it or not" frames tea-making as practice for presence. The quotes work because they don't treat

tea as serious in a forbidding way; Iroh treats tea seriously in a warm, accessible way, which is much harder to write convincingly than serious-forbidding. The writing room behind Avatar deserves credit for sustaining this tone across 60+ episodes.

The historical Tang and Chinese tea echo

Avatar's creators drew explicitly from Chinese cultural references for the Fire Nation, Earth Kingdom, and tea-related material. Iroh's tea aesthetic reflects Tang-Song dynasty Chinese tea culture rather than modern Western or Japanese ceremonial tea; the Jasmine Dragon's decor, his clay teapots, his attention to specific tea varieties, and his discussion of brewing water all echo Lu Yu's Cha Jing tradition (see the Lu Yu page). The Iroh-as-cultural-icon phenomenon partly works because the character carries authentic Chinese tea-culture DNA that the show treated with research and respect, rather than generic "exotic East" pastiche.

The other fictional tea characters Iroh sits with

Iroh is part of a small constellation of fictional tea characters who shape tea-culture meaning: Captain Picard in Star Trek with his "Tea. Earl Grey. Hot" replicator order, Arthur Dent in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy with his doomed quest for a proper cup, Mrs Doyle in Father Ted with her relentless tea-pushing, Mrs Potts in Beauty and the Beast as an actual teapot. Each character makes tea legible in a particular cultural register; Iroh occupies the "tea as wisdom and hospitality" position uniquely. The fictional pantheon collectively does more cultural work than any historical tea figure outside Lu Yu in making tea seem worth caring about.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. A two-month-old supermarket bag still beats a three-year-old gift tin.

Tea reading

For the original tea philosopher Iroh distantly echoes see Lu Yu. For real founders making real tea see Thomas Twining, Thomas Lipton, the Pukka founders and the Teapigs founders. For jasmine tea context see the jasmine tea guide. For brewing properly (Iroh's implicit lesson) see water temperature and brewing loose leaf tea.

The bottom line on Uncle Iroh

Iroh is a fictional retired general from a children's animated show, and treating him as a tea-culture figure of substance is not a joke. The reason is that the show treats his tea love as a sign of wisdom, hospitality and

presence rather than as quirk or eccentricity, and this framing has done real cultural work in making tea-drinking culturally legible to a generation of viewers. Every "tea is worth doing properly and sharing" gesture in modern Western tea culture has Iroh-energy somewhere in it. The cup is worth doing well; if a cartoon general makes that land for a reader, that's a perfectly valid route to the same place.

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