Indian and Sri Lankan Tea: The Complete Map

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Indian and Sri Lankan tea, in summary:** Indian and Sri Lankan tea is several distinct characters, not one: malty Assam, delicate Darjeeling, bright Nilgiri, brisk Ceylon. Choose by character.

Most of what Britain actually drinks traces back to two countries: India and Sri Lanka. Three names do most of the work, Assam, Darjeeling and Ceylon, and once you can taste the difference between them you can read any tea packet and predict the cup. This hub connects every guide.

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

The three pillars

Start with the side by side: Darjeeling vs Assam vs Ceylon, the fastest way to understand the whole region. Then the individual guides: Assam (the strong, malty, milk-friendly powerhouse), Darjeeling (the light, floral, milkless one), and Ceylon (the bright, versatile all-rounder).

Going deep on Darjeeling

Darjeeling rewards depth because it is really four teas, not one. Read the four flushes of Darjeeling to understand why the season on the label matters as much as the estate, and Darjeeling muscatel explained for the single most misunderstood word in tea, and the strange insect story behind it.

The wider picture

To see where these sit among the world's black teas, including the Chinese and African ones that fill most teabags, read black tea by origin and the foundational black tea guide. For the everyday blends built on Assam and Ceylon, see English vs Irish breakfast.

Indian and Sri Lankan tea, at a glance

Region	Character
Assam (India)	Strong, malty, brisk; the classic milk-and-builder's base
Darjeeling (India)	Light, floral, "muscatel"; the delicate, often-no-milk one
Nilgiri (India)	Bright, fragrant, smooth; good hot and iced

Region	Character
Ceylon (Sri Lanka)	Bright, brisk, citrus-edged; versatile single-origin

The regions in a little more depth

Each region rewards going deeper because each has real internal variety that a single country, or even a single region name, hides. Darjeeling is the clearest case: its flushes differ enough to be almost separate teas, first flush the lightest and most floral, second flush rounder with the prized muscatel note, autumnal flush deeper still, which is why the season on the label matters as much as the estate. Assam has its own grades and a distinct second-flush season; Ceylon is split by elevation into low, medium and high grown, each brighter and more delicate as you climb; Nilgiri has its bright, fragrant frost-tea character. The upshot is the same across all of them: the regional label tells you the broad character, but the flush, grade or elevation tells you the actual cup, which is exactly why each has its own deep guide rather than a single line here.

How to use this hub

Want one strong daily cuppa with milk: Assam, or a breakfast blend. Want range and brightness, iced included: Ceylon. Want to slow down and taste something delicate without milk: Darjeeling, bought by flush. All four brew as sturdy blacks: a full rolling boil and a three to four minute steep, milk natural with Assam and Ceylon and optional with a fine Darjeeling, which many drink clean. The links above take you from this overview to the full detail on each; the comparison is the best single starting point.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · For Assam, Ceylon and Darjeeling alike, count what a cup costs. A good loose leaf Assam normally wins, though supermarket bags occasionally do.

Tea reading

- Assam tea
- Darjeeling tea
- Ceylon tea
- Black tea

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/