Dilmah: The Ceylon Tea Brand That Owns Its Story

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Dilmah, in summary:** Dilmah, founded 1988 by Merrill J. Fernando: producer-owned single-origin Ceylon, ethics built into the company structure rather than bolted on.

Dilmah stands out because it is built on an idea as much as a product: that the country that grows the tea should profit from it. You can buy the range now on the Dilmah shop page; this is the story behind it, and it pairs with our Ceylon tea guide and the black tea by origin map.

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

The founding idea

Dilmah was founded in 1988 by Merrill J. Fernando, a Sri Lankan tea taster who spent decades arguing that the value of Ceylon tea was being extracted by multinationals while the growing country saw little of it. Dilmah was created as a producer-owned brand: grown, picked, blended and packed at origin in Sri Lanka rather than shipped out as a commodity and branded elsewhere. The name itself comes from his sons, Dilhan and Malik. Among mainstream tea brands, Dilmah is one of the few whose ethical story was the starting point rather than a marketing addition.

Single-origin Ceylon

Dilmah is unapologetically single-origin: pure Ceylon tea rather than a multi-country blend tuned for cost. That matters because Ceylon has a real, identifiable character, brisk, bright, citrus-edged, that changes with elevation, all covered in our Ceylon guide. Its Watte range presents four Ceylon altitude levels side by side and is the single clearest demonstration of how elevation changes the cup. A single-origin brand lets that character show rather than blending it into anonymity, which is the opposite of the commodity-blend model and the whole point of the founding argument.

What they make

The range runs from pure Ceylon black and Earl Grey to green, flavoured and the premium t-Series. The Ceylon black and the loose-leaf green are the truest expressions of what the brand is for; the flavoured lines are competent but the single-origin purity is the reason to choose Dilmah specifically. Browse the stocked range on the Dilmah shop page and use the black tea and green tea guides to choose by style.

Ethics as structure, not slogan

Dilmah built charitable and environmental commitments into the company structure through the MJF Charitable Foundation and conservation work, funded by the business rather than bolted on. As with the certification stories in Pukka organic and B Corp and Clipper Fairtrade, the sensible reading is that Dilmah's ethics are part of how the company is run rather than greenwash, and that is a fair reason to choose the brand if it matters to you.

How to brew it

Treat Dilmah Ceylon black as the brisk black tea it is: fully boiling water, a real three to four minute steep, milk optional, see the water temperature guide. The loose-leaf green wants water off the boil and a short steep, per how to brew green tea. High-grown Ceylon is bright enough to enjoy without milk, which is part of its appeal.

Who it is for

Dilmah is for the drinker who wants clear single-origin Ceylon and cares that the growing country profits, rather than the cheapest possible blend. It is not a delicate connoisseur's tea nor a bargain everyday filler; it is dependable, characterful, ethically coherent Ceylon, and the Darjeeling vs Assam vs Ceylon comparison shows exactly where that character sits.

The founding story, in one place

Aspect	Dilmah
Founder / year	Merrill J. Fernando, 1988; a Sri Lankan tea taster
The argument	Ceylon tea's value was extracted by multinationals while the growing country saw little
The answer	a producer-owned brand: grown, picked, blended and packed at origin
The name	from his sons Dilhan and Malik
Ethics	MJF Charitable Foundation and conservation built into the company, business-funded

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · One small stash of dependable Dilmah Ceylons beats a big shelf of curiosities. Rotate two or three of them that you enjoy.

Tea reading

- Dilmah (the main guide)
- Ceylon tea guide
- Best tea brands UK
- black tea reference

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
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