Nilgiri Tea: India's Blue Mountains

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Nilgiri tea, in summary:** Nilgiri is the third great Indian black-tea region, brisk and fragrant from the Blue Mountains, often the unsung blender behind British breakfast blends.

Nilgiri, the Blue Mountains of southern India, is the country's third great black tea region after Assam and Darjeeling, and the most underrated. This region guide sits within the growing regions cluster and the black tea by origin map.

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

The Blue Mountains

Nilgiri is grown at high elevation in the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu, in a mild climate that allows year round plucking. The result is a brisk, bright, smooth, fragrant black tea with a distinctive aromatic, slightly fruity floral character and a clean finish, less malty than Assam, less floral delicate than Darjeeling, a bright middle path.

Frost tea, the rare speciality

Nilgiri's most prized speciality is winter frost tea, picked in the coldest months (typically December to February) when night temperatures in the Blue Mountains drop close to freezing. The slow, cold-stressed growth concentrates aromatic compounds and amino acids, producing an intensely smooth, sweeter, more floral cup that nudges toward a high-grade Darjeeling first flush while keeping its own brisk Nilgiri backbone. Volume is small and it carries a premium, but it is a real seasonal rarity, the Nilgiri equivalent of the prized flushes elsewhere, the same season defines peak idea as Darjeeling's flushes. Across the rest of the year, first-flush spring gives the brightest cup and the summer pickings the brisk, fragrant everyday body.

Why you have probably drunk it without knowing

Like Kenyan tea, much Nilgiri is brisk and consistent enough to be bought for blends and iced tea bases rather than sold under its own name, and it is especially valued for iced tea because it stays clear rather than clouding. So you have likely had Nilgiri in a blend or an iced tea without ever seeing the word.

How it compares

Set beside its neighbours: Assam is the malty powerhouse, Darjeeling the floral aristocrat, Ceylon the bright all-rounder, and Nilgiri the fragrant, smooth, dependable one that is excellent iced. It is less malty and broad than Assam, less floral and muscatel than Darjeeling, and very close in character to a high-grown Ceylon such as Nuwara Eliya, unsurprising given the shared high-elevation profile. The full three-way is in Darjeeling vs Assam vs Ceylon; Nilgiri is the fourth name worth adding to that mental map.

How to brew it

Nilgiri takes fully boiling water (95 to 100C) and a normal three to four minute black tea steep, and it is one of the best Indian blacks for iced tea because its briskness holds up under dilution and it stays clear rather than clouding, see the iced tea recipes and the water temperature guide. It drinks well neat or with the smallest splash of milk; over-milking it the way you might an Assam muddies its bright, fragrant character. Frost tea is best without milk to taste what makes it special.

Nilgiri tea, the Blue Mountains region at a glance

Element	Note
Location	Nilgiri Hills, Western Ghats, southern India (Tamil Nadu)
Elevation	1,000-2,500m; cool, misty year-round
Best-known speciality	Frost tea (winter-pluck), rare and prized
Rank in India	Third behind Assam and Darjeeling by volume
Character	Brisk, bright, fragrant, less malty than Assam, less floral than Darjeeling
Use in UK	Often the unsung blender behind English Breakfast and supermarket bag blends
Best with	Drunk neat or with a splash of milk; takes iced brewing well
Single-origin worth	Yes; first flush spring and frost teas are true specialities

The bottom line on Nilgiri

Reduced to one paragraph: Nilgiri is the third great black-tea region of India after Assam and Darjeeling, grown high in the Blue Mountains of Tamil Nadu, producing a brisk, bright, fragrant cup that drinks well neat or with a small splash of milk. Most British drinkers have unknowingly drunk Nilgiri as the unsung blending base behind their everyday breakfast blend, and seeking out a single origin spring or rare frost tea Nilgiri is well worth the small premium for anyone curious about the region. Source Nilgiri from the black tea range or the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

If this piece pointed you somewhere, these are the obvious places to land: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. More in the tea shop; Nilgiri baskets over £35 ship free in the UK.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · A Nilgiri pouch is judged best by its price per cup. Loose Nilgiri usually wins; supermarket bags, often Nilgiri inside, sometimes do too.

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