Why Does Tea Taste Different in Different Places?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Regional tea taste differences, in summary:** Why your tea tastes different on holiday or in different UK regions: water hardness, brand variation, equipment, milk, and memory effects.

Many people quietly notice that the same tea tastes noticeably different at home, at work, at a relative's house or on holiday, and assume they are imagining it. They are not, and the explanation is almost always one thing: the water. This sits in our questions cluster with the water and brewing guide.

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

Water is most of the cup

A cup of tea is over ninety eight per cent water, so the mineral content of that water has an outsized effect on flavour, far more than people expect. The same leaf, brewed identically, tastes different in soft Scottish water and hard southern English water. This is not a perception quirk; it is chemistry, and it is the single biggest reason "the tea tastes different here".

Hard water versus soft water

Hard water, high in calcium and magnesium, reacts with the compounds in tea, muting brightness and flavour and producing the thin film, the scum, on the surface, the detail in the hard water scum page. Soft water lets the same tea taste cleaner, brighter and livelier. The regional gap is large: London tap water typically runs 250 to 300 mg/L calcium carbonate while Scottish Highland water can be below 50, so a brand that tastes flat in a hard water area can taste noticeably better in a soft one, and people moving between regions notice immediately.

Why some brands are blended for this

This effect is real enough that some brands blend specifically for it, the clearest example being Yorkshire Tea Hard Water, engineered to deliver a full cup in mineral heavy water where the standard blend tastes flat. The existence of a whole product line for this is the strongest possible evidence that water, not imagination, is the variable.

The other variables

Water is the big one, but not the only one. Different kettles, fresh versus repeatedly re boiled water (which tastes flatter as oxygen is driven off), the type and cleanliness of the pot or mug, and even altitude on holiday (water boils cooler higher up, so black tea under extracts) all shift the cup. Each is covered in the brewing guide; together they explain almost every "why does it taste different" case.

What to do about it

If your tea tastes flat where you live, a simple jug water filter is the cheapest, highest impact fix in hard water areas, often more noticeable than changing brand. Failing that, a blend tuned for hard water, fresh water each time rather than re boiling, and a properly hot brew recover most of the difference, the practical throughline of this cluster: suspect the water and the brew before the tea.

Bottom line

You are not imagining it. The same tea really does taste different from place to place, mostly because of water hardness, with kettle, freshness and altitude as supporting factors. It is chemistry, it is well understood, and in a hard water area a filter fixes more of it than any change of brand, which is one of the most useful and least known facts in everyday tea.

Quick reference: Why tea tastes different in different places

Variable	What it does to the cup
Water hardness	Calcium binds polyphenols and suppresses aromatic notes; hard water gives flatter, less aromatic cup
Water mineral content	Different minerals affect extraction differently; chlorinated water tastes different from non-chlorinated
Kettle scale	Limescale buildup affects water taste and slows heating; descaled kettles brew differently
Altitude	Boiling point drops above 1500m; tea brews cooler at altitude and extracts less
Brand reformulation	Major brands shift blends gradually; the same brand tastes slightly different across decades
Milk fat content	Whole vs semi-skimmed vs skimmed dramatically changes the cup's mouthfeel
Your palate that day	Recent food, illness, stress, time of day all affect taste perception
Memory and expectation	Tea in familiar setting tastes better than tea in unfamiliar; the Proust effect amplifies childhood-encoded flavours

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Wherever you are, one pot of good loose leaf outdoes five exotic bags rushed.

More tea reading

For water effects in detail see the water for tea guide and the tea scum and hard water page. For specific brand variants see Yorkshire Tea for Hard Water. For palate changes see why did my parents' tea taste better. For broader category context see the black tea fundamentals.

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

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