

# Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

**Japanese tea history, in summary:** A UK guide to Japanese tea history: Buddhist monastic origins, Eisai and matcha, Sen no Rikyu and chanoyu, modern tea types.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/>*

Japan received tea from China and turned it into something distinctive: a spiritual and aesthetic discipline centred on matcha and the tea ceremony. This sits in the history cluster beside [tea in China](#).

*Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.*

## Arrival via Buddhism

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Arrival via Buddhism, Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/>*

Tea came to Japan with Buddhist monks returning from China, used initially to aid meditation, an origin that shaped its later spiritual character.

## Eisai and matcha

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Eisai and matcha, Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/>*

The monk Eisai promoted whisked powdered tea (the matcha lineage) and its benefits, embedding tea in Zen practice, see [what is matcha](#).

## The way of tea

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The way of tea, Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/>*

Over centuries Japan developed chanoyu, the tea ceremony, refined by figures like Sen no Rikyu into an art of hospitality, simplicity and presence, not just a drink, see [the Japanese tea ceremony](#).

## Aesthetics and philosophy

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Aesthetics and philosophy, Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/>*

Concepts of wabi sabi, restraint and mindful attention run through Japanese tea, making it a cultural and philosophical practice distinct from Chinese tea culture.

## Japanese tea types

Japan specialised in steamed green teas, sencha, gyokuro, matcha, houjicha, with shading and processing techniques behind their umami character, see [umami in tea](#).

## Modern legacy

The ceremony endures, and matcha has become a global phenomenon, carrying Japanese tea culture far beyond Japan, see [matcha vs green tea](#).

## Bottom line

Japan took Chinese tea and made it a spiritual art, monks, matcha, Zen and the ceremony, a culture as much as a drink, see [the history of tea](#).

## Quick reference: Tea in Japan

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Period	What happened
9th century	Buddhist monks (Saicho, Kukai) bring Chinese tea seeds and powdered tea practice to Japan
12th century (1191)	Eisai reintroduces tea seeds from China; writes Kissa Yojoki promoting tea for health and longevity
15th-16th centuries	Sen no Rikyu develops chanoyu (the formal tea ceremony) reaching its mature form under daimyo patronage
Edo period (1603-1868)	Sencha (loose-leaf brewed tea) develops alongside matcha; tea drinking spreads beyond elite samurai class
Modern era	Japan develops distinctive shade-growing techniques producing gyokuro and matcha at industrial scale; sencha becomes the dominant Japanese daily tea

Period	What happened
Major Japanese tea types	Matcha (powdered shade-grown), gyokuro (shade-grown loose-leaf), sencha (everyday loose-leaf), genmaicha (with roasted rice), hojicha (roasted)
Cultural role	Tea ceremony (chanoyu) is one of the most formalised cultural arts in any tea-drinking country

## Taste Japanese tea

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Taste Japanese tea, Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/*

To explore Japanese tea, try [ceremonial matcha](#), everyday [sencha](#), shade-grown [gyokuro](#) for umami, or roasted [hojicha](#) and nutty [genmaicha](#). Browse the wider [green tea range](#) or the full [tea shop](#).

## Reference noted

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Reference noted, Tea in Japan: From Monks to the Tea Ceremony. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-in-japan-history/*

- [Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea \(history\)](#)

**FROM THE CURATOR** *teas* · If a tea on this page sounds appealing, just try it once. You learn more in one cup than in twenty articles.

## More tea history reading

For specific Japanese teas see [what is matcha](#), the [sencha guide](#) and [umami in tea](#). For Chinese roots see [tea in China](#). For ceremony context see [tea ceremonies around the world](#). For green tea fundamentals see the [green tea overview](#).

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