

What Is a Tea Sommelier?

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

The short version: A UK guide to tea sommeliers: certified specialists in hospitality and retail. UK Tea Academy training, what they do, sommelier vs tea master.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/>*

"Tea sommelier" sounds grand and has a real, definable meaning. This sits in the tea people cluster beside [Jane Pettigrew](#).

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

Information based on public sources, accurate as of May 2026. Training-body details and salaries change; check current providers for the latest.

Tea sommelier at a glance

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Tea sommelier at a glance, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/>*

Detail	Fact
Definition	Certified tea specialist; tea equivalent of wine sommelier
Working in	Hospitality, retail, consultancy, tea trade buying
Major training body (US)	The International Tea Masters Association (ITMA)
Major training body (Canada)	Tea and Herbal Association of Canada (THAC) - TAC Tea Sommelier Programme
UK training	UK Tea Academy (London-based, sommelier diploma)
European training	Tea Sommelier Academy Hamburg, France's ITC, others
Typical training duration	6 months to 2 years across multiple modules
Core curriculum	Classification, processing, origins, brewing, sensory, pairing
Career applications	Hotels, restaurants, tea shops, brand consulting, supply chain
Salary range	GBP 25-50k+ depending on role and seniority

The definition, and why the role exists

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The definition, and why the role exists, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/*

A tea sommelier is a professionally trained tea specialist who sources, evaluates, brews and pairs tea, the tea equivalent of a wine sommelier, usually through formal courses and certification. The role exists for the same structural reason: a complex beverage category needs trained people to handle it at professional level. Premium hospitality (luxury hotels, fine dining, high-end tea retail) generates real demand for expertise beyond casual brewing, and the certification gives employers a verifiable competency standard. It is genuine professional development with labour-market demand, not status inflation: UK hotels like Claridge's, the Savoy and the Connaught, and retailers like Fortnum and Mason, employ qualified tea specialists.

What they actually do

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The work spans several settings. In hospitality, a tea sommelier curates the tea menu, trains wait staff in brewing standards (water temperature, leaf measurement, timing, service), runs food pairings for tasting menus, and fields customer questions. In retail, they source and evaluate tea, decide the range, train shop staff and advise customers. In consultancy, they design tea menus for hotel groups and brands; and in the supply chain, they evaluate tea for buying decisions at trade level. The common thread is professional-grade tea expertise applied commercially. See [tea and food pairing](#).

Training programmes

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Training programmes, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/*

Several established programmes operate worldwide, and most cover the same core: classification (the six types), processing (oxidation, withering, firing), origins, brewing (water, temperature, time, ratio), sensory evaluation (cupping) and pairing. The Tea and Herbal Association of Canada's Tea Sommelier programme is widely respected; the International Tea Masters Association runs US-based training; and in the UK the London-based UK Tea Academy offers a Tea Sommelier Diploma that is the accepted UK standard, with graduates working in major London hotels and premium retailers. Courses run from around six months to two years, varying in assessment but converging on similar competencies. See [the tasting guide](#).

Sommelier versus tea master

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Sommelier versus tea master, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/*

The two terms are not interchangeable. Tea sommelier usually implies formal modern certification through a programme like the UK Tea Academy, THAC or ITMA. Tea master is older terminology, used loosely in the West but with specific meaning in East Asian traditions: the Chinese tea-master path involves years of

apprenticeship, and the Japanese sense implies chanoyu ceremonial expertise certified through a teacher-student lineage. A modern sommelier may have chemistry-and-processing knowledge a traditional master never studied; a traditional master may have ceremonial depth no Western certification covers. Both are legitimate, but they name different things. See [the tea ceremony](#).

Is the certification worth it?

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Is the certification worth it?, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/>*

For hospitality and trade professionals, the certification is genuinely worth it: it provides a verifiable competency standard that helps with career progression and opens specific roles, hotel tea service, premium retail buying, brand consultancy, that often require a formal credential. For a serious hobbyist, it is not strictly necessary, since the same underlying knowledge is available through books (Tony Gebely, Jane Pettigrew), online resources and self-directed tasting practice. The certification is valuable as a professional qualification; the knowledge behind it is reachable other ways. See [best tea books](#).

The afternoon-tea application

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The afternoon-tea application, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/>*

The single biggest professional application in the UK is hotel afternoon-tea service. Premium London hotels, Claridge's, the Savoy, the Ritz, the Connaught, the Dorchester and others, run dedicated afternoon-tea programmes at around GBP 75 to 200 a head, and each needs sommelier-level expertise to justify the price: a curated menu of fifteen to thirty teas, brewing standards consistent across hundreds of daily covers, trained staff, and food pairing across the three stages of the service. Without that expertise the service drifts into a generic tea-bag operation that cannot support premium pricing, which is exactly why hotel groups value the credential.

What to buy to taste at sommelier level

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What to buy to taste at sommelier level, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/>*

For single-origin tea buy [single-origin loose-leaf](#), [Darjeeling single-estate](#) or [Ceylon single-estate](#). For premium Japanese tea buy [gyokuro](#) or [premium sencha](#). For premium Chinese tea buy [Longjing](#), [oolong](#) or [aged Pu-erh](#). For the kit to apply the technique buy a [gaiwan](#) or a [tea-tasting set](#).

Reference noted

- [EFSA: Scientific opinion on dietary reference values for water](#)

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FROM THE CURATOR teas · Take the simplest thing on this page that fits your routine. Range and ritual are for week two.

More tea reading

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for More tea reading, What Is a Tea Sommelier?. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-a-tea-sommelier/*

For the tasting framework see [the tea tasting guide](#). For comparable tea-people figures see [Jane Pettigrew](#), [Tony Gebely](#) and [Tim d'Offay](#). For traditional ceremony context see [the Japanese tea ceremony](#). For pairing see [the tea pairing chart](#). For education books see [the best tea books](#).

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- [Oolong tea](#)
- [White tea](#)
- [Herbal tea](#)
- [Caffeine in tea](#)
- [How to make tea properly](#)
- [Loose leaf vs teabag](#)

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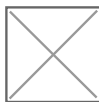
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