

# Tea Tariffs Explained

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

**The short version:** On tea tariffs: import taxes shift sourcing, with modest consumer impact, while climate matters more. The mechanism, recent moves and the UK scheme, explained.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/>*

Trade policy quietly shapes what tea costs and where it flows. This sits in the climate and cost cluster beside [why tea costs more](#).

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

*Market and climate information based on public reporting, accurate as of May 2026; figures are estimates and change. Not financial advice.*

## Tea tariffs at a glance

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Tea tariffs at a glance, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/>*

| Detail                            | Fact   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| What a tariff is                  | Import tax raising landed cost of affected tea   |
| Effect on sourcing                | Shifts buying toward lower-tariff origins  |
| UK current tariffs on tea         | Generally low for most major tea sources post-Brexit                                   |
| UK developing-country preferences | Reduced tariffs for Kenya, Sri Lanka, others under Developing Countries Trading Scheme |
| US tariff changes 2024-2025       | New tariff measures from 1 September 2024 created cost uncertainty                     |
| EU tariff structure               | Generally low; preferences for ACP countries (Africa-Caribbean-Pacific)                |
| India tariff position             | Producer-country; tariff policy aimed at domestic market protection                    |
| China tariff exposure             | Variable; Chinese tea in US faces specific tariff layers                               |
| Tariff vs commodity-cost effect   | Tariffs typically smaller effect than climate-driven cost movements                    |
| Consumer-level lag                | Tariff changes appear in retail prices 3-12 months later                               |

## What a tariff does

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What a tariff does, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/>*

A tariff is an import tax: a tariff of X% means importers pay X% more at customs, and that cost flows through wholesale and retail until the drinker pays a little more. The strategic effect is bigger than the price effect, though, because tariffs shift buying toward lower-tariff origins and so reshape global tea flows. Tea is a relatively low-tariff commodity worldwide, typically in the 0 to 10% range into most markets, so specific policy changes move sourcing more than they move shelf prices.

## How tariffs reshape global flows

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How tariffs reshape global flows, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/>*

The real action is in flow patterns rather than absolute prices. When US tariffs on Chinese tea rose across 2018 to 2024, US blenders shifted toward Indian, Kenyan and Sri Lankan leaf for the displaced volume. When the UK gives Kenyan tea preferential access, UK blenders lean Kenyan. So producer countries effectively compete for different export markets depending on their relative tariff position, and the same Indian tea can be more competitive in the EU than the US at different times. For UK drinkers, the post-Brexit environment broadly favours Kenyan and Sri Lankan sourcing, part of why English Breakfast blends increasingly emphasise Kenyan composition. See [supply pressures](#).

## Why they matter less than people think

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Why they matter less than people think, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/>*

Tariffs get trade-press attention but usually move consumer prices less than people assume. Current levels on most tea into most markets are low, so even a big percentage change produces a modest absolute change, and climate-driven supply costs and packaging inflation typically swamp it. The trade-friction costs (delays, paperwork, regulatory burden) can matter more than the headline rate. The big exception is the US-China tea trade, where stacked tariff layers can exceed 25%, but that is geographically and politically specific. For UK consumers, tariffs are real but minor next to climate and inflation. See [brand pressures](#).

## The UK Developing Countries Trading Scheme

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The UK Developing Countries Trading Scheme, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/>*

The most relevant UK detail is the post-Brexit Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS), which gives reduced or zero tariffs to tea from developing countries including Kenya, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It cuts the cost of sourcing from those origins, which is part of why UK English Breakfast blends lean increasingly Kenyan and why Yorkshire Tea and Tetley, both heavily Kenyan-sourced, keep a price advantage. Indian tea, by contrast, faces standard rates rather than DCTS preferences, so origin-blends that cannot shift

toward DCTS-favoured sources feel more cost pressure.

## What to do

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What to do, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/*

The practical response is mostly nothing reactive, because tariff effects are gradual and small next to other pressures. Expect blends to keep adjusting country-of-origin composition over time, so the Yorkshire Tea or PG Tips of today may not match the sourcing of five years ago. Buy on per-cup value rather than country-of-origin loyalty, since tea is largely fungible at most price points, and favour transparent brands that hold relationships across several origins, as they ride single-country tariff shocks better. See [sustainable buying](#).

## What to buy

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What to buy, Tea Tariffs Explained. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-tariffs-explained/*

For brands with diversified multi-country sourcing that absorb tariff swings buy [Twinings](#), [Yorkshire Tea](#), [PG Tips](#) or [Tetley](#). For DCTS-favoured origins buy [English Breakfast blends](#) or [Ceylon tea](#). For Fairtrade direct sourcing (typically less tariff-affected) buy [Fairtrade tea](#).

## Reference noted

- [Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea \(cultivation and trade\)](#)

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## More tea reading

For the broader cost picture see [why is tea getting more expensive](#). For climate context see [climate change and tea](#) and [tea and drought](#). For the shortage question see [will there be a tea shortage](#). For specific origins see [Kenya tea](#) and [Ceylon tea](#). For sustainable sourcing see [is tea sustainable](#).

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