# How Tea Customs Differ Around the World

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How tea customs differ around the world, in summary:** A UK guide to global tea customs: Turkish glasses, Moroccan mint, Indian chai, Japanese ceremony, Hong Kong milk tea. One leaf, a hundred customs.

"A cup of tea" means something completely different depending where you are standing. This sits at the centre of the world tea culture cluster beside Persian tea culture.

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

## What you need to know: how tea customs differ globally

| Region/style | Tea custom |
|---|---|
| Britain | English Breakfast, milk and sugar to taste, mug, frequent |
| Turkey | Strong black, no milk, sugar, tulip glasses, çaydanl?k double-pot, all day |
| Iran (Persian) | Strong black, no milk, with sugar cube held in teeth, samovar tradition |
| Morocco/North Africa | Gunpowder green with mint and sugar, poured from height into glasses, three-glass ceremony |
| Senegal/Mauritania (Attaya) | Three rounds of green mint tea, each progressively sweeter, a social custom |
| India/Pakistan | Masala chai (spiced black with milk, simmered), street-vendor staple, several daily |
| China | Gongfu cha (multiple short infusions of premium loose-leaf), aesthetic, scholarly |
| Japan | Chanoyu (formal ceremony with matcha), discipline, spiritual focus |
| Hong Kong | Strong black with evaporated/condensed milk; cafe staple ("yuanyang" if mixed with coffee) |
| Russia | Samovar tradition; tea concentrate diluted with hot water; with lemon and jam |
| United States | Mostly iced tea (sweetened South, unsweetened elsewhere); hot tea minority |
| Tibet | Butter tea (po cha): black tea, yak butter, salt, churned for highland calories |

## The five families of tea ritual

Behind the dozen entries in the table sit a handful of repeating families. The strong-glass-tea belt runs across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Yemen and Central Asia: strong black brewed long, served in small clear glasses with sugar and no milk, offered constantly as hospitality, and it produces the world's heaviest consumption (Turkey leads at about 3.5kg a head a year), see Turkish and Persian tea culture. The mint-and-sugar tradition of North and West Africa brews Chinese gunpowder green strong with fresh mint and plenty of sugar, poured from a height to aerate it into a foam, often as a three-glass ceremony, "the first bitter as life, the second strong as love, the third gentle as death", see Senegalese attaya. South Asia simmers masala chai, black tea boiled together with milk, sugar and spice rather than steeped then dressed, a street-vendor and home staple drunk several times a day, see Pakistani chai and Indian tea culture. East Asia keeps the refined craft traditions, Japanese chanoyu with whisked matcha and structured choreography, and Chinese gongfu cha with multiple short infusions of premium leaf in tiny vessels, see Japanese and Chinese tea culture. And the cafe condensed-milk style of Hong Kong brews a strong Ceylon blend with evaporated or condensed milk, the cha chaan teng staple, with the coffee-and-milk-tea "yuanyang" as its famous variant, see Hong Kong milk tea.

### Why the map matters

The variation is not superficial: the same plant produces very different drinks, vessels, sweetness, milk and etiquette, while the one constant everywhere is hospitality, tea as the thing you offer a guest. Knowing the map helps in three plain ways: it makes travel smoother, since you will be offered tea in many countries and knowing what is coming eases social friction (a refusal can read as unfriendly in the glass tea belt); it is a quick read on how a culture handles welcome and contemplation; and it corrects the parochial assumption that tea is X, because X depends entirely on where you are standing, see American tea culture and British tea culture.

### What to buy

Taste the map: a sturdy English Breakfast for the British and glass-tea styles, gunpowder green with mint for North Africa, a masala chai for South Asia, and matcha or a premium oolong for the East Asian craft traditions. Browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery over £35.

**FROM THE CURATOR**

*teas* · £35 is two or three good bags, and from there UK delivery is free. Put together a small mixed order, not one extravagant buy.

### Tea-culture reading

- Turkish tea culture
- Indian tea culture
- Japanese tea culture

- Hong Kong milk tea

### More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
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