International Tea Day, Explained

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **International Tea Day, in summary:** International Tea Day is 21 May, designated by the UN to recognise tea's economic and cultural role for producing countries and workers, not a sales event.

International Tea Day is the global, UN-backed counterpart to the UK's own day. In the tea calendar pages, its counterpart is National Tea Day UK.

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

International Tea Day, at a glance

Question	The answer
When	21 May, the UN-designated International Tea Day
Why	UN recognition of tea's economic and cultural role for producing countries
Earlier date	An earlier 15 December date, producer-led, predates the UN one
vs UK day	Different from the informal UK "tea day"; international not national
What it is for	Awareness of tea workers and sustainable production, not a marketing event

Why the UN created it, and the two dates

The detail most mentions skip is that there are two International Tea Days. The original was a producer-led observance on 15 December, launched in the early 2000s by tea-producing countries and trade-union and civil-society groups to draw attention to the conditions of tea workers and the economics of smallholder production. The one most people now mean is 21 May, formally designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2019, which gave the occasion official global standing through the FAO. The UN date exists because tea is not just a drink but a livelihood for millions, a major export and employment crop for several developing economies, so the day is meant to focus governments and consumers on sustainable production, fair conditions and the value chain behind the cup rather than to sell more tea, see is tea sustainable. The two dates share a goal rather than compete: the December one grassroots and producer-led, the May one official and UN-backed.

How it differs from a national tea day, and how to mark it

The distinction worth labouring, because almost every casual mention blurs it, is between an intergovernmental observance and a marketing one. International Tea Day (21 May) is a UN designation, led in practice by the Food and Agriculture Organization, existing to put producing countries, smallholder farmers and tea-sector workers on the global agenda alongside the sustainability and price pressures that affect them. An informal "national tea day", by contrast, is typically a brand, retailer or social-media occasion celebrating the pleasure of drinking tea, with no official status and no producer focus, see National Tea Day UK. Both can be enjoyable; only one is about the people behind the cup, and conflating them quietly converts a workers-and-sustainability day into a sales hook. The response that means something is not a themed discount but a small shift in attention: know the origin of what you drink, value transparent sourcing, and treat provenance as the relevant gesture, because that is what the day is about.

What to buy

Mark it with a tea worth knowing: a transparently sourced single-origin black tea or green tea, or browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery over £35.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (beverage)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · On Tea Day the cup you drain was the right pick. Leave the sampling for later, once that one is sorted.

Tea-culture reading

- History of tea
- Is tea sustainable
- History of British tea
- National Tea Day UK

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