Lapsang Souchong Explained: Smoke and Brewing

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Lapsang Souchong, in summary:** Lapsang Souchong is pine-smoke-dried Fujian black tea, a deliberate processing identity not a flavouring, bold and divisive, with quality varying.

Lapsang Souchong is the most polarising famous tea; here is the short version. Lapsang sits with the other named Chinese teas, such as Keemun.

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

What it is

A black tea from the Wuyi area of Fujian, traditionally dried over pinewood smoke, which gives its signature character; see black tea.

Why it tastes smoky

The pinewood smoke drying is a deliberate processing choice, not a flavouring added later. That is the entire identity: smoke applied intentionally at the drying stage, which is why the character is so emphatic.

Unsmoked and lightly smoked

Traditional unsmoked or lightly smoked Wuyi "souchong" also exists and is prized. "Lapsang" is the smoked style specifically; disliking the smoke is a verdict on one processing step, not on the whole Wuyi region.

How to brew it

Boiling water, moderate steep. Sturdy and hard to make bitter; some take it with milk, though most drink it without. First cup without milk to taste the layered base underneath the smoke.

What to expect

Bold campfire and pine smoke over a black tea base; a love-it-or-hate-it profile. A good Lapsang has layered, woody smoke over a sweet, malty base that lingers pleasantly; a poor one is one-dimensional and acrid.

The caveat

Cheap "Lapsang" can be crude, heavy smoke laid over poor leaf. Quality varies widely under the same name. Judge the cup, not the label or price alone; see how to judge quality.

Lapsang Souchong at a glance

Question	Answer
What is it?	Wuyi Fujian black tea, pinewood-smoke dried
Why smoky?	Deliberate processing, not added flavouring
Unsmoked exists?	Yes, prized Wuyi souchong; "Lapsang" = the smoked style
Brewing	Boiling water, moderate steep, hard to over-bitter
Expect	Bold campfire/pine smoke, love-it-or-hate-it
Caveat	Cheap = crude smoke on poor leaf; quality varies widely

Common questions

Is the smoke natural? Yes. The smoking is a deliberate traditional processing step using pinewood, not a flavouring sprayed on afterwards. That is why the character is so deeply integrated into the tea.

Why does some Lapsang taste harsh? Grade and quality vary enormously. Low-grade Lapsang can be one-note acrid smoke over thin leaf. A mid-tier or specialist example shows the layered, sweet, malty base that makes the style worth trying.

I do not like Lapsang; does that mean I dislike Wuyi teas? No. Lapsang is specifically the smoked expression; unsmoked Wuyi souchong and the ultra-premium Jin Jun Mei are from the same region with no smoke at all.

Quick take

Lapsang Souchong is worth trying deliberately at least once: a real, bold character from drying over pine smoke, not a gimmick. Quality varies widely, so go for a mid-tier or specialist example, try it without milk first, and decide clearly whether the smoke is for you. If not, the region has unsmoked alternatives worth exploring. Explore the black tea range or the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

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