Nilgiri Tea: Southern India's Bright Underrated Black

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Nilgiri tea, in summary:** Nilgiri is southern India's bright, fragrant black: a blender's favourite, excellent iced, and an underrated, good-value single origin.

Nilgiri is the third great Indian tea name after Assam and Darjeeling, and the least famous of the three, which is precisely why it is worth knowing. This page explains what Nilgiri tea is, why it is prized by blenders, and what it offers as a single origin.

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What it is

Nilgiri tea is grown in the Nilgiri Hills, the "Blue Mountains", in southern India. It is high grown, but in a warmer southern climate than Darjeeling, with a mild, frequently misty character and picking through much of the year rather than in sharp seasonal flushes. That combination of altitude and southern warmth is the key to everything about it: it gives a tea bright and fragrant like other high-grown teas but far more consistent and productive, which is exactly why it became a blender's favourite. It is mostly black tea, clean and aromatic, sometimes called the fragrant tea of southern India.

How it tastes

Nilgiri sits, in style, between its two famous northern cousins. It has more brightness and aroma than a hearty Assam but more body and less delicate floral finesse than a fine Darjeeling. The result is a smooth, brisk, fragrant, well balanced black with a clean finish, very drinkable and unusually versatile, which is the key to its role in the trade.

Indian black	Character	Niche
Assam	Malty, strong, full	Breakfast, milk
Darjeeling	Light, floral, muscatel	Delicate, prized, costly
Nilgiri	Bright, fragrant, smooth, balanced	Versatile, blends, iced tea

Why blenders love it

Nilgiri is highly valued as a blending tea because it is bright, clean and consistent and combines well without dominating, so it lifts a blend rather than fighting it. It is also especially good for iced tea, because it tends

not to go cloudy when chilled, a property called low creaming down, which is exactly what large scale iced tea producers want. This is why a great deal of excellent Nilgiri disappears, unnamed, into blends and iced-tea products, the same quiet workhorse story told on the Kenyan tea page: a tea most people drink often and have never knowingly tasted by name.

Nilgiri as a single origin, and the value

Bought as a named single origin, Nilgiri is an excellent, underrated everyday drinking black: bright and smooth enough to enjoy without milk, strong enough to take it, and very forgiving to brew. Because it is less famous than Assam or Darjeeling, comparable quality often costs less, which makes a named single-estate Nilgiri one of the better-value discoveries in Indian tea, an everyday black that overdelivers for the price rather than a compromise. It is also a fine, low-risk single origin for a beginner, being so hard to brew badly.

Frost tea, the winter speciality

Nilgiri's prestige expression is its winter or "frost" tea, made from leaf grown through the cold season, which can be exceptionally clean, aromatic and intense. It is produced in small quantities and prized by enthusiasts, and it is the clearest evidence that Nilgiri has real depth beyond its everyday blending role. Coming across a frost Nilgiri is worth the experiment for anyone who assumes the region is only a commodity.

How to brew it

Nilgiri is forgiving and versatile. Use fully boiling water and a three to four minute steep for a bright, smooth black; it is hard to over-bitter and takes milk or lemon happily. Because it resists clouding when chilled it is one of the best choices for clear home iced tea, so brew it strong, cool it and pour over ice. For an everyday black that copes with milk, lemon, ice and a slightly careless brew without complaint, few teas are as easygoing.

Nilgiri is a good lesson in not buying tea by fame alone: it does much of the quiet work behind familiar blends and iced teas, yet as a named single origin it is bright, dependable and usually cheaper than its celebrated northern cousins for comparable quality. Held against the others, Assam is power and malt, Darjeeling is delicacy and prestige, and Nilgiri is brightness, balance and value. The companion Ceylon and black tea guides cover the neighbours, and you can find a good-value loose black in the full tea shop.

For everyday teas relevant to this topic: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. The whole tea range is here for Nilgiri and its neighbours; UK postage is free from £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Match the tea to the moment. Nilgiri works hot at 6am and iced at 4pm, and no rule says those cups must match.

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