Hyson: Sri Lankan Tea and the Ceylon Range

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Hyson, in brief:** Hyson is the retail face of authentic single-origin Ceylon tea: bright, brisk and origin-led rather than a value rival to the big British blends.

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

Hyson is one of the longest established Sri Lankan tea brands, founded in 1979 in Kandy and built around the Ceylon tea heritage that's defined Sri Lankan tea since the 19th century. The brand operates as a fully integrated tea producer, owning estates and processing facilities in the Sri Lankan tea growing regions, blending and packaging in Sri Lanka, and exporting to over 50 countries worldwide. In British retail Hyson is positioned as the authentic Ceylon tea specialist, offering single origin Sri Lankan teas at accessible prices alongside specialty and flavoured variants.

This guide is a deep dive into Hyson: the Sri Lankan tea heritage, the vertical integration approach, the Ceylon tea family, the full Hyson range, and how to find your way around one of the most authentic single origin tea catalogues in British retail.

The Hyson history

Hyson was founded in 1979 in Kandy, Sri Lanka, as a tea export business by founder T. M. A. M. Iqbal. The brand grew through the 1980s and 1990s by combining direct from estate sourcing with international export distribution, building one of the largest independent Sri Lankan tea businesses by export volume.

The brand's name "Hyson" references a traditional Chinese green tea style historically associated with the Hyson district of China; the name was chosen to invoke the heritage of premium tea trading even though Hyson the brand specialises in Sri Lankan rather than Chinese teas. The naming convention was common in the 19th and 20th century tea trade where established tea style names were used as brand identities for new tea businesses.

Notable milestones in the brand's history:

- **1979:** founded in Kandy, Sri Lanka by T. M. A. M. Iqbal
- **1980s:** expansion into international export markets across Europe, Middle East, and Asia
- **1990s:** vertical integration with acquisition of tea estates and processing facilities
- **2000s:** broader UK supermarket and specialty retail distribution

- **2010s onwards:** expansion into specialty and flavoured tea variants alongside the core Ceylon black tea range
- **Continues** as a privately owned Sri Lankan business with global export presence

The brand remains privately owned and Sri Lankan headquartered, providing continuity and direct connection to the Sri Lankan tea industry that's harder to maintain for brands owned by international FMCG conglomerates.

The Sri Lankan tea heritage

Sri Lankan tea (formerly Ceylon tea) has been one of the world's premier tea origins since the 1860s when the Ceylon coffee industry collapsed due to coffee leaf rust disease and was replaced by tea. The first Ceylon tea was planted by Scottish planter James Taylor in 1867; within a few decades Ceylon had become one of the world's largest tea exporters, a position it maintains today.

Sri Lankan tea is grown across several distinct regions, each producing tea with characteristic flavour profiles:

- **Nuwara Eliya** (high elevation, central highlands), produces the lightest, most delicate Sri Lankan teas with bright character and floral notes
- **Dimbula** (mid to high elevation), produces medium strength teas with brisk character and clean finish
- **Uva** (eastern highlands), produces medium strength teas with distinctive aromatic character; particularly prized when produced during the optimal seasonal window
- **Kandy** (mid elevation, central region), produces full bodied teas with strong character; this is where Hyson is headquartered
- **Ruhuna and Sabaragamuwa** (low elevation, southern), produce full bodied, dark coloured teas suitable for blending

Sri Lankan tea is generally produced as orthodox tea (traditional rolling and oxidation methods) producing whole leaf and broken leaf grades, in contrast to Indian tea which is more often CTC processed (cut tear curl) for tea bags. The orthodox processing produces a brisker, more characterful cup than CTC tea, which is part of why Sri Lankan tea is often positioned as a premium origin.

For more on the wider black tea family see the black tea overview.

The vertical integration approach

Hyson's competitive advantage as a brand is its vertical integration: the company owns tea estates, processing facilities, blending operations, and export distribution. This is unusual in the global tea industry where most brands are pure marketing and distribution businesses sourcing from independent estates and producers.

The vertical integration provides several practical benefits:

- **Direct quality control** from leaf to cup, with consistent standards across the supply chain
- **Authentic single origin positioning:** backed by actual ownership of the source estates

- **Lower middleman costs:** supporting more competitive retail pricing
- **Supply chain stability:** the brand isn't dependent on broker sourced leaf with variable quality
- **Direct investment in producer communities** through estate ownership and worker programmes

For consumers who specifically value origin authenticity in their tea, Hyson's vertical integration is a meaningful credibility marker. The single origin Ceylon teas in the Hyson range come from Hyson owned estates rather than blended from anywhere CTC tea sold under origin marketing.

The Hyson range

Premium Ceylon black teas:

- **Hyson Premium Breakfast Tea** the flagship Sri Lankan single origin breakfast blend, brisk and characterful
- **Hyson Pure Ceylon Tea:** plain Sri Lankan black tea, the cleanest expression of the Ceylon character
- **Hyson Special Blend:** the everyday Hyson black tea blend
- **Hyson Loose Leaf Ceylon:** the loose leaf version for traditional pot brewing

Specialty Ceylon teas:

- **Hyson Earl Grey** Sri Lankan black tea base flavoured with bergamot
- **Hyson English Breakfast:** multi origin breakfast blend in the British classic style
- **Hyson Decaf Ceylon:** the decaf version of the standard Ceylon blend
- **Hyson High Grown Ceylon:** premium high elevation Sri Lankan tea

Green tea:

- **Hyson Pure Green Tea** Sri Lankan green tea (less common origin for green tea than Chinese or Japanese)
- **Various flavoured green tea blends:** jasmine, lemon, mint variants

Flavoured and specialty:

- **Hyson Vanilla Ceylon:** vanilla flavoured black tea
- **Hyson Cinnamon Ceylon** Sri Lankan cinnamon (Ceylon cinnamon, the "true" cinnamon, distinct from cassia cinnamon used in most Western cooking)
- **Hyson Chai blends:** spiced Ceylon black tea variants
- **Hyson Iced Tea blends:** designed for cold brewing in summer

The range is more focused than Twinings or Tetley but covers the core black tea categories well, with the distinctive single origin Ceylon positioning across most products.

The Ceylon cinnamon distinction

One specific Hyson product worth understanding: Ceylon cinnamon is distinct from cassia cinnamon, the more common type used in most Western cooking. Ceylon cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*, sometimes called "true cinnamon") is grown in Sri Lanka, has a more delicate, sweet, complex flavour, and contains lower coumarin levels (the compound in cassia cinnamon that's been associated with liver issues at high doses).

For drinkers wanting the more delicate, traditional cinnamon flavour, or specifically the lower coumarin variant for daily consumption, Ceylon cinnamon products from Hyson and other Sri Lankan brands are the real thing. Most supermarket cinnamon (and most cinnamon teas) use cassia cinnamon, which is cheaper and more widely available but has the less refined flavour and higher coumarin content.

Hyson vs the competition

Hyson competes against several different brand types in British retail:

- **vs mass market British black tea brands (Yorkshire, PG, Tetley)** Hyson offers single origin Sri Lankan tea with stronger origin authenticity but less brand recognition. The cup is brisker and more characterful than typical mass market British tea.
- **vs Twinings Ceylon and similar specialty options** Hyson typically offers better value at comparable quality for Sri Lankan specific teas because of the vertical integration cost advantage
- **vs other Sri Lankan tea brands** (Dilmah, Mlesna, Heladiv), Hyson holds a similar quality position with broader UK distribution than some competitors
- **vs premium British brands (Teapigs, Whittard)** Hyson focuses specifically on Sri Lankan origin authenticity rather than the broader specialty tea positioning

Hyson's competitive position is strongest with drinkers who specifically value Sri Lankan single origin character and want authentic Ceylon tea at accessible prices. For drinkers who prefer the heavier Assam led character of Yorkshire Tea or the brisker Kenyan profile of PG Tips, Hyson's brisker Ceylon character may be unfamiliar but is worth trying as a flavour profile expansion.

The Hyson sustainability position

Hyson's sustainability credentials are built around the vertical integration: the brand operates its own estates with Rainforest Alliance certification across most of the supply chain, invests directly in worker communities through estate management programmes, and maintains direct relationships with Sri Lankan tea growing regions across multiple generations.

The brand's ethical positioning is less prominently marketed than Pukka's organic or Clipper's Fairtrade organic positioning, but the practical credentials are solid. For consumers who specifically value direct estate ownership and origin authenticity over third party certifications, Hyson's model provides a different kind of credibility.

Some Hyson products carry organic certification; many do not. The brand prioritises origin authenticity and direct supply chain control over universal organic positioning.

How to brew Hyson properly

Sri Lankan Ceylon tea benefits from standard British black tea brewing with attention to a few specifics:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a rolling boil
2. **Pour over the bag immediately:** no need to cool for black tea
3. **Brew for 3 to 4 minutes:** slightly shorter than for stronger Assam led blends; Ceylon character is brisker and benefits from controlled extraction
4. **Stir, remove the bag, add milk if desired** Ceylon tea takes milk well but also drinks excellently neat with a slice of lemon (the more traditional Sri Lankan serving style)
5. **Sugar optional** Ceylon tea has natural slight sweetness that some drinkers prefer to leave unenhanced

For drinkers used to heavier Assam led British blends, Ceylon tea will taste lighter and brisker; this is the authentic Sri Lankan character rather than a defect.

What we stock

Browse the full Hyson range. The most bought Hyson products on teas.co.uk:

- Hyson Peach Infused Black Tea, 32 Tea Bags 32g
- Hyson Lemon Infused Black Tea, 32 Tea Bags 32g
- Hyson Pineapple Infused Black Tea, 32 Tea Bags 32g

For comparisons across the wider British black tea landscape, see also: Yorkshire Tea, PG Tips, Tetley, Twinings, Teapigs.

The verdict on Hyson

Hyson is the British retail face of authentic Sri Lankan single origin Ceylon tea. The combination of vertical integration, direct estate ownership, and focused Ceylon positioning makes it one of the most credible single origin tea brands available in mainstream UK retail. The brand's 45-year heritage in Sri Lanka provides connection to the source country that's harder to claim for international FMCG brands sourcing from broker traded leaf.

For drinkers who specifically want authentic Ceylon character and value origin authenticity, Hyson is a strong choice. For drinkers used to heavier British blends (Yorkshire, Twinings English Breakfast), Hyson's brisker Ceylon profile takes some adjustment but represents a meaningful flavour profile expansion worth exploring.

The brand isn't trying to compete on breadth with Twinings or value with Tetley; it occupies a specific origin authenticity position and does it well. For tea drinkers building a varied tea collection, adding Hyson alongside the major British blended brands brings real variety in cup character and origin.

Hyson at a glance

Aspect	Plain read
What it is	A Sri Lankan (Ceylon) tea brand with a single-origin, vertically integrated approach

Aspect	Plain read
Character	Bright, brisk, recognisably Ceylon; a clear origin identity
Range	Black Ceylon at its core, plus Ceylon cinnamon and related lines
Position	Origin authenticity rather than competing on price with mass blends
Brew	Boiling water, ~3, 4 min; takes milk; a straightforward strong cup

The plain verdict is that Hyson occupies a specific and well-held position: it is the retail face of authentic single-origin Ceylon tea rather than a value rival to the big British blends, and it does that origin job well. Next to the familiar blended brands, a proper Ceylon gives anyone after variety a different cup, and a different origin. See also black tea, Ceylon tea and how to choose tea. Explore the style in the full tea shop.

Source

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. Hyson two months old will taste livelier than a gift tin three years old.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Compare Hyson Lemon with Dilmah Earl Grey

See how Hyson Lemon's direct citrus profile compares with a classic bergamot-led Earl Grey in Dilmah Earl Grey vs Hyson Lemon.

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.

