Da Hong Pao

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Da Hong Pao, in summary:** Da Hong Pao, the legendary Wuyi rock oolong: heritage, the roasting process, the mineral flavour, how to brew it gongfu style and the premium pricing.

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

Da Hong Pao ("Big Red Robe") is the most prestigious of all Chinese oolongs and one of the most expensive teas in the world. Made from the leaves of *Camellia sinensis* grown in the rocky cliffs and ravines of the Wuyi Mountains in Fujian Province, Da Hong Pao is the headline "yancha" (rock tea), the family of heavily oxidised, mineral rich oolongs that grow in the unique mineral laden soils of the Wuyi region. Quality Da Hong Pao produces a deep amber cup with complex character that includes mineral, roasted, fruity, floral, and orchid notes layered together.

This guide covers everything about Da Hong Pao: the Wuyi rock tea heritage, the legendary mother bushes, the production process, the proper brewing approach, and how Da Hong Pao fits into the wider oolong family.

The Da Hong Pao heritage

Da Hong Pao takes its name from a legend dating to the Ming Dynasty. The traditional story tells of a scholar who fell ill while traveling through the Wuyi Mountains; a monk gave him tea from the mountain that cured him. When the scholar passed his imperial exams and became a high ranking official, he returned to thank the monks and draped his official red robes over the tea bushes as a gesture of honour. The "big red robe" name has stuck for over 500 years.

The original mother bushes (six bushes growing on a cliff at Jiulongke) are still standing and remain the most prized tea trees in the world. Tea from the original mother bushes was last commercially harvested in 2005; since then, the mother bush tea has been preserved and is no longer available at any price. Modern Da Hong Pao is produced from cuttings descended from the mother bushes, grown elsewhere in the Wuyi region.

The Wuyi Mountains have been producing tea for over 1,000 years. The unique geography (rocky ravines with mineral rich soils, cool misty climate, specific altitude ranges) produces tea with a distinctive character that really cannot be copied elsewhere. The "yancha" (rock tea) family includes Da Hong Pao plus several other prestigious Wuyi oolongs (Tieluohan, Shuixian, Rougui, and others).

For the wider oolong family see the oolong overview.

The Da Hong Pao production process

Da Hong Pao is produced through traditional yancha (rock tea) processing:

1. **Plucking:** picking from cliffside Wuyi bushes; mature leaves rather than tender buds
2. **Sun withering:** leaves spread in the sun to begin moisture loss
3. **Cooling and indoor withering:** alternating cool and warm conditions
4. **Shaking:** repeated bruising of leaf edges to develop oxidation
5. **Heavy oxidation:** allowed to oxidise to 60 to 70 percent (much more than tieguanyin's 10 to 25 percent)
6. **"Kill green":** pan firing to halt oxidation
7. **Rolling:** twisted into the characteristic curled strip shape (different from tieguanyin's tightly rolled balls)
8. **Heavy roasting:** multiple rounds of roasting over charcoal at low temperatures, sometimes spread across weeks; this develops the distinctive deep character and "fire" notes

The heavy roasting is what most distinguishes Da Hong Pao from tieguanyin. Where tieguanyin emphasises the bright floral character with minimal roasting, Da Hong Pao goes for the developed depth that long roasting produces. The roasting is an art form; master tea makers in the Wuyi region adjust roasting based on year, batch, and intended character.

The Da Hong Pao flavour profile

Quality Da Hong Pao has one of the most complex flavour profiles in the tea world:

- **Mineral character:** the "rock" note that defines yancha; described as "wet stone", "mineral", or "rock like" character from the Wuyi soils
- **Roasted depth:** warm toasted character from the heavy roasting; not smoky like lapsang but warm and complex
- **Stone fruit notes:** ripe peach, plum, and apricot character in the best examples
- **Orchid floral notes:** similar to tieguanyin's orchid character but darker and more complex
- **Long warming finish:** the cup lingers significantly
- **Deep amber to dark amber cup colour**
- **Multiple infusion potential:** excellent across 6 to 10 brews

The complexity is what makes Da Hong Pao prestigious; few teas offer this many distinct flavour notes layered together. Premium Da Hong Pao reveals different character in different infusions; the first infusion may emphasise the roasted notes, the second the mineral character, the third the floral notes, and so on across the session.

How to brew Da Hong Pao properly

Da Hong Pao requires gongfu style brewing to show its character properly:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a rolling boil. Da Hong Pao takes near boiling water (95 to 100°C); the heavy oxidation and roasting requires hot water for full extraction
2. **Use 5 to 7g of leaves** per 150ml of water (more than typical Western brewing)
3. **Rinse the leaves:** pour boiling water over and immediately discard; wakes up the tea
4. **First infusion:** brew for 30 to 45 seconds
5. **Subsequent infusions:** increase brewing time slightly each round; Da Hong Pao gives 6 to 10 excellent infusions
6. **Drink neat:** no milk, no sweetener
7. **Notice the character changes across infusions:** the multiple brew character evolution is part of the experience

For Da Hong Pao and its oolong cousins, the heat for each is in the water temperatures guide.

Premium pricing context

Da Hong Pao spans an enormous price range:

- **Standard commercial Da Hong Pao** £20 to £50 per 100g; varying quality but accessible
- **Quality Wuyi Da Hong Pao** £50 to £200 per 100g; premium experience
- **Mother bush descendant Da Hong Pao** £200 to £1000+ per 100g; the most prestigious commercial tier
- **Original mother bush Da Hong Pao:** no longer available; legendary historical sales reached £1+ million per kilogram in auction

The price reflects the labour intensive production, the limited Wuyi growing area, and the prestige built over 500+ years. For a first taste at fair prices, mid range Da Hong Pao (£40 to £80 per 100g) gives real character without the extreme premium pricing.

What we stock

Browse the oolong tea range. Mainstream British shops stock Da Hong Pao only patchily; specialty Chinese tea importers offer the widest choice.

For comparisons across the wider tea landscape, see also: Teapigs, Twinings.

The verdict on Da Hong Pao

Da Hong Pao is the prestige experience of the oolong family and one of the great teas worth knowing in the wider tea world. The combination of mineral rich Wuyi terroir, heavy oxidation and roasting, complex multi note character, and 500+ years of cultural heritage makes it one of the more rewarding investments for serious tea drinkers.

For drinkers exploring beyond standard British tea, Da Hong Pao represents the heavy oxidation traditional oolong character that contrasts with the lighter oxidation modern style of tieguanyin. Both are excellent; together they show the breadth of what oolong tea can be.

The proper gongfu brewing approach is essential; Da Hong Pao brewed Western style produces flat unimpressive cups. The multiple short infusions reveal the evolving character; this is part of what makes the tea worth its price.

Buying Da Hong Pao in the UK

Da Hong Pao is the prestige rock oolong; mainstream British supermarkets do not carry it, and the British retail oolong shelf is dominated by lighter Taiwanese style products and accessible blends. For real Wuyi character, buy from specialty Chinese tea importers or from carefully chosen independent retailers that work with named Wuyi producers. Avoid generic "Da Hong Pao tea bags" sold at low prices; these are almost never real Wuyi rock oolong and rarely deliver the mineral roasted character the tea is famous for.

For drinkers building an oolong cupboard from accessible British retail, a sensible path is to start with a quality Taiwanese oolong or a roasted tieguanyin to learn the family character, then move up to authentic Wuyi rock oolong (Da Hong Pao, Rougui, Shuixian) once the palate is tuned to the more complex traditional style. The teas.co.uk oolong tea range sits alongside our wider shop catalogue; free UK shipping kicks in at £35 across the full range, and the per cup price displayed on each product page is the plain comparison metric for premium leaf tea purchases.

Da Hong Pao versus the wider oolong family

Da Hong Pao occupies the heavily oxidised, heavily roasted end of the oolong spectrum. Compared with the lighter end:

- **Versus modern green style tieguanyin** Da Hong Pao is darker, deeper, more mineral, and roasted; tieguanyin is lighter, floral, orchid bright, and minimally roasted
- **Versus a Taiwanese high mountain oolong** Da Hong Pao is fuller bodied with rock mineral character; the Taiwanese style emphasises altitude driven floral creaminess
- **Versus a quality black tea like Yorkshire Gold or a single estate Assam** Da Hong Pao shares the warm depth but adds the mineral complexity and the multiple infusion gongfu format that black tea does not match
- **Versus lapsang souchong** both are roasted Chinese teas but lapsang's smoke is overt pine smoke while Da Hong Pao's roast is warm and integrated rather than smoky
- **Versus pu erh** both are Chinese prestige teas with multi infusion potential and complex character; pu erh's earthy fermented depth contrasts with Da Hong Pao's mineral roasted profile

Frequently asked questions

Is Da Hong Pao caffeinated? Yes, like all true tea from *Camellia sinensis*, Da Hong Pao contains caffeine. Levels are moderate (broadly comparable to a quality black tea); the heavy roasting does not strip caffeine. See the ultimate caffeine guide for the family by family numbers.

Can Da Hong Pao be brewed Western style? It can, but the result is flat compared with proper gongfu brewing. If brewing Western style, use 4g per 250ml, 95°C water, and steep for 90 to 120 seconds; expect to get two reasonable infusions rather than the six to ten of gongfu brewing.

Why is Da Hong Pao so expensive? The real Wuyi region is small, the cliffside plucking is labour intensive, the traditional roasting takes weeks, and the cultural prestige built over 500+ years keeps demand high. Original mother bush leaf is no longer commercially available at any price.

Can the leaves really be re infused 6 to 10 times? Yes, and the character changes meaningfully across the session. The first three infusions tend to emphasise the roasted top notes; the middle infusions reveal the mineral and floral character; the later infusions produce a sweeter, lighter cup as the leaves give up their final compounds.

Does Da Hong Pao taste smoky? No. Heavy roasting produces warm depth, not smoke. If a Da Hong Pao tastes overtly smoky, it has either been over roasted or the leaf is not real Wuyi rock oolong. For Chinese tea that is meant to be smoky, see lapsang souchong.

What food pairs well with Da Hong Pao? The complex roasted character pairs beautifully with dark chocolate, roasted nuts, aged cheese, dim sum, roast pork, and grilled meats. The mineral depth holds up to richer foods that would overwhelm a green tea. For sweeter pairings, simple dark biscuits work better than overly sugary cakes.

Da Hong Pao in the British tea cupboard

For most British tea drinkers, Da Hong Pao is the special occasion or weekend morning tea rather than the daily mug. The gongfu format requires more attention than dropping a Yorkshire Tea bag into a mug, and the price tier puts real Wuyi rock oolong next to premium spirits rather than everyday breakfast tea. A 50g pouch of quality Da Hong Pao gives roughly 8 to 12 sessions; the per session cost is high relative to mainstream tea but modest relative to comparable craft drinks.

Drinkers who enjoy brewing over many infusions often build a small rotation that includes Da Hong Pao alongside tieguanyin, an aged pu erh, and a quality silver needle white; this four tea Chinese rotation covers the major prestige tea families and gives real variety across a year of weekend sessions. Alongside this, mainstream British staples from Yorkshire Tea, Twinings, and Teapigs handle the daily mug duty.

For the wider context see the oolong overview, the tieguanyin overview, the black tea overview, the lapsang souchong overview, the loose leaf brewing guide, the full caffeine guide, and the water temperatures guide.

Da Hong Pao, in one place

Aspect	Da Hong Pao
What it is	the most famous Wuyi rock oolong (yancha), from the cliffs of Fujian
Processing	partially oxidised then charcoal roasted; a heavily worked, heat built tea
Flavour	mineral "rock rhyme", roasted, dark fruit and toasty rather than floral; long finish
Brewing	gongfu style: high leaf, small vessel, many short hot infusions; re steeps a dozen times
Pricing	real mother bush material is legendarily rare; commercial Da Hong Pao is blended or propagated

Related on the wiki: Da Hong Pao Oolong.

For everyday teas relevant to this topic: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Have a wander through the tea range; above £35, UK delivery on this rock oolong is free.

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teas · Match the tea to the moment. A 6am cup and a 4pm Da Hong Pao session need not be the same brew.

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