Dilmah: Ceylon Tea and the Watte Range

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Dilmah, in summary:** Dilmah in summary: the producer owned single origin Ceylon brand, the Watte altitude range, the ethics built into the company, and who it is for.

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

Dilmah is the Sri Lankan family owned tea brand built around a single principle: Ceylon tea is best when it's single origin, ethically traded, and the value stays in Sri Lanka. Founded in 1988 by Merrill Fernando, one of the first Sri Lankans to train as a tea taster in London, Dilmah is now one of the world's most recognised single origin specialty tea brands. The cup is bright, clean, and consistently among the best Pure Ceylon you can buy.

The founder's story

Merrill Fernando trained as a tea taster in London in the 1950s. For three decades he watched Western tea brands buy Sri Lankan tea cheaply, blend it with cheaper origins, and sell it at premium prices in the UK and US, with most of the profit staying outside Sri Lanka. In 1988, at age 58, he started Dilmah. The name combines the names of his sons Dilhan and Malik. The mission was clear: Sri Lankan tea, packed in Sri Lanka, owned by Sri Lankans.

The brand's "Real Tea" positioning rejected the idea that Ceylon tea should be a commodity input for global blends. Single origin, single estate, and direct from source became the Dilmah promise.

What Dilmah stands for

- **Single origin tea.** Every Dilmah tea is grown, processed, and packed in Sri Lanka. No multi origin blending.
- **Family owned.** Still run by the Fernando family. No private equity, no multinational conglomerate ownership.
- **Ethically priced.** Fair pay for workers comes through the MJF Foundation, and it reaches well past ordinary commodity pricing.
- **Quality focused.** No race to the bottom commodity products. Mid to premium tier across the range.

- **Educational.** Tea tasting education matters to Dilmah, and its School of Tea trains tea professionals across the world.

The Dilmah range

Premium / Pure Ceylon line

The flagship single origin black tea. Bright, citrussy, balanced. The cup that introduces most drinkers to Dilmah.

Watte single region range

"Watte" means "garden" in Sinhalese. The Watte range showcases specific Ceylon districts:

- **Yata Watte (Low grown).** Bold, full bodied. Strongest cup of the line.
- **Meda Watte (Mid grown).** Balanced, malty.
- **Ran Watte (High grown).** Bright, refined.
- **Uda Watte (Highest grown).** Most delicate, almost green leaning.

Tasting the four side by side is one of the most accessible introductions to Ceylon altitude variation.

Single region teas

Specific Ceylon districts: Nuwara Eliya, Dimbula, Uva, Kandy. Premium pricing; distinctive regional characters.

Earl Grey and flavoured teas

Dilmah Earl Grey uses Ceylon as the base, brighter than typical UK Earl Grey. Other flavoured teas: Vanilla, Cinnamon, Strawberry, Apple. All built on Ceylon black tea base.

Green tea range

Sri Lankan green tea is a smaller production category but Dilmah does it well. Lighter and less grassy than Japanese green; more vegetal than Chinese green.

Specialty range

White Tea, oolong, herbal blends. Smaller production lines.

How Dilmah compares to other Ceylon options

Vs Twinings Pure Ceylon

Dilmah is single origin and Sri Lankan owned; Twinings Pure Ceylon is Sri Lankan tea, UK blended. Dilmah is fresher and more characterful; Twinings is cheaper and more accessible.

Vs Mlesna

Both Sri Lankan brands. Mlesna positions more as a gift and tin specialist; Dilmah as the everyday quality single origin brand. Both excellent.

Vs Hyson

Hyson is also Sri Lankan but more accessible price tier. Dilmah is the premium Sri Lankan owned option.

Vs specialist single estate Ceylons

Lumbini, Pedro, Madulkelle estate teas are premium tier with traceable single estate provenance. Dilmah's Watte range is the closest mainstream parallel.

How to brew Dilmah

Standard Ceylon brewing applies:

1. 1 tsp loose leaf or 1 bag per 200ml.
2. Water at full rolling boil. Ceylon needs heat.
3. Steep 3-5 minutes.
4. Drink black, with lemon, or with a small amount of milk. Ceylon is versatile.

The MJF Foundation

The Merrill J. Fernando Charitable Foundation funds:

- Healthcare and education for tea estate workers and their families in Sri Lanka
- Disability inclusion and special education programmes
- Disaster relief and humanitarian aid
- Sri Lankan biodiversity and conservation

A meaningful portion of Dilmah's revenue funds the foundation. Buying Dilmah is one of the more directly impactful tea purchases on the UK shelf, your cup contributes to a real social mission.

Caffeine

40-50mg per 200ml cup. Standard Ceylon black tea range. Slightly lower for high grown Nuwara Eliya and Uda Watte.

Buying Dilmah

Browse Dilmah here. Available through specialist UK retailers and selected supermarkets. The full Watte range and single region lines typically require specialist retailers.

FAQ

Is Dilmah really a Sri Lankan brand? Yes, family owned, Sri Lankan headquartered, single origin. One of the most authentic Ceylon brands globally.

Best Dilmah tea? Premium Pure Ceylon for the everyday flagship. The Watte single region range for tasting altitude variation.

Is Dilmah expensive? Mid premium pricing, more than supermarket Ceylon, less than specialist single estate tea. Good value for the quality.

Does Dilmah do green tea? Yes, Sri Lankan green tea, smaller production but distinctive.

What's the difference between Dilmah and Twinings Pure Ceylon? Dilmah is Sri Lankan owned, single origin, with a charitable foundation. Twinings Pure Ceylon is UK blended and a more commercial product.

Dilmah, at a glance

Aspect	Dilmah
Founded	1988 by Merrill J. Fernando; named for sons Dilhan and Malik
Model	producer owned: grown, blended and packed at origin in Sri Lanka
Tea	single origin pure Ceylon, brisk, bright, citrus edged, elevation led
Signature range	Watte: four altitude levels side by side; plus the premium t Series
Ethics	MJF Charitable Foundation and conservation built into the company structure

Curator's note: if you're going to buy one Ceylon tea brand for the year, make it Dilmah. The Watte range alone is worth the introduction, four altitude levels, side by side, and you'll understand why Ceylon is one of the world's great tea origins. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

Buy it via the Dilmah range, compare in the Ceylon range, or browse the full tea shop (free UK shipping over £35).

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Begin with one Dilmah tea, perhaps Pure Ceylon black, and see if it fits your day. Save the Watte range for week two.

Dilmah deeper reading

- Dilmah: the Ceylon brand that owns its story
- the black tea family
- Herbal tea overview

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 Dilmah Earl Grey with Hyson Lemon

Our current Dilmah Earl Grey vs Hyson Lemon comparison uses live packs to separate bergamot's floral citrus character from straightforward lemon black tea.

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