Kenyan Tea: The Invisible Workhorse of British Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Kenyan tea, in summary:** Kenya is the world's largest tea exporter and the invisible workhorse of British breakfast blends: strong, bright, body-heavy CTC leaf.

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

Kenya is the world's largest exporter of tea, surpassing both India and Sri Lanka. The Kenyan tea industry produces 500+ million kg annually, mostly CTC black tea sold in bulk to international blenders. Most British drinkers consume Kenyan tea daily without realising it, it's a major component of Yorkshire, PG Tips, Tetley, and most UK breakfast blends.

The scale

Kenya's tea industry is enormous:

- 500-600 million kg annual production
- The world's largest tea EXPORTER (more than India or Sri Lanka)
- Roughly 25-30% of UK tea consumption originates from Kenya
- Approximately 600,000 small scale tea farmers
- The Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA) coordinates smallholder production

Where Kenyan tea grows

Major regions:

- **Kericho.** The largest tea growing region. Highland tea production.
- **Nandi.** Western Kenya highlands.
- **Meru / Mount Kenya region.** High altitude, distinctive character.
- **Kakamega.** Western Kenya.

Tea grows at 1,500-2,500m altitude in the Kenyan highlands, comparable to Sri Lankan high grown areas. The volcanic soil and equatorial sun produce vigorous growth.

What Kenyan tea is like

- **Strong.** Sturdy body, bold flavour.
- **Bright.** Distinctly bright/red cup colour.
- **CTC processing dominant.** Crush tear curl pellets, fast extracting, ideal for tea bags.
- **Slightly less complex than orthodox black tea.** Mass CTC processing prioritises speed over nuance.
- **High yielding leaves.** Compact pellets pack lots of caffeine and tannin per unit weight.

Why UK breakfast tea blends rely on Kenyan

- **Cost effective.** Lower per kilogram price than premium Assam or Ceylon.
- **Strength.** Adds body and colour to blends.
- **Consistency.** Year round production, less seasonal variation than monsoon affected Indian regions.
- **Bag friendly.** CTC processing optimal for tea bags.
- **Reliable supply.** Massive industry can absorb global blender demand.

Yorkshire Tea, PG Tips, and Tetley all contain Kenyan tea. The blender doesn't necessarily highlight this on the box, but the cup wouldn't taste the same without it.

Single origin Kenyan tea

While most Kenyan tea is sold to blenders, some is available as single origin:

- **Premium single estate Kenyan.** Specialist UK retailers carry single estate Kenyan teas, typically orthodox processed, not CTC. Distinctive cup with proper character.
- **Kenyan purple tea.** A specific cultivar (TRFK 306) producing purple coloured leaves with high anthocyanin content. Specialty product.
- **Mainstream single origin Kenyan.** Less common but does exist (Twinings has done some).

How to brew Kenyan tea

1. 1 bag (or 1 heaped tsp loose) per 200ml.
2. Water at full rolling boil. Kenyan tea needs heat.
3. Steep 4-5 minutes.
4. Drink with milk and sugar (British style) or black with lemon.

Caffeine

50-60mg per 200ml cup. Slightly higher than typical Ceylon, comparable to strong Assam. The high caffeine content is part of why Kenyan tea is valued by blenders.

Ethical sourcing concerns

The Kenyan tea industry has had some labour rights concerns:

- Smallholder farmers often paid low farm gate prices
- Estate tea workers historically poorly paid
- Some major brands work with KTDA cooperatives that improve smallholder pay
- Fairtrade certified Kenyan tea exists (Clipper, some Pukka lines)

If ethical sourcing matters, choose brands with clear Fairtrade or direct trade certification.

Buying Kenyan tea in the UK

- **Indirectly through major UK blends.** Yorkshire Tea, PG Tips, Tetley all contain Kenyan tea.
- **Single origin Kenyan teas.** Specialist retailers, teas.co.uk, with friends like Whittard, Mei Leaf and What Cha.
- **Fairtrade Kenyan.** Clipper does Fairtrade Kenyan tea.
- **Kenyan purple tea.** Specialist novelty option.

Comparison with other major black tea origins

Origin	Cup character	Caffeine
Assam (India)	Malty, robust	50-60mg
Ceylon (Sri Lanka)	Bright, citrussy	40-50mg
Kenyan	Strong, bright red, body heavy	50-60mg
Darjeeling	Light, muscatel	30-45mg
Chinese black	Refined, less astringent	30-50mg

FAQ

Is Kenya a major tea producer? Yes, the world's largest tea EXPORTER. Most UK breakfast blends contain Kenyan tea.

What does Kenyan tea taste like? Strong, bright, body heavy. Kenyan leaf stands up to milk and sugar.

Is Kenyan tea single origin available? Yes, through specialist UK retailers. Most Kenyan tea, however, is sold to international blenders.

Caffeine? 50-60mg per cup. Higher than typical Ceylon.

Is Kenyan tea Fairtrade? Some, Clipper does Fairtrade Kenyan. Mass market UK blends generally aren't.

Curator's note: Kenyan tea is the invisible workhorse of British tea drinking. You're drinking it every day in your Yorkshire Tea or PG Tips. Worth trying single origin Kenyan once, the bright strong character that makes blends work shows up in concentrated form. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Stock up via the English tea range and loose leaf range.

Reference noted

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

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Freshness beats provenance for most drinkers. Buy a smaller bag more often.

Kenyan tea reading

Continue with Kenya tea and climate, is Yorkshire Tea good, is PG Tips good, black tea and ethical sourcing .

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