

Gone are the days when tea was just a humble brew. Today, its millennial avatars have elevated it from a mandatory morning cuppa to a fine gourmet experience.

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# SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

From elaborate Japanese tea ceremonies to cutting chai served on the streets of Mumbai, tea is an integral part of cultures the world over. The ubiquitous brew has now leapt beyond being just a regular cup of chai. If the response is anything to go by, nobody is complaining. It has metamorphosed into an ingredient for your cocktail, and even on your plate. Experts from top tea establishments weigh in on the same.







## ADVENT OF ARTISANAL TEAS

The milky chai has received an artisanal upgrade, and both restaurants and customers aren't shying away from experimenting. So, how did this change come about?

"Until a few years ago in India, tea was synonymous with chai. People are increasingly looking at tea as a contemporary beverage as opposed to your morning fix. Today tea has varieties such as hand-blended, artisanal or exotic-flavoured," notes Ambarish Ghosh, Founder and Director of The Hillcart Tales, a tea brand based in Delhi.

The collection at The Hillcart Tales is proof. Their most popular

offering in this category has been the Celestial Chamomile, and Blood Orange which is blended with hibiscus and rosehip tea.

It also helps that tea as an ingredient is a favourite among chefs. Javed Merchant, Executive Pastry Chef at Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel, elaborates, "The aroma does not overpower or mask the natural taste of any ingredient but enhances it. Be it a barbecue of heavily smoked meat cuts, light and airy desserts or fancy cocktails, tea is a modest concoction that mixes well." At Renaissance, the Iced Tea Popsicles are a favourite among kids.

"Different varieties of tea should be carefully chosen to create a blend of flavours and a truly delightful gastronomic experience," says Kavita Mathur, Tea Guru and Co-Founder at Tea Trails, who has tasted more than 2,000 varieties of teas and blends. She suggests the following tea and food pairings:

- Continental breakfast best pairs with Assam, Nilgiri and Ceylon teas.
- Spicy food best pairs with oolong, Darjeeling and jasmine green tea.
- Strong cheese goes well with green teas, as the umami flavours in cheese complement the vegetal flavours of greens.



At Tea House in Hilton Shillim, Maharashtra, exquisite green tea leaves are hand-sewn to cocoon marigold, jasmine blossoms and amaranth flowers. "When infused, they blossom into a symphonic display," gushes Executive Chef Shubhendu Kadam.

mood. "This can range from the Indian masala chai to fresh mint tea. Tea is also paired well with cookies and flavoured teacakes, chicken sandwiches and croissants," reveals Cindrella Gomes, Assistant Food and Beverage Manager at Sofitel.

Tea-based cocktails are slowly catching pace, and Mumbai's Typhoon Shelter has been serving up some interesting combinations. Drunken Rose is a heady concoction of dried rose macerate in vodka, sweet vermouth and *umeshu*, a liqueur often flavoured with green tea. Varun Sudhakar, Head of Beverage Innovation,

### MOODY TEAS

Dedicated tea cafés and boutiques offer not just a gourmet but also an inventive tea drinking experience to discerning customers. The tea salon at Artisan, Sofitel Mumbai, has introduced a menu wherein one can choose a tea that suits their





says, “The tannin from the tea is used to enhance the aftertaste of the drink.”

Pa Pa Ya, a restaurant specialising in Pan-Asian cuisine in Mumbai and New Delhi, serves up invigorating tea-infused spirits such as the vodka-based Tea Tini comprising sencha tea, and long Thailand iced tea.

### TEA TO EAT

Don't just drink your tea. With chefs having free rein to get creative in the kitchen, patrons can now eat it too. Tea Trails, a chain of tea cafés across metros such as Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, New Delhi (and many others), has introduced the Burmese Tea Salad, which comprises fermented green tea leaves with lettuce and crumbled nuts in a garlic-hinted sesame dressing. Then there are the tea marbled eggs — a dish that owes its distinctive glazed

appeal to black tea brewed in with coddled eggs. Masala Chai Sundae, as the name suggests, packs a punch of flavours with its medley of black tea, spices and ice cream. Similarly, restaurant POH's Matcha Mint Sorbet is a visual treat.

Home baker Keya Bhatia's matcha tea and coconut macarons are in constant demand. The Kettlery's chai *puchkas*, too, can create a

flavourful storm.

For those wanting to go the whole hog, Owner and Chef Anisha Maker's Thai-inspired chicken noodle soup with mint green tea at Mumbai's Garage Inc. lends a spin to the classic chicken noodle bowl. “The mint green tea, when added to the broth, gives it a grassy aroma, offering the dish a deeper dimension,” concludes Anisha. [Go](#)

Ever tasted the world's most expensive tea? Grown in the Wuyi Mountains in China, the highly oxidised, dark-coloured Da Hong Pao belongs to the oolong variety. Because of its excellence, Da Hong Pao tea is customarily set aside for honoured guests in China.



Photos Courtesy: Keya Bhatia; The Kettlery