



Teatime in Japan

**On The Menu:** Matcha Green Tea paired with Mochi

**“Tea...is a religion of the art of life.” – Okakura Kakuzo**

- Japan’s first record of tea was found in the writings of a Buddhist monk in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. Tea began as the drink of the religious classes and envoys who spent time in China. The first Chinese tea was allegedly first brought to Japan in 805 by a priest named Saicho and then in 806 by a priest named Kukai. This tea was probably “brick tea” or *tancha*.
- Tea then became the drink of the royals when Emperor Saga encouraged its cultivation in Japan and imported seeds from China.
- Matcha was first enjoyed in China during the Tsang Dynasty but after a grueling war with the Mongols, Chinese tea ceremonies came to a halt.  
It was Japanese Buddhist monks who began the tradition of grinding green tea leaves into powder, adding hot water, and fluffing the drink up with a bamboo whisk. They discovered that this concoction kept them awake and alert better through their long meditations. These monks and priests were the ones who transported and first introduced matcha to Japan over a thousand years ago. Originally, matcha was consumed primarily by men. It was later made accessible to women, who now outnumber men in the practice of *chanoyu*, the traditional Japanese tea ceremony.
- Chanoyu, “The Way of Tea” is the traditional formal Japanese tea ceremony. Also known as “sado” or “chado,” it commonly features matcha and less commonly features leaf teas such as “sencha.” Japanese tea masters teach and carry on this



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formal tradition of social refinement, grace, and serenity that is still alive and practiced today.

- In 1191 Eisai brought black tea seeds from China which were planted and originated Uji tea. Eisai was also the author of the earliest Japanese tea book, *Kissa Yojoki* ("How To Stay Healthy By Drinking Tea") and highlighted tea's medicinal powers, how it soothed the side-effects of drinking, quenched thirst, eliminated indigestion, and energized the body, amongst other qualities.
- Eisai was also responsible for exposing the warrior (samurai) class to tea-drinking after learning that the Shogun Minamoto-no-Sanetomo commonly drank too much after a meal and offered his tea readings as the antidote.
- Popular pastimes of China in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries including art, reading poetry, and debating philosophy while drinking tea caught on in Japan. In conjunction with the increase in tea production in the country, this is what made tea more accessible and widely-consumed by all Japanese social classes.
- The modern tea ceremony in Japan is attributed to the one cultivated by Sen Rikyu, who lived in Japan in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Tea ceremonies were also crucial to the feudal system, as negotiations over land and other affairs were discussed over a serene tea ceremony.
- A dedicated tea house, constructed specifically for the purpose of hosting the Japanese Tea Ceremony features tatami floors but tea can be served and enjoyed anywhere, including outdoors. The tea ceremony changes with the season as different implements are used.
- There are many different versions of Japanese tea ceremonies but it can follow this form: Guests arrive and change into *tabi*, traditional Japanese socks that have a separation for the sandal in the toes. Calligraphic scrolls holding meaningful scripts or sometimes artwork adorn the waiting alcove to be enjoyed before proceeding with the ceremony. Formally, the host wears a kimono and the tea ceremony considers the long sleeves of this garment. Host and guests bow and then are seated for tea. The host cleanses and arranges each tea implement and prepares a thick tea in a bowl that is passed to the first guest and bows are exchanged before the guest sips the tea. The first guest then bows to the second and the bowl is transferred and sipped from, with the second guest rotating it so that the guests do not drink from the same spot. This ritual continues until all guests have enjoyed the thick tea. Confections are then introduced and thin tea is prepared for each guest in a bowl. Implements are cleaned and the host exits by bowing at the door.

### **Want To Learn More?**

*The Japanese Tea Ceremony: Chan-No-Yu* by A.L. Sandler

*The Book Of Tea* by Kakuzo Okakura



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