

AN EPIC JOURNEY

TRACING TEA

IN PURSUIT OF THE ULTIMATE CUPPA



How far would you go
for the perfect cup of tea?

Across the street?

To the end of the block?

How about 15,000 miles?

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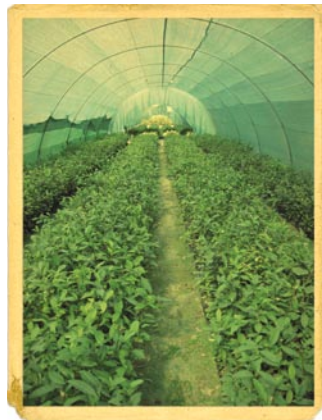


INDIA: A tea garden in Darjeeling

As part of a project titled Tracing Tea, four students and a film crew are following the leaf from Darjeeling's Makaibari Estate, through 18 tea-drinking nations to Britain. The group is travelling by Indian auto-rickshaw, charting the role of tea and trade in shaping the histories and cultures of Europe and Asia over the past 5,000 years. The eight-part documentary is scheduled for international broadcast in late 2009.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TRACING TEA JOURNEY

The adventure begins at the Makaibari Estate in Darjeeling, India, the world's oldest single-owner garden. Built in 1859, Makaibari was the first tea garden to introduce biogas systems (in 1971) and to be certified biodynamic. Estate management has also pioneered ways of preventing soil erosion, conserving forestry on the estate, and including women in the management of village bodies and the plantation itself.



Tea will discuss the role that Buddhism—in particular the Buddhist monasteries—played in cultivating and popularizing tea across Asia.

MORE DISCOVERIES

Central Asian republics are developing at a great pace thanks to their large and accessible reserves of oil and gas. This new money, evident in ostentatious displays in the larger cities, is fueling demand for luxury products, boutiques and cafés. Consumers are increasingly well-traveled and discerning, making it a prime future market for specialty tea and coffee outlets and café chains.

Iran's city of Rasht borders the Caspian Sea and has a humid climate and good rainfall, making it ideal for tea production. The cooler temperatures and lush green hills are a far cry from the dry and oppressive heat of Tehran, and so Gilan has become a popular tourism destination for wealthy Tehranis. Families come to picnic on the tea estates, go to the beach, and



PAKISTAN: The Institute of Tea Research's covered tea plants and sacks of dried tea

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even let their hair down and party.

Turkey, on the opposite shore of the Black Sea from the Ukraine, was hit hard by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and almost all of that year's tea crop had to be destroyed due to unsafe radiation levels. Tracing Tea will be looking at the ongoing impact of Chernobyl on the Turkish tea industry, and also working closely with the tea research institute in Rize, explaining the commercial applications of its work on the mineral content of tea and the potential for cloning tea plants.

Eastern Europe's emerging tea market is expected to become a core area for green tea sales. Its countries' hot beverage markets are currently dominated by herbal and fruit teas and infusions, and a number of Europe's blending houses are also located in Hungary and the Czech Republic, which Tracing Tea will investigate while there.

Almost at journey's end, the project will travel through Germany and the Netherlands, countries better known for their coffee consumption. However, without the Dutch East India Company opening maritime trading routes to China, Japan and Java in the early-1600s, none of us would likely be drinking tea at all. Tea became fashionable for the society figures present at the Dutch court of Orange, and the arrival of Chinese porcelains along with the tea chests stimulated European factories



KYRGYZSTAN: Tash Rabat ("The House of Stones") is framed by the Tien-Shan mountains in the Naryn region.



TURKEY: Within the country, Turkish tea is usually known as Rize tea. Virtually all of the country's tea is produced in the Rize province on the Black Sea coast.

to discover new techniques and make porcelain manufacturing commercially viable. Teapots, cups, saucers and other paraphernalia could then be produced cheaply for the ever-growing population of tea drinkers.

Finally, Tracing Tea will return to London, where a hotel will detail the careful preparation of its afternoon tea while explaining its history, and the student team will attempt to compete with the experts serving tea to the most demanding of customers. Tracing Tea also will tackle the role that tea consumption played in the Industrial Revolution. Professor Alan MacFarlane of Kings College, Cambridge, will explain with the aid of engravings, old photographs and a walking tour of the city the impact that tea had on urban mortality rates, population density and early factory workers.

tracingtea.com ■