

# On International Tea Day, how about some 'kokum chai' and blue tea?

Forget technology and globalisation, it's tea that seems to be shrinking and reuniting the world. While Indian and Sri Lankan teas are reaching out to far-fetched Mozambique, rare African teas are finding their way into your breakfast cup and that's just two examples of the brew's culinary movement across the globe. There's also a cup for every sip — tea is had shaken, stirred, infused, chilled and in other ways. Having spanned centuries and cultures, tea is one of our greatest culinary heirlooms. Here's looking at where the beverage has reached, today...

## NEW FUSIONS AND FLAVOURS

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India has come a long way in accepting tea beyond chai, but for a lot of people, it is still green, says tea curator Radhika Batra Shah. "When I do tea ceremonies people are amazed as they realise that tea is also white, oolong, varieties of black and tisanes (made of fruits, flowers, spices or herbs). And today, there is a tea for each part of the day — you awaken with whole leaf Darjeelings and robust Assams. Luncheon teas aid digestion so here's where fine tisanes made of fruits, flowers, spices or herbs fit in. For the mid-afternoon there is the champagne of teas — oolong which wipes fatigue away. And soothing whites make for quiet-moment teas." She also says there is so much innovation in flavours, today. "I recently made a 'kokum tisane'. It aids digestion and has always been a dadima's favourite cure for weight loss."

## KEY BENEFITS

*Radhika lists out a few teas and how they help...*

**White tea:** Resonates feelings of calm and peace.

**Green tea:** Infuses energy.

**Oolong tea:** Brings about a feeling of happiness.

**Black tea:** Makes you feel refreshed and rejuvenated.

## COOKING WITH TEA

### Versatility in the kitchen

Don an apron and get adventurous. Says executive chef Paul Kinny, "So many people still know tea only in one avatar, but there's so much you can do when it comes to cooking with tea. You can smoke meat with it — try robust oolong with prawns or Earl Grey with chicken. Just be careful of the balance as tea and smoke impart a bitter flavour. You can also try green tea as a dusting over dessert or make tea essences into dressings for salads. And if you're throwing a party just like you use coffee to make a tiramisu, use tea instead and make a 'tearamisu'. You can also make tea-inspired mocktails and cocktails and try a tea-infused Long Island iced tea," he reveals.

### Tea popsicles, anyone?

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Can't imagine something hot and cold together? A restaurant at Lower Parel did just that when they came up with 'tea popsicles'. Executive chef Thomas Zacharias who created this, talks of the idea behind it. "Most of us have cherished *masala chai* at one point or the other, but never really had it in a dessert form. We came up with a nostalgic dessert using the flavours of *masala chai* in the form of a *kulfi*. The dish consists of *masala chai* flavoured *kulfi* popsicles, served with jaggery caramel, candied ginger and a biscuit crumble. The three toppings add crunch and complexity to the dessert," he says.

### In your dessert

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There are various ways in which tea can be innovatively used in to enhance the flavours of desserts, says executive sous chef Vasant Khot. "The four basic categories of tea — green, black, oolong and white — enhance various desserts in different ways. While black tea enhanced with mint can be used in making panna cotta, white tea can be used in mango souffle. You can add the teas dry, steeped in water, steeped in other liquids, infused etc. The most- preferred teas for this are Darjeeling tea, hearty keemun or even smoky lapsang from China," he says.

### **ORGANIC TEAS TO THE FORE**

Today, folks have gone beyond the basics; there's a huge move towards healthier, organic tea. "This means tea that is grown in chemical-free and pesticide-free soil," explains organic tea expert Raka Chakrawarti. "With tastes evolving and an increased awareness of health , people realise it's worth spending a little extra over it. Now, you may not perceive the benefits of organic tea on the surface, but over time it does matter," she adds.

### **CULINARY TIPS TO USE TEA**

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- As a marinade or a rub where you combine tea leaves with spices for stronger meats.
- Use tea in soups, like a mushroom-cha, where flavours of mushroom are spiked with any light tea.
- You also make a masala chai-inspired pastry or flavour a creme brulee with a masala chai mixture; it's apt for the winter.

### **TRY THESE TEA-LICIOUS DESSERTS:**

*Executive sous chef Vasant Khot shares pairing tips...*

- **Black tea:** Litchi cardamom black tea with cream cheese topping.
- **Green tea:** Matcha castellan with lemon rind and pistachio frosting.
- **White tea:** White chocolate and raspberry tea cup cheese cake with an orange sauce.
- **Jasmine tea:** Infuse mango *firni* with jasmine tea.
- **Black tea with milk:** Use it to make a *masala chai* brulee.
- **Earl grey:** Try Earl grey blackberry chilly flake ice cream.
- **Black tea:** Black tea goes well with apple pie.
- **Keemun:** Keemun has a floral essence. Infuse it with wasabi and raspberry sauce.

## **LOW-CAL BITE: TEA LEAF SALAD**

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*Lahpet Thoke*, the Burmese tea leaf salad makes for a low-fat bite. It's made of pickled tea leaves, roasted peanuts, ginger-garlic and sesame seeds.

## **Tried this anti-ageing 'blue' tea?**

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The Butterfly Blue Pea Tisane is being called one of the world's healthiest teas. Apart from being a visual treat, it packs a host of benefits. "This is a perfect caffeine-free tea, it aids digestion, calms the nerves and above all, it is anti-ageing. It also infuses well into desserts and cocktails," informs Radhika.