

Is it your cup of tea?

From Gyukuro to Rooibos, tea consumption in India is going non-milk and gourmet

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Estimates suggest the per capita consumption of tea in India is 176.6 cups. Much more than coffee, which stands at a mere 16.6 cups. And most tea cups have been invariably skewed towards 'chai'.

However, given the evolving dynamics, that's about to change. Well-heeled and globe-trotting Indians are driving consumption towards trendy signature, handmade teas and tisanes (fruit infusions). Like the black orthodox tea blended with bergamot orange, or the green tea (buds) hand-rolled with jasmine flowers, or the Gyukuro, which is a premium shaded green tea. Or better still, the Rooibos, a red-hued brew renowned for its antioxidants, green teas blended with dried peach and strawberries, teas with berries and hibiscus, and the super-premium Chinese variants that have tea leaves hand-sewn around flowers.

"Then of course there is the

dessert tea. Like we made a banana nut bread into a tisane with 0.5% of carbohydrate, to enjoy with a slice of cake. Indians are far more discerning today and the palette has transformed to embrace gourmet tea blends to cherish tea drinking as an enjoyable experience," say tea connoisseurs Mayura Rao and Medha Rao, who run AusumTea.

The market for specialty tea in India is growing at a rate of 25% annually, say experts, "with a greater adoption seen of the greens, whites and well-

ness tea blends."

Tea taster Suhail Kapur, who manages the Sancha Tea Boutiques in NCR, Mumbai and Bangalore, says gourmet teas at their boutiques help people discover the cup which is perfect for them. "Tea sommeliers at our boutiques guide every individual through a journey of white, green, oolong and black teas by brewing various samples and highlighting the nuances of each cup," he says.

"Teapreneurs' are set out to hold tea tasting sessions and parties that involve tasting of brews, sharing of information, with a food pairing similar to wine tastings. They also take the effort to ring in blends that are unique and have a specific audience in mind.

Says Rao, "We pick a theme.

For example, lemongrass is used majorly in East Asian cuisine,

drinks and at their spas. So we have taken lemongrass as a lead flavour and worked on building a recipe that compliments this flavour. We then choose to add say sweet lime to enhance the lemongrass, or ginger to suit the Indian palette. We aim to create a layered tea drinking experience and thus focus on at least a few different smells and tastes in each cup."

Sensing market potential, Sancha, which operates six boutiques, is seeking to expand. "Sancha will be online starting July. Although ours is a niche offering, we see that customers are interested in learning about the tasting notes in our teas, be it grassy, fruity, woody or floral," says Nikhil Kapur, head of marketing and sales.

AusumTea, while continuing to build its presence online, will also build an offline partnership with hotels, cafes and restaurants. "We currently offer our blends as loose leaves and will diversify into tea-bags," says Rao.

...& ANALYSIS

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