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How To Properly Drink Tea, According To A Tea Sommelier



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Dining & Drinking



Cha Jie Tea Lounge JUMEIRAH NANJING

A visit to China wouldn't be complete without experiencing an authentic tea drinking ceremony. Tea drinking is an essential component to Chinese culture, and moreover, holds special meaning depending on the circumstance. Whether it be paying respect to an elder, an expression of gratitude or simply an opportunity to connect with a friend, pouring a cup of tea is both an activity that can be enjoyed daily, as well as an opportunity to commemorate something special.

Traditionally, the tea drinking ceremony embodies the ideas of Taoism, Confucian and Buddhism, going beyond just an act of drinking and into a way of life and appreciation of friendship, virtue and etiquette.

Jumeirah Nanjing's tranquil Cha Jie Tea Lounge is one place to experience the complex world of Chinese tea culture. One of the most peaceful times to enjoy the tea ceremony is at sunset, which daily is accompanied by staff dressed in ethnic attire reminiscent of the vast culture of Nanjing's historic past.

With views of the river, the melodic sounds of a musician playing the Guzheng, also known as the Chinese zither, and an array of over 30 varieties of tea to choose from it's a serene, elegant setting perfect to experience the ancient tradition.

Forbes chatted with Christie Xu, the restaurant manager and tea sommelier at Cha Jie, on all things Chinese tea culture. Here's what she had to say.

Talk about the importance of tea in Chinese culture.

“ Tea is part of life in Chinese culture. People love to be accompanied by the aroma of tea during work and life. It is also a vital part of maintaining good health. I believe the name of the restaurant Cha Jie, which means “Let the tea talk and explain” in Chinese, exemplifies the way Chinese people interpret why tea matters.

You can pause, calm down and find peace during a sip of tea. If you are looking for local flavors, Yu Hua tea, originating from Nanjing City in Jiang Su province, can be a good seasonal choice. The name Yu Hua means "Rain Flower," and it is so called because the tea leaves are harvested from within the Rain Flower Terrace area.

When you brew Yu Hua tea, the first thing you will notice is the soothing flowery aroma. The first few sips are refreshingly light and subtle but the flowery sweet taste and aftertaste slowly grows as you drink the tea.



Cha Jie Tea ceremony JUMEIRAH NANJING

For someone who is new to drinking tea, what are some guidelines to follow when preparing it?

“ Choose your tea based on factors such as seasons and physical state. For example, flower tea for spring and green tea for summer. And green tea may upset the stomach for someone with digestive problems since the leaves are not fermented when processed.

Strong tea has too much caffeine and it is not good for the cardiovascular system. When you are very tired, a cup of strong tea can provide you immediate energy but as they say: an excess of anything is bad. Especially avoid strong tea before sleep. And do not drink overnight tea.

When brewing tea, temperature varies for different types of tea. And the way tea leaves are stored matters to keep its quality.

When it comes to taste, what are signs you're drinking a quality tea?

“ Two senses will help you on your path to becoming a tea connoisseur.

Smell: No matter what kind it is, high-quality tea will have a distinct aroma. Green tea should smell grassy, light and fresh, while black tea should smell earthy, floral and sweet. When steeped, excellent tea should be deeply aromatic and amplify the unique scents of the dry tea leaves.

Taste: Great tea will have a strong, recognizable taste and mouthfeel. Flavors that are barely noticeable, overly astringent or unpleasantly chemical-tasting are an indication that you are drinking low-quality or old tea.

How are you supposed to drink it? Is it like wine where you take in to account the aroma or balance of flavors?

“ The water temperature, tea set, and environment are all critical factors contributing to a wonderful tea experience. At Cha Jie, the tea set is tailor-made with ginkgo patterns to fit into the whole environment. And a professional tea sommelier is available to help guests select tea matching each other.

Definitely, you will have a more in-depth understanding if there is a ceremony showcasing how to brew the tea.

How important is the custom of drinking tea in tea houses that highlight tranquility and peace in its ambiance?

“ Tea is a long-time culture of tranquility in Chinese culture. People intend to find peace during the sipping of tea. By providing the magnificent riverside sunset from the 41st-floor window, together with the discerning decoration in the Tea Lounge, guests will feel the long-standing traditions in the utmost calm.

And our tea Sommeliers serve an exquisite array of premium varieties, including oolong, pu-erh, green, red, and scented teas, in accordance with time-honored traditions from authentic tea carts. Guests are offered multiple selections of tea recommended by professional tea sommeliers.

For those looking to recreate a tea lounge feel, do you have any advice?

“ What matters is always the tea quality, the environment and cultural engagement you can offer.

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