

# Tea Time

From bold blacks and calming chamomiles to herbal blends filled with botanical flavor, these hot sips transform ordinary moments into indulgent rituals with added health benefits.

By ASHLEY RYAN

Whether used to warm up on a rainy day, boost your immune system when you feel a cold coming on, fall asleep at night or socialize with loved ones, there's no denying that tea has worked its way into our daily lives. However, it is far from a cutting-edge trend.

Many are familiar with the long-standing tradition of afternoon tea in England or the skillful preparation of ceremonial sips in China and Japan, but countless cultures across the globe have steeped leaves—as well as fruit, florals and herbs—in boiling water to produce a beverage that is soothing, ritualistic and, most importantly, good for your body and mind.

“[In December,] the Food and Drug Administration awarded tea the ‘healthy’ label, recognizing that two cups of green or black tea a day can support overall health in reducing the risk of heart disease and diabetes,” says Lan Pham Zentil, a Laguna Beach resident and founder of the Jadetiger Tea brand. “Tea has been consumed for over 5,000 years and was initially used for medicinal purposes; the FDA just solidified what was already instinctively practiced.”

From a promising partnership to a local tea shop and explorative nature workshops, read on to discover several ways to delve into the realm of tea in Laguna Beach.

## THE RITUAL REIMAGINED

In 2011, Pham Zentil was diagnosed with bone cancer and she made the decision to leave corporate life behind as she searched for a meaningful way to spread love and share a connection with her community.

“There was a stressful eight-week period when oncologists were unsure what type and stage of cancer I had,” she recalls. “I took that time to think about what career I’d want to pursue that I could be passionate about [and] that incorporates my business experience, creativity, time with family, travel, philanthropy—it was a heavy order. And after a few weeks of



Ingredients grown at The Ranch at Laguna Beach are incorporated in seasonal blends made by Jadetiger Tea for the resort. At left is Lan Pham Zentil, founder of Jadetiger Tea.

contemplation, tea kept coming to mind.”

To Pham Zentil, tea was a beloved commodity that she could learn the business of, but also use to connect with people. In 2018, Jadetiger Tea was born. The tea blends, which are crafted at a facility in north Laguna and available via an online shop in addition to select restaurants, spas, retail shops and boutique hotels, incorporate organic ingredients

from around the world in a time when we need to focus on wellness more than ever.

“We are bombarded by sugar-laden drinks, processed foods, GMOs, toxins like pesticides and herbicides, even plastics in what we eat and drink. Our schedules and lifestyles are busier and more demanding than ever,” she explains. “We need healthy options, and from a trusted source. Tea is a clean cup of

THIS SPREAD: MARILENA VERDUGO



Lemon balm and borage flowers used in the the Purple Jasmine Garden tea blend by Jadetiger Tea





Lan Pham Zentil, founder of Jadetiger Tea

plant power that helps support heart health, immunity and boosts energy. ... To me, more important than the physical benefits are the mental and emotionally calming benefits of tea. There's a saying that a cup of tea can impart the wisdom of the ages. The tea lifestyle inherently promotes health and wellness."

She travels to Asia in the springtime to source tea leaves, but gathers herbs for her blends locally. Using 3 grams instead of the usual 2 and an unbleached paper bag, Jadetiger Tea aims to make the drink convenient and accessible to all. "I'm a bit of a renegade," Pham Zentil notes. "I don't like rules and I break the first rule in premium tea: I bag high-quality loose-leaf tea."

Varieties range from Jasmine Jade and LemonTox to E-Grey and ChamoMint, but a partnership with The Ranch at Laguna Beach has provided her even more freedom to experiment.

"Lan sources tea from all over the world in a sustainable way," says Kurt Bjorkman, chief operating officer at the resort. "That's really important for us to meet with our ethos when it comes to how we approach food and beverages. To have something that we know and can trust is done on a high level is really amazing."

In addition to classic teas like chai, green tea, chamomile and English breakfast, Jadetiger Tea creates special blends offered only at the resort. "We pull something from the farm that we grow and we dehydrate it here on-property and give it to Lan, who



A tasting session with Jadetiger Tea's spiced peach tea varieties

then blends it and creates a custom tea," Bjorkman explains.

Changing with the seasons, these range from a spiced peach tea for fall to a strawberry balm spring tea and a Lunar New Year variety for winter. Ingredients like peppercorns, marigold petals and lemon, all grown at The Ranch, have been incorporated into these varieties. Pham Zentil's favorite was a purple jasmine floral blend that she created one summer after spending time in the garden with Ryan Goldsmith, locally known as Farmer Leo, and Farmer Makena.

"Through multiple tastings with the food and beverage team, together we came up with the perfect balance of green jasmine tea, flowers and herbs from the on-site garden, and butterfly pea flower," Pham Zentil says. "The tea steeps a beautiful bluish-purple and, when lemon or lime is added, turns bright pink. The anthocyanins in the flower are activated by the acid. It's a delicately smooth yet floral cup and the mixologist team created a beautiful tea cocktail with it."

In addition, Pham Zentil visits The Ranch regularly to meet with and train the culinary team on her teas so that they are well-versed in how to prepare each blend and can discuss it properly with guests. Jadetiger Tea is currently served in Harvest restaurant, The Porch coffee shop, Lost Pier Cafe and Young's Beach Shack (operated by The Ranch) in Dana Point as well as through room service at the resort. Later this year, Bjorkman says the property plans to add it to the gift shop and also host tea tasting experiences for guests to learn about the nuances of brewing tea. "It's kind of a full property takeover," he adds.

For Pham Zentil, the partnership has been a positive experience. "We hit it off from the first moment we met Kurt," she says. "Over time, I shared my journey starting a tea company through the course of our conversations. As the tea line grew, it seemed our values to stay organically sourced, low waste, eco-conscious [and] local [aligned], and then I reached out to Kurt about a tea tasting and the rest was history."

COURTESY OF JADETIGER TEA



Kavita (left) and Vidya Reddy, co-owners of Tea & Turmeric shop

### STEEPED IN AUTHENTICITY

From the shops to the trails, there are other tea-related experiences to be had in Laguna as well. Discover an array of loose-leaf options at Tea & Turmeric. The South Coast Highway shop, which also sells spices and gourmet cooking kits, stocks more than 180 varieties ranging from black, green and white to mushroom, oolong and herbal teas.

"You name it, we probably have it," says Vidya Reddy, who owns the shop with her sister, Kavita. "... Our connection to the healing and joyful power of spices and teas, passed down from our Indian grandmother and mother, inspired us to open this shop. Our shop is a testament to their wisdom and a platform for the mission in our motto: tea and spice for joy and health."

Given Reddy's background in naturopathy and Ayurveda, the shop also offers a selection of wellness teas inspired by ancient recipes from cultures around the world that place an emphasis on natural healing. "Sleep, inflammation and stress relief teas are our most requested wellness teas," she notes. "We have several blends in these ... and other wellness categories, like immunity, digestion and hormonal health. We also have a unique line of Ayurvedic teas."

Many of these are herbal. "Herbal teas do not contain tea leaves," Reddy says. "... Cultures throughout the world have used herbs, flowers and botanicals as medicine for thousands of years. They were the original medicines before modern medicine existed. So tea has been inextricably linked with wellness since its inception."

Several times a year, the shop hosts Tea and Meditation workshops that both educate visitors about tea and encourage them to slow down and take a quiet moment for themselves, focusing on the ritualistic components of steeping and

LEFT: MARY HURLBUT; RIGHT: KAVITA REDDY



Tea & Turmeric offers more than 180 varieties of tea including black, green, white, mushroom, oolong and herbal options.

sipping tea. This year, Ridya and Kavita also plan to introduce classes on making chai, creating custom herbal blends and pairing tea with chocolate.

Laguna Canyon Foundation also hosts a quarterly Native Plant Tea workshop during which Shelbi Richardson, a resource specialist for OC Parks, introduces locals to a variety of native flora within the coastal sage scrub ecosystem. "Participants will get to know a few key plants, including laurel sumac, white sage, black sage, elderberry, California sagebrush and any wildflowers currently in bloom," she explains. "We explore these plants' unique history through their different uses to humans and animals."

Part of the workshop includes creating your own custom tea blend, selecting from

three types of tea leaves that are sustainably sourced. "Time is specifically set aside at the end for participants to enjoy the surrounding views while sipping their tea," Richardson says, adding that they are encouraged to plant their own native garden at home in order to harvest leaves and create their own tea based on what they've learned. The spring iteration of the event will take place at Nix Nature Center on May 10.

With the many benefits to both physical and mental health, tea is perfectly suited for the Laguna Beach community. "Tea is not just a drink," Reddy says. "It's a holistic practice that nurtures both body and mind, and we are passionate about helping others experience the same benefits." ■