

Tea is Trendy

A growing market that is giving coffee shops a run for their money.

Before long it might be frothy Frappuccinos versus the richness of Oolong. As consumers grow more concerned over their health, many are opting to drink tea for their caffeine fix rather than coffee. Contrary to popular belief, tea is naturally lower in caffeine, which people view as being more healthful. According to the Tea Association of the U.S. Inc. based in New York, the caffeine content for tea is between 1/3 and 2/3 less than coffee depending on the type.

Tea also is credited with anti-aging and anti-cancer properties. In response to consumer concern over health, a number of teashops have opened in Orange County and are catering to the demand. Which poses the question, is tea trendy? The answer according to those in the know: It seems to be.

A growing industry

"If anyone believes that the United States tea industry is not undergoing a dramatic period of change, they should take a quick tour of their local supermarket and observe what is happening. Even within this single distribution channel, change is pervasive and immediately apparent," says Joe Simrany, president of the Tea Association of the USA, Inc.

A noticeable new development at the supermarket is that tea can be found in several different locations, not just in the "coffee" aisle. Consumers may observe the significant amount of space already being devoted to ready-to-drink teas in the "soft drink" aisle, but Simrany says this is only the beginning.



Desiree Nelson, the owner of the Lavender Lounge Tea Co. in San Clemente

PHOTO BY DEBBIE SKLAR

Traveling around the store, you may also find tea in the dairy department, in bottles and non-typical containers. Additionally, depending on the size of the supermarket, you may also encounter a refrigerated cabinet dedicated completely to tea.

"More often than not, you may spot some form of tea on a promotional display or in a vending machine near the entrance or exit. Most recently, organically grown tea is finding its way into special departments that have been set up to organize these products. Tea is even finding its way into the health and beauty aisle as an ingredient in other products," Simrany says.

The teahouse trend

Even if you're a confirmed coffee lover, there is no escaping the fact that tea's popularity is increasing. For example, Simrany notes the growing availability of specialty teas in thousands of coffee shops across the country. Even for coffee drinker, tea has a new appeal in the form of a product called Chai – a blend of tea, spices and milk. And tea outlets are popping up all across the country including Orange County.

"The trend of specialty tea is following on the heels of a similar expansion in the coffee industry. Today, specialty coffee accounts for one-third of total coffee sales and an even larger percentage of the profits," Simrany says. "Specialty tea will represent the fastest growing segment of the tea industry over the next decade. This segment has the capability of doubling its volume over the

TEA-A-TETE

- According to the Tea Association, tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world next to water.
- Tea can be found in nearly 80 percent of U.S. households.
- On any given day, more than 127 million Americans are drinking tea.
- On any given day, about one-half of the American population drinks tea.
- On a regional basis, the South and Northeast have the greatest concentrations of tea drinkers.
- About 85 percent of tea consumed in America is iced.
- One pound of tea will brew 200 to 400 cups of tea.
- Over the last nine years, sales of bottled tea have grown nearly 10-fold. In 2003, bottled, ready-to-drink tea sales were conservatively estimated at \$2 billion. **OCM**

next 10 years and may grow at an even faster pace than coffee.”

Locally, teashops including the Lavender Lounge Tea Co. in San Clemente, owned by Desiree Nelson, are noticing more and more foot traffic.

“I think tea is coming into its own. Slowly but surely, it is catching on,” says Nelson,

who opened the store in November after two years worth of research.

“I think it’s hard to call a traditional and ancient cultural experience trendy,” she says. “Tea is endearing to all races, ethnic groups and people in general.”

Nelson, 31, became fascinated by tea while working in the tearoom at the Ritz-

Carlton in Laguna Niguel for three years after college. “I didn’t know a lot at the beginning, so I started doing some research and learned all I could about tea.”

Today, her shop sells more than 60 varieties of tea from importers around the world – including white, black, green, red and herbal tea. She also sells tea paraphernalia, textured teas (Choobee style which is flavored gelatin-like squares you slurp up with a big straw), cakes, cookies and gourmet savories, as well as offering a tea club and regular tea tasting events. Nelson even created a special signature tea for San Clemente that she calls San ClemenTea, a peach-apricot blend.

“Our emphasis is to teach people about tea and that it is a multi-cultural fusion,” Nelson says. “People need to take time out to slow down and relax, and they can do that with tea. Somehow tea brings that out in people.”

Over in Irvine near the UCI campus, Kristen Lee, the general manager for Cha for Tea, says the shop is owned by Ten Ren Tea Co., which is based in Taiwan.

Cha for Tea sells hot and cold tea drinks, light food fare and tea influenced gifts. “We’re like a Starbucks, but with tea,” Lee says. “We use tea in our cooking too because it is healthy. For example, in our basil chicken entrée, we use Oolong tea to simmer the chicken, which enhances the flavors and cuts grease.”

Lee says that the tea trend has taken a little while to catch on but, since 2000 when the Irvine location opened its doors, sales have steadily increased by 10 percent each year. “It took some time, but Americans seem to like the different teas.”

Like Nelson, Lee mentions that customers enjoy the health benefits that tea may offer. “There are a lot of benefits to drinking tea, like eliminating free radicals in the body, fighting cancers and the aging process,” she says.

The most popular teas at Cha for Tea include iced Mango Green and hot Almond Milk teas. “Tea is the next trend wave,” she said. “I think it’s because people are into their health and tea can offer added benefits.” Tea drinking has been shown to benefit heart health, reduce rectal and colon cancer and increase bone strength in women, among other benefits.

TEA-RIFFIC FOR YOUR HEALTH

Recent growth in retail tea sales and specialty teashops is driven in large part by tea’s health benefits. Desiree Nelson, owner of Lavender Lounge Tea Co. in San Clemente, says many customers who stop by her tea lounge express an interest in giving up caffeine, but they still need an anti-oxidant fix. “I have one customer who has been drinking tea all her life and she says that it is the key to life,” she said.

According to the Tea Association and researchers, tea offers many benefits: It is a refreshing beverage that contains no sodium, fat, carbonation or sugar. It is virtually calorie-free. Tea helps maintain proper fluid balance and may even contribute to overall good health.

Tea contains flavonoids, naturally occurring compounds that are believed to have antioxidant properties. Antioxidants work to neutralize free radicals, which scientists believe damage elements in the body, such as genetic material and lipids, and contribute to chronic disease.

Every day, new findings from the international scientific community lend credibility to tea’s healthy properties. For the most part, studies conducted on green and black tea, which are from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant, have yielded similar results.

Here are some other recent findings:

■ **Heart Health:** Drinking 3 to 5 cups of tea per day can offer significant heart health benefits ranging from reducing heart attack risk to lowering Low Density

Lipoprotein cholesterol, or “bad” cholesterol. For example, one recent study found that participants who drank more than 16 fl. ounces of black tea per day had a 50 percent lower prevalence of cardiovascular disease than non-tea drinkers.

■ **Colon Cancer:** Benefits to gastrointestinal health reaped by tea drinking seem to be cumulative and dependent on the amount of tea consumed per day, as well as the number of tea-drinking years. One study found that women who consumed the equivalent of 2.5 cups of tea per day had a 60 percent reduction in rectal cancer risk, compared with women who drank less than 1.2 cups of tea daily. An additional study found tea drinkers to have about 42 percent reduced risk of colon cancer as compared to non-tea drinkers.

■ **Skin Cancer:** According to University of Arizona research findings, participants who drank iced black tea and citrus peel had a 42 percent reduced risk of skin cancer and hot black tea consumption was associated with a significantly lower risk of the most common form of skin cancer, squamous cell carcinoma.

■ **Bone Health:** Two recent studies found that tea-drinking women had higher bone mineral density measurements than non-tea drinkers, especially in those who had been habitual tea-drinkers for six or more years. Higher bone mineral densities is an indicator of strong bones.

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TYPES OF TEAS

Much of the world's tea is grown in mountainous areas 3,000 to 7,000 feet above sea level, situated between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn in mineral-rich soil. Leading tea-producing countries include Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania.

The three main types of tea – green, oolong and black – all come from the plant *Camellia Sinensis*. The way that the teas are processed accounts for the differences in color and flavor. *Camellia Sinensis* is an evergreen plant that loves subtropical areas such as India and southern China. There are three main types of *Camellia Sinensis*: China, Assam (mostly found in India) and Cambodian. Even though there are only three types of plants, there are more than 2,000 varieties of teas. The variations come from the differences in the soil, the climate and how the plant is harvested, just as changes in the vineyard affect a fine wine.

■ **Black Tea:** This is the type of tea that comes to mind when many people think of tea. Black tea accounts for 80 percent of the tea manufactured worldwide. These teas have a smoky aroma and an intense flavor.

■ **Green Tea:** Green tea has received a lot of attention in the news. It reportedly offers health benefits, relatively low caffeine content and a mild flavor. Commercial green tea even has a significant amount of Vitamin C. Research indicates that green tea can neutralize nasty smells such as garlic. As the name indicates, green tea usually is pale green or yellowish in color.

■ **Oolong Tea:** Oolong teas are most often served in Chinese restaurants. They are known for their rich tastes and lasting aftertastes. Oolong tea is defined as semi-fermented tea and there are many degrees of fermentation. Some Oolong teas are lightly fermented, so they are called Green Oolongs. These teas are very fragrant. Black Oolongs are heavily fermented and are known for their lasting aftertaste.

■ **Herbal Teas:** Herbal teas are not made from *Camellia Sinensis*, but from other plants such as mint and chamomile. They have many different health benefits and flavors. Herbal teas are great beverages for children since they are naturally sweet and do not contain caffeine or sugar. **OCM**

Source: *The Tea Association of the U.S. Inc.*

On the basis of the growth realized over the last five years, it is safe to predict that “the only hot water the tea industry will encounter will be used to make the world’s favorite brew,” Simrany says.

He isn’t the only believer. “There is just something special about drinking tea that takes

us back to a time when things were smoother, quieter,” says Nelson, who has been drinking tea for 10 years. “I rarely drink coffee, but give me a cup of tea and I’m happy.” **OCM**

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