

Seven Stars Tea House

If you spend time in Yangshuo then at some point you will want to visit the Seven Star Tea House on Diecui Road, up near the bus station. The tea house is run by owner Annie Zhou who has lived in Yangshuo for over twenty years and really does know everyone in town. Opened in 2004 the tea house cover two floors with a tea shop downstairs and a seated, air conditioned tea rooms upstairs serving everything from soft drinks to snacks and of course tea. With her team of specially trained staff she will make you feel welcome and introduce you to the distinctively Chinese business of drinking tea.



A unique feature of the Seven Stars Tea House is that it is the only tea house in Yangshuo with its own tea plantation. Annie's family got involved with the tea business after her brother saw that as people's lives were improving the popularity of tea drinking was growing. Where as twenty years ago the people would not have been able to afford good quality teas now things had changed and the quality of life had improved. Seeing an opportunity to invest, in 2000 her family started to plant tea trees on a mountain close to her village, Jiaobalin near Yangshuo in Guangxi province. Now the Seven Stars Tea Plantation covers 40 hectares of mountainside and produces over 40 tons of the finest quality organic green tea. In 2009 their tea, Cuiyu Green Tea won the Guangxi Special prize at a tea tasting competition, rather like a wine tasting but better for you perhaps. The Cuiyu Green Tea, noted for its clear green colour and fragrant taste of chestnuts and fresh corn is exported across China to hotels and tea houses. You can even try it in Prague at!



Tea production at Seven Star Tea Plantation

Tea has always been an important part of Chinese way of life. The making of tea is called Chá Dào, literally meaning "tea brewed with great skill" and the art of brewing and serving tea plays a major cultural role in China. It is a time to unwind and socialise with friends while enjoying the smell and taste of fine quality teas. Tea drinking plays a part in pretty much all social occasions



and when someone pours you a cup of tea this is seen as a sign of respect. It is even said in China that when you see someone on the street, before you even say “hello” you say “have you had tea yet”?

Tea is credited as being first discovered by the Chinese Emperor Shennong in 2737 BC. It is said that the emperor liked his drinking water boiled before he drank it so it would be clean, so that is what his servants did. One day, on a trip to a distant region, he and his army stopped to rest. A servant began boiling water for him to drink, and a dead leaf from the wild tea bush fell into the water. It turned a brownish colour, but it was unnoticed and presented to the emperor anyway. The emperor drank it and found it very refreshing, and cha (tea) was born. Considered to be the father of Chinese agriculture, Shennong, sometimes referred to as the 'divine farmer' is said to have taught his people how to cultivate grains as food, so as to avoid killing animals. Shennong is also credited with identifying hundreds of medical (and poisonous) herbs by personally testing their properties and is also believed to have introduced the technique of acupuncture.



If you visit Annie in her tea house she will welcome you with a cup of Cuiyu Green Tea and will be happy to let you try other teas from her stock. There is a huge range of different types of tea in China, possibly thousands of them. This makes it very difficult for the newcomer to tea drinking to take in all the different qualities, types and tastes. In China the main way tea is classified is by the amount of fermentation that has taken place during the process of making the tea. Actually fermentation is the wrong word since the process is more akin to composting where the tea leaves are left open to the oxygen which promotes bacterial decomposition in the cell structure of the leaves. Sometimes called 'withering'. After the leaves have been oxidised, or not in some cases, they are then dried to arrest the process of fermentation. Annie explains that there are some basic differences the beginner needs to understand for example;

White Tea: This tea has a soft taste that reflects the time of year when it is harvested, the spring when water is in abundance and the sprouts of the tea tree are ripe with the flavour of the sun. White Tea is the speciality of the Fujian province and is picked from the youngest white shoots from the tea tree. The finest White Teas such as the much sought after Silver Needle are only picked during the spring time when there is an abundance of water and good sunlight to promote early growth. This tea is not left to ferment and is quickly dried after picking which helps to retain a soft sweetness and a clear colour. White Tea is rich in antioxidants and is very healthy for you with strong anti-viral and anti-bacterial qualities.

Green Tea: This tea which is left to dry or “wither” for a short period of a few hours before pan frying, steaming or drying



over charcoal fires. Because the tea is produced from young leaves and is dried so quickly soon after picking the tea has a golden colour and freshness to its taste. Green tea is now very popular across the rest of the world and is well known for its healthy medicinal properties and its ability to promote a longer life. Annie's favourite Green Tea is of course her own family produced Cuiyu Green Tea, which translates as Green Feather Tea. She describes it as "a forest in the sea" referring to the way the individual tea leaves stand upright in the tea cup.

Yellow Tea: Is similar to green tea but has a slower drying phase, where the damp tea leaves are allowed to sit and yellow during a more extended 'withering'. Thus it has been part fermented or oxidised usually to about 10%. Its appearance when brewed is more yellowy than green tea and is often cured with other herbs to enhance the flavour.

Oolong Tea: This is a part fermented tea which has had its leaves bruised to break open their cell walls and stimulate enzymatic activity during the oxidisation process. Typically the leaves will be fermented to between 50% and 70%. The tea may also be cured by regular periods of drying over charcoal fires during this phase. When rolled into small pellets it is often referred to in the west as Gunpowder Tea. This technique renders the leaves less susceptible to physical damage and breakage and allows them to retain more of their flavour and aroma. In addition, it allows certain types of Oolong Teas to be aged for decades if they are cared for by being



occasionally roasted. Annie favours a rather expensive type of Oolong Tea called Tie Guanyin and equates it to a very fine wine with its rich brown smoky flavour and distinctive sweet after taste. At 3000rmb a kilo this is very much a tea for special occasions and not a tea to be drunk every day.

Black Tea: This is the kind of tea we are most familiar with outside of China. Black Tea is fully oxidised and often compressed into bricks as it travels well and thus has been popular with traders over the centuries. The leaves are first bruised and then oxidised in a warm humid environment before being dried to arrest the fermentation process. This process turns the tea leaves black which is why the tea carries this name though when brewed it tends to have a dark reddish colour and strong flavour.

Post Fermented Tea: For those seeking a stronger tea you can try a one from the Yunnan region. Named after the city of Pu'erh, this tea is perhaps better known outside of China and comes in two forms. The raw Pu'erh, called Sheng Pu'erh is unfermented, rather like a Green Tea and is very strong with high caffeine content. It is rather like drinking coffee with its bitter taste. The fermented version of the tea, Shou Pu'erh, is left to cure after the fermentation



process and then fermented again and which is why sometimes this tea is called Black Black Tea. For the second part of the fermentation as the tea is warmed in a wet atmosphere and continually turned to promote bacterial decomposition. When ripened in this way the tea develops a sweeter, softer flavour in the same way that letting a good wine lay adds to the quality taste, and of course the price. In this form the tea is revered for its medicinal qualities as it is said that it reduces blood cholesterol, a fact borne out by medical research. It is also widely believed in Chinese cultures to counteract the unpleasant effects of heavy alcohol consumption.

Red Tea: Another kind of fermented tea you might like to try is the Red Tea. This tea is made from plants of the aspalathus genus where as the other teas are produced from varieties of the camellia sinensis plant . The flavour of this tea is very different from those made from the camellia. The tea is caffeine free and is believed to aid insomnia problems, irritability, headaches, nervous tension and hypertension. It has a mild, round flavour and is often mixed with other types of tea.

Of course there are many other teas drunk in China, too many to list them all here including many herbal and medicinal teas. Scented Teas for example such as Jasmine, Osmanthus and Chrysanthemum are very popular and sometimes these are mixed with Green Tea to enhance the flavour. Other teas may be mixed with spices or herbs, for example there is a type of Oolong Tea that is powdered with Ginseng and then rolled into small pellets. This gives the tea a very refreshing smoky flavour, a sweet after taste and a delicious golden brown colour. Annie will also serve a very special kind of Flower Tea that are made by hand by threading stamen, petals and leaves from plants such as jasmine, lily, globe amaranth, chrysanthemum, osmanthus and hibiscus. These are then wrapped in a ball of green tea leaves. When presented to you they will look like large seeds but when immersed in hot water the open gently to reveal a spectacular display of colours.

If you ask Annie will show you how to make good quality tea offering you a lesson that will enhance your taste experience. For example she suggests that with Green Tea the water temperature should be around 80 degrees. White Teas should also be brewed with water at 80 degrees but steeped for longer than normal to allow the finer flavours and aromas to develop. Where as with Black teas the water should be as hot as possible.

Making a good quality cup of tea is a complex process and people study for years to attain the status of Tea Master. You also need the right Tea Tools for the job probably including a Tea Tray to catch the excess water that is produced during the brewing of the tea. Even without years of



training and all the correct tools you can still have a go and Annie generously agreed to describe for us how to brew a quality cup of tea so you can all try this at home:



1. BOIL WATER.

2. RINSE THE TEA BOWL WITH HOT WATER.

3. FILL THE TEA BOWL WITH TEA LEAVES UP TO ONE THIRD OF THE HEIGHT OF THE POT.

4. RINSE THE TEA LEAVES BY FILLING THE TEA BOWL WITH HOT WATER UP TO HALF FULL AND DRAINING THE WATER IMMEDIATELY LEAVING ONLY TEA LEAVES BEHIND.

5. POUR MORE HOT WATER INTO THE TEA BOWL AVOIDING THE FORMATION OF ANY BUBBLES. THE INFUSION SHOULD NOT BE STEEPED FOR TOO LONG: 30 SECONDS IS AN APPROPRIATE MAXIMUM FOR THE FIRST BREW.

6. POUR THE INFUSION INTO SMALL SERVING POT WITHIN A MINUTE BY CONTINUOUSLY MOVING THE TEA AROUND OVER THE STRAINER AS IT POURS. BE SURE TO DRAIN ALL THE WATER FROM THE TEA BOWL SO THE TEA DOES NOT STEW.

7. THE SERVING POT IS THEN USED TO DECANT INDIVIDUAL PORTIONS OF THE LIQUID TO DRINKING CUPS. EACH CUP OF TEA IS EXPECTED TO HAVE THE SAME FLAVOUR, AROMA AND COLOUR.

8. POUR EXCESS TEA FROM THE SERVING POT AND DRINKING CUPS AND THOROUGHLY WASH DOWN ALL THE IMPLEMENTS.

9. THEN REPEAT THE PROCESS. IT IS POSSIBLE TO DRAW THREE OR FOUR GOOD INFUSIONS FROM A SINGLE POT OF TEA, BUT SUBSEQUENT INFUSIONS MUST BE STEEPED FOR A LITTLE LONGER.

After a person's cup is filled, that person may knock their bent index and middle fingers (or some similar variety of finger tapping) on the table to express gratitude to the person who served the tea. This custom is said to have originated in the Qing Dynasty when Emperor Qian Long would travel in disguise through the empire. Servants were told not to reveal their master's identity. One day in a restaurant, the emperor, after pouring himself a cup of tea, filled a servant's cup as well. To that servant it was a huge honour to have the emperor pour him a cup of tea. Out of reflex he wanted to kneel and express his thanks. He could not kneel and kowtow to the emperor since that would reveal the emperor's identity so he bent his fingers on the table to express his gratitude and respect to the emperor.



Annie's tea rooms are always buzzing with activity as local people pop into chat or to purchase tea. Often you will see someone sitting gazing onto a tiny glass cup as they muse over the clarity of the tea, inhaling the aroma and savouring the fragrance of the tea before deciding on a purchase. It even happens that a customer will inspect the fineness of the mesh in the tea strainer before making a final decision. Other people come to socialise, share local gossip and enjoy Annie's ebullient company. The shop stocks a full range of Tea Tools including smelling cups, tasting cups, serving pots, tea bowls, strainers, kettles and tea trays. The list is endless but the important thing is Annie can also sell you the tea you need to go with the tools.

If you visit the Seven Star Tea House, on occasion you may get the opportunity to sit with a Tea Master who will share with you their own private collection of teas from some of the thousands available in China. At master-classes like this these tea professionals will wow you with their knowledge of tea and like a good chef will delight your taste buds with their rare brews. Annie will also organise tea ceremonies for groups so you can experience the ritual yourself and sample a range of teas. Or you can sit down with her and get lessons on how to make tea from

a real expert. As a qualified tour guide Annie can also organise day trips to the Seven Stars Tea Plantation where you can see the tea being produced and enjoy a day out in the countryside around Yangshuo with its stunning mountain top views.



Tea drinking is an elegant pastime, a relaxing and healthy way to pass the time in good company with good conversation. This old tradition is very much on the comeback in modern China, you could say it is a sign of the times and an indicator of the way peoples lives have improved over the last twenty years. Tea culture also reflects the history and traditional values of Chinese culture and the people here celebrate the old ways now with a tasty cup

of tea. It is said that when you get up in the morning there are seven things to think about: oil, salt, wood, rice, soy sauce, vinegar and tea!

To book a Tea Ceremony, Tea Lesson or Tasting contact us on the details below. Groups, individuals and parties welcome.

周艳珍
Annie Zhou
E-mail: annie_cf@hotmail.com
电话/tel: 0773-8819918
手机/mob: 13807830496
地址: 阳朔叠翠路36号

