

IMPORTANCE OF TEA IN DAILY LIFE OF TURKISH PEOPLE

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Summary

Turkish people drink tea several times in a day and it is possible to find a glass of tea almost everywhere. There are so many tea houses in each street of the cities, towns and even villages. Almost each park has tea houses where tea is served with a traditional manner. Tea is a fascinating beverage for starting first talk to a stranger person. Offering tea is the first duty for Turkish people in their offices, restaurants and homes for their guests or clients. Turkish women arrange tea parties in their houses with special meal for tea. In Turkey, tea is mostly drunk with a characteristic tulip shaped glasses with sugar. Sometimes, lemon juice is added just before serving. Special pots are used generally for brewing of tea. In present study, importance of tea in daily life of Turkish people is exclusively reviewed.

Keywords

Turkish tea culture, tea brewing, tea pots, tea glasses, tea gardens, tea parties.

History

Tea became known in Turkey in 1555, and was first drunk in İstanbul. In those early years, drinking coffee was very popular in the country, and "Turkish coffee" also became well-known in Europe. Over time, however, the consumption of black tea in Turkey has increased, and today black tea consumption is higher than coffee consumption.

The preference for and increased consumption of tea triggered endeavors to cultivate tea in Turkey. Thus, the first attempt for the cultivation of tea plants occurred in 1888. In that year, tea seeds were brought from Japan and sown in some regions near İstanbul. However, poor knowledge about tea cultivation techniques and unsuitable ecology resulted in frustration. Thirty-six years later, in 1924, tea seeds from Russia were successfully cultivated in another area on the east coast of the Black Sea. Eventually, the first tea harvest (135 kg) was achieved in 1938. From that raw material, approximately 30 kg of black tea was produced. After World War 2, both the production and the consumption of black tea rapidly increased in Turkey (Table 1). Today, Turkey is 4th in the world, in terms of annual per capita consumption of tea. It is also one of the most important tea producing countries in the world.

Table 1. Some information about tea in Turkey

Years	Area (x1000Ha)	Smallholders (x1000)	Raw material (1000 ton)	Black tea (1000 ton)	Per capita consumption (kg/year)
1938	0.15	-	135 kg	30 kg	-
1950	2.65	-	0.9	0.2	0.083
1960	8.0	77.0	25.9	5.8	0.280
1970	28.1	125.0	153.3	33.4	0.522
1980	53.8	178.8	476.1	96.9	1.772
1990	88.6	202.9	608.4	122.7	2.236
2000	76.7	204.5	758.0	138.8	2.247
2005	76.6	202.0	1194.0	216.0	2.696

Table 1. indicates that at a minimum, more than one million people are directly involved in tea cultivation, when considering the contribution of various members of the families. In addition, thousands of people work in the tea sector in various capacities i.e. in tea plants, in

retail and wholesale businesses, and in serving sectors, such as tea or coffee houses.

Tea Brewing Methods and Tools for Tea in Turkey

In Turkey, tea is usually brewed using two different methods i.e. in a set of special tea pots or in a samovar. However, Turkish people have recently started to use tea bags as well.

Brewing tea in tea pots

For this purpose, two stacked kettles (*çaydanlık*), especially designed for tea preparation, are used. Water is boiled in the larger lower kettle and then some of this water is used to fill the smaller kettle on top, where several spoonfuls of tea leaves are steeped, in order to produce a very strong infusion. When served, the remaining water in the lower kettle is used to dilute the tea in the top kettle. This dilution gives each individual consumer the choice between a strong or weak brew. Brewing tea takes at least 15 minutes, but this period varies according to personal drinking habits. Tea pots are made from different materials, such as ceramic, earthenware, steel, copper, aluminium etc.

Brewing tea in samovar

The samovar is mostly preferred when brewing tea for a larger number of people, such as in parks, in tea houses and in other outdoor places. A traditional samovar, which is also valued for its aesthetic appearance, consists of a large metal container with a faucet near the bottom and a metal pipe running vertically through the middle. The pipe is filled with charcoal and dry pinecones, and heats the water in the surrounding container. After water boils in the container, it is used to fill a small teapot which contains the tea leaves. Once the fire has been turned off, this small teapot is placed on the top of the large container, and is kept heated by the passing hot air. Then the tea is served, again by diluting the strong infusion with boiled water from the main container. Today there are new electric samovars as well.

Tea glasses in Turkey

Turkish people have evolved their own way of making and drinking tea, which has differentiated their tea culture from that in other parts of the world. In Turkey, tea is traditionally offered in special tulip-shaped glasses. The most important characteristic of these small glasses is their transparency, in order to show the colour of the tea. This is because the colour of the tea is the most important quality parameter for Turkish people. These tea glasses are very thin and fragile. One can easily feel the temperature of the tea while drinking it, due to this specific tea glass design. Generally, these glasses hold only 100-110 mL of tea, and this small size aids in maintaining the hot temperature of the tea while it is being drunk.

There are different types of tea glasses designed with a rim or a gold covered ring/line, in order to save the drinker's fingertips from being burned. Tea saucers (small plates placed under the tea glasses) are traditionally made from ceramic and glass, however, steel and plastic tea saucers have become more common in recent years. Tea glasses and saucers are designed to form special tea sets, and sometimes special Turkish handcrafted decoration and engravings are found on these tea saucers.

Tea ceremonies, Tea parties

Breakfast

These days, almost everyone starts the day with tea in Turkey. Preparation of the breakfast tea is the first thing done when one gets up in the morning. Turkish tea drinkers often consume tea with sugar, and sometimes they add lemon. There are many cafes and fast food

restaurants serving breakfast with tea in the mornings. You can also see street vendors selling special Turkish bagels (called “simit”), which are a ring-shaped bread covered with sesame seeds. In Turkey, tea and simit are definitely accepted as an inseparable pair for the breakfast.

Tea: all day everywhere

Today, wherever you go in Turkey, you can find small teahouses or tea gardens. Teahouses are found in every park, village, town square, seaside, hilltop, and any conceivable place with a view. There are three common places for drinking tea: tea gardens, family tea gardens and coffee houses.

Tea gardens are preferred by individuals and groups of all ages, who spend their leisure time there because of the pleasant atmosphere. Sometimes students do their homework there as well. Family tea gardens are mostly preferred by families who want to have a good breakfast with perfectly brewed tea in an elegant environment. These gardens often have playgrounds for the children. Even wedding ceremonies are performed in these tea gardens. Coffee houses, which form the main part of social life, are found in every part of the country from a little village to the downtown area of the big cities. One can find all kinds of non-alcoholic beverages there, however tea is the most popular one. Generally these places are preferred by retired or jobless men. They play games such as backgammon, cards, and dominos, and also enjoy lively discussions of political and community issues. You can have a glass of hot black tea everywhere, and anytime throughout the day in Turkey. Traditionally the Turkish expression “let’s have a tea” means “I have missed you, let’s talk while drinking tea”.

Tea Parties

In Turkey, different social groups, such as university students, teachers, various professions, clubs, and women especially, frequently organize tea parties for different purposes, such as to meet new people, to get together with friends, and to discuss different topics.

Women’s tea parties are the most popular. They are very important for Turkish woman, particularly for the hostess, because she has to be well prepared for the big day. All women get made up, and dress up in their most beautiful dresses for the party. The hostess prepares a variety of traditional cakes, patties, pastries, stuffed vine leaves, etc. because these are special foods which go perfectly with tea. In this way the hostess is able to show off her cooking and baking skills. It is customary for one of the guests of the party to be the hostess of the next tea party.

Conclusion

In summary, tea has become an indispensable element of the daily life for all Turkish people. In Turkey, a special, unique tea culture has evolved during the years, and this culture continues to grow to this day.

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