

IT'S ALWAYS TEA TIME SOMEWHERE

There's something so soothing about tea. It's one of the few calorie-free pleasures in my life, assuming I'm not having black tea that commands milk. I always keep one of those electric water heaters on the counter so that I can refill my cup at a moment's notice. I've got cabinets full of teas – Assam, Earl Grey, Silver Needle, Shou Mei, An Shi Ti Kuan Yin, Tumeric Ginger, and Milky Oolong are some of my favorites.



For special occasions, there's nothing better than High Tea. I love the ritual of it, the shared experience with friends, the conversation, but in truth, it's the scones I'm after. How divine it is to raise my pinky to a beautiful porcelain cup, and then schmear my scone with an over abundance of clotted cream and jam.



But perhaps my most unique experience was learning how to prepare a Chinese tea ceremony. I was working in Singapore and there was a small teashop near the office. On a whim, I signed up for a course thinking I would be with other people. I walked up the creaky stairs to a small room that could clearly fit only two. An older Chinese gentleman with one blue glass eye entered the room and bowed.



For the next two hours, we did not speak, having no language in common. Yet patiently, he gingerly poured the water over the tea leaves once, then twice, then three times, as I tasted the difference between cups. The first was too bitter, so it was poured out. The second had a burst of earthy flavor, though it was a bit harsh. The third was just perfect – clean, smooth, and relaxing.

I think the whole ceremony was about patience. It's about slowing down. It's about stopping to appreciate what's good right in front of you. It's about learning how to savor each moment. Not a bad lesson to learn from a simple cup of tea.