

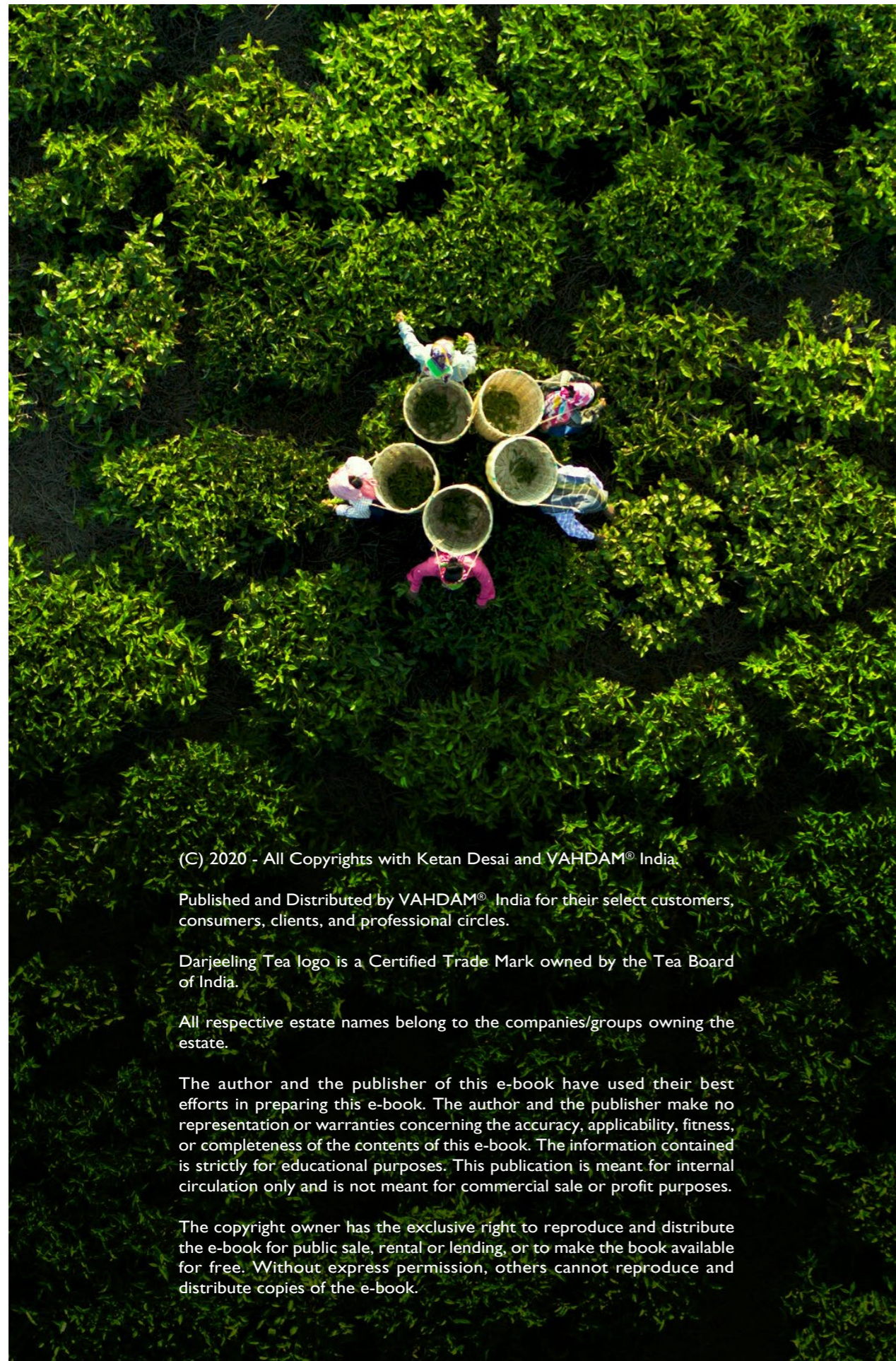
*Facts, facets & fables of The Champagne of Teas*

# Darjeeling Tea

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Ketan Desai



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INDIA



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*“If God asked you for a  
cup of tea, offer him a cup  
of Darjeeling tea.”*  
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## Preface

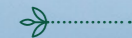
Darjeeling always evokes mystique, mystery, and magic. The crisp, clean air, the misty clouds, the rolling hills and mighty mountains - and its most famous product - Darjeeling tea!

What Champagne is to sparkling wine, Roquefort is to blue cheese, Scotch is to whiskey, and Havana is to cigars, Darjeeling is to Tea!

Darjeeling Tea is the Rolls Royce of teas. This iconic and enigmatic gem, among all teas, is one of the most expensive and sought after by true tea connoisseurs that include the likes of Emperor of Japan to the Chancellor of Germany.

Whilst tea lovers all across the world know about Darjeeling tea, there is always this endless intrigue and interest in knowing more about the fascinating story of Darjeeling tea : how did tea come to Darjeeling ? What is it about Darjeeling tea that makes it so exclusive ? What is a first flush ? What is muscatel tea ? What are some of the legendary tea estates in Darjeeling...and so on.

In this easy-read e-book, our in-house tea-expert has carefully hand-picked the finest facets of the Darjeeling tea, just as they would lovingly hand-pluck the finest tea leaves.



*We hope you enjoy the story of Darjeeling tea - truly Mother Nature's rarest gift.*



### *The Famous Darjeeling Toy Train*

*The iconic Darjeeling Toy Train was started in 1881 by the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR). Starting from New Jalpaiguri to Darjeeling, the journey takes one through some of the most breathtaking and memorable sights of the lush valleys plush with tea bushes and the majestic Himalayan peaks. It was accorded the World Heritage Site status in 1999.*





*Ketan Desai*



## About the Author

Ketan was born, bred, buttered and jammed in Calcutta, amongst the only race in the world - Bengalis - who are fiercely proud and fanatically particular about their tea : Darjeeling. He grew up in 'tea', so to say, with both maternal and paternal families having been in the tea business for generations. His earliest memories of tea are of his maternal grandfather sniffing, sorting and smelling dry tea leaf samples and making cryptic notes on the pages of a thick auction catalogue. He also vividly remembers his uncles noisily slurping, sucking and spitting endless cups of tea neatly laid out in the endless tasting room.

He joined the family business immediately after finishing his school, working as an intern. From opening up neatly wrapped packets of samples to writing down tasting remarks to copying sold prices at the auction hall, this was the time when Ketan learnt the basics.

After completing his education, he joined Late Iqbal Ahmed, a global authority on all aspects of tea. It was Mr. Ahmed who polished the rough edges by deepening and widening Ketan's knowledge of tea. From plucking the first-fine leaves in Assam, to pruning bushes during winters in Darjeeling. He learnt formulating blends for Egypt to Iran, Germany to Japan and Syria to Sudan. In the public tea auctions, he realised how buyers bid with a wink of

an eye to tap of a pencil. It was during this time that the USSR collapsed and Russia opened new opportunities. Ketan was amongst the first tea professionals to visit Russia during the early 1990s. Over the years, he has travelled extensively to Russia and the CIS countries, learning the language, and writing for a trade journal.

With the first dotcom boom in the early 2000s, Ketan was instrumental in launching teauction.com – the world's first B2B portal for online auction of teas. After a successful launch in India, Ketan travelled to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Kenya to launch teauction.com in these auction centres. He took a sabbatical to complete a full-time MBA.

After the sabbatical, Ketan went the entrepreneurial way and launched CHA - India's premier chain of loose-leaf tea boutiques. He also launched a niche financial communications agency in Bombay and promoted-invested in D:FY – a new-age sports brand with his brother.

Ketan is currently with VAHDAM® India where he is the Chief Tea Educator as well as the Sustainability Officer, leading TEAch Me® - the flagship educational programme focussing on the education of tea-workers' children in India. He is also an investor in VAHDAM® India.



## How tea came to Darjeeling

How did a sleepy hamlet nestled in valleys of the mighty Himalayas, till less than 200 years ago, transform into miles and miles of manicured rolling lush green carpets that we see today ?

The story of tea in Darjeeling is one of drama and danger, as well as deception and determination. It is about one Scot's relentless pursuit that finally broke down the forbidden walls fiercely guarding China's tea secret, and another Scot's pioneering efforts in his home-garden that made Darjeeling tea the most famous black tea in the world!

From romance to randomness, and from improbability to ingenuity, the history of Darjeeling tea is full of adventure and intrigue. We go back to mid 18th century Britain : tea drinking has become such a rage in Britain, thanks to Princess Catherine of Braganza, so much so that it has replaced ale and gin as people's favourite beverage. Demand is exploding and the tea-clippers just cannot carry enough tea to meet the rising demand. By 1766, Britain's annual import of tea has crossed 6 million pounds (over 2.7

million kgs). Another estimated 6-7 million pounds (3 million kgs) are smuggled. And yet, the demand for tea keeps rising.

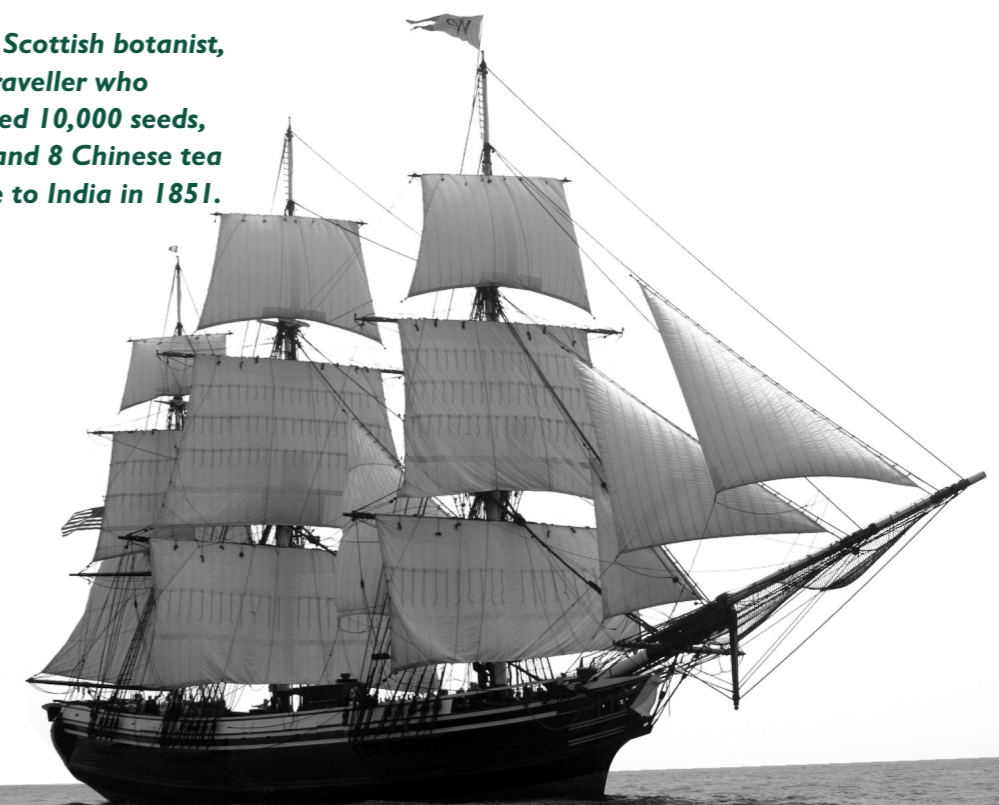
However, there is a big problem - the Chinese are not interested in any goods produced by Britain, but are increasingly demanding more and more silver for their tea. The coffers of the Empire are fast emptying of the silver. While the British have created a demand for tea, supply from China is increasingly getting expensive and unreliable.

The British are desperately looking at alternate sources for tea. As always, they turn to India.

By this time, The East India Company is firmly entrenched in India. From as early as 1778, efforts were made to cultivate tea in India, mainly using seeds smuggled from China. However, the British attempts at growing tea in India were not successful for almost 50 years. A key reason for this was the climate : the delicate Chinese tea bushes could not survive the harsh conditions in India.



**Robert Fortune - a Scottish botanist, plant hunter and traveller who successfully smuggled 10,000 seeds, 13,000 tea plants, and 8 Chinese tea makers to emigrate to India in 1851.**





### Tea is Discovered in Assam

The first big break for The East India Company came in 1823.

Due to the pioneering efforts of Scottish brothers, Robert and Charles Bruce, the indigenous variety of the tea plant (*Camellia Sinensis Assamica*) was discovered growing in the wild in the present Indian state of Assam in 1823. By 1834, the first commercial tea plantation using the Indian variety was started at Suddeya in Assam and in 1838 the first consignment of eight chests of Assam tea was sold at a London Tea Auction. In the next few decades, Assam tea became a roaring success and regular quantities of Assam tea were being sent to Britain.

However, the British realised way back in 1840, that quantity does not mean quality. While the indigenous Assam tea produced a brisk, malty, and strong cup, it could never produce teas that had the light, fruity and floral characteristics of Chinese teas. The Assam teas were gutty and strong, but had little finesse or flavour.



Robert Fortune

### Two Scots - and Tea Comes to Darjeeling

The determination of the British to successfully grow the Chinese tea plants in India was resolute. They kept sending their agents in China to smuggle back Chinese tea plants and seeds – and bring back the production secrets of green tea and black tea. Till now, the British botanists believed that the two teas involved different plants rather than different processing!

It was one such agent of the Company, Robert Fortune - a Scottish botanist, plant hunter, and traveller who successfully smuggled 10,000 seeds, 13,000 tea plants, and 8 Chinese tea makers to emigrate to India in 1851. They landed at Calcutta (now Kolkata) in March 1851. The tea plants brought by Fortune survived well during the journey and were distributed to different parts of the country to see where they would thrive.

Most efforts were made to cultivate the Chinese bushes in the regions around Assam, where the indigenous Assam variety was thriving. But this was unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, one Dr. Archibald Campbell, another Scottish surgeon, had been planting

tea seeds in his home garden in Darjeeling since 1841. By 1853, he reported that almost 2,000 tea plants were thriving between 2,000 ft to 7,000 ft. Delighted with this surprising success of Dr. Campbell, the government supported him with funds to establish 2 nurseries – in Darjeeling and Kurseong, where both the Assam and the Chinese bushes were planted.

And...it was in Darjeeling that the Chinese tea bushes were found to be unexpectedly flourishing!

Such was the success of growing these Chinese tea bushes in Darjeeling, that soon individuals and small companies were clearing the Himalayan foothills and planting the Chinese tea bushes!

By 1852, the first commercial tea garden was planted at Tukvar, followed by Steinthal and Aloobari. More gardens quickly followed at Makaibari, Pandam, Ging, Ambootia, Tukdah, and Phoobsering. The first factory was opened at Makaibari in 1859. By 1874, there were 113 tea gardens in Darjeeling! And since then, there has been no looking back!

All these tea estates still exist today and teas from these estates are among the most premium ones!

## What makes Darjeeling tea so unique

What makes Darjeeling Tea so exclusive? In one simple word – flavour!

Darjeeling tea's distinctive flavour - light and subtle, floral and fruity, at times smoky and peaty, with hints of honey to wafts of walnuts, the fragrance of figs to the aroma of almonds – and much more! Rare Darjeeling teas also have the elusive Muscatel flavour - and these are highly prized by connoisseurs all over the world.

What makes Darjeeling Tea so expensive? Again, in one simple word – rare!

Because it is produced in extremely small quantity. At just about 8 million kgs. out of India's total annual production of over 1,300 million kgs., it accounts for less than 1% of all Indian teas!

So rare is Darjeeling Tea that it takes about 22,000 young shoots to make 1 kg of pure Darjeeling Tea. One tea bush in Darjeeling will make tea only for about 16-18 cups in an entire year – this is how exclusive Darjeeling Tea is!

Much like Champagne and Scotch, only tea produced in 87 fabled estates in the defined Darjeeling region, on the foothill of the Himalayas, can be called Darjeeling tea. The combined area under cultivation at these 87 estates is roughly 48,000 acres - about the same size as the Queen's Balmoral Estate. It is in these chosen and select slopes between 700 and 7,000 ft above the sea level that sunlight, cool air, plentiful rainfall, and rich soil are brought together by Mother Nature to create the magic of Darjeeling Teas. No other region in the world can produce this magic, and that is why Darjeeling Tea is so unique.




- **Only 87 estates – like champagne, stilton, and roquefort**
- **Mother nature - unique combination of climate, cultivate, soil, air, altitude – and the magic of human hands (skillful picking of finest leaves honed over generations – still done by nimble hands of women pluckers)**
- **22,000 Young shoots to make 1 kg of Darjeeling tea**
- **Only 8 million kgs are produced**
- **One bush produces enough tea to make 32-36 cups in a year**



***The tea bushes are mystic messages on the Earth's canvas. A tale of excellence, brewed cup by cup, produced with the loving care lavished by the workers.***



An aerial photograph of a lush green tea plantation on a steep hillside. Numerous workers, seen from above, are scattered across the field, each carrying a large, round, woven basket on their back. The workers are wearing colorful clothing, and the tea bushes are arranged in neat, parallel rows. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

Darjeeling Tea cannot be grown or manufactured anywhere else in the world. According to the Tea Board of India :

“The crafting of Darjeeling Tea begins in the field. Where women workers begin plucking early in the morning, when the leaves are still covered with dew. The spirals of walking women gradually twist, then unfold to form a line. The tea is picked fresh every day, as fresh as the crisp green leaves can make them. The tea bushes are mystic messages on the Earth’s canvas. A tale of excellence, brewed cup by cup, produced with the loving care lavished by the workers. Caressed to state-of-the-art perfection by unchanging tradition. Quality that is cherished worldwide.”

Darjeeling Black Orthodox Tea is the first Indian product to have the Protected GI Status (PGI) way back in 2004-05. In October 2019, Darjeeling Green Tea and Darjeeling White Tea also received the GI tag.



*The Tea Board of India has developed a unique logo to identify and authenticate real Darjeeling Tea. Only packs that contain 100% Darjeeling Tea are allowed to use the Darjeeling logo on their packs.*





## Darjeeling tea – Make and Method

### Altitude & Elevation

Darjeeling tea estates are located within 700 ft to above 7,000 ft. Altitude is the single-most important factor that determines the flavour and quality of Darjeeling Tea. Based on their elevation, Darjeeling Tea estates can be classified as Low Elevation (up to 2500 ft), Medium Elevation (2500-4000 ft), High Elevation (4000 - 5500 ft) and the Very High Elevation (5500 -7000 ft).

### Quality and Yield

Darjeeling Tea is all about quality, finesse, and exclusivity. And quantity is always limited. A bush of Darjeeling Tea will produce only about 32-36 grams of finished tea every year. That makes just 16-18 cups per year!

The reasons why a tea bush in Darjeeling produces such a limited quantity of tea are :

- The bush itself – since most of the bushes in Darjeeling are Chinese, they are smaller leaves and grow slowly compared to the indigenous Assam Jat/bushes.
- Season – due to high altitude, the season in Darjeeling is much shorter than in tropical and warmer Assam. For 3 to 4 months during the winter in Darjeeling (typically, November to February) the bushes go into hibernation.

Darjeeling Teas regularly sell at record-breaking prices. In 2014, Makaibari tea estate sold a particular batch of tea at US\$ 1850/ kg. – even though it was a small batch of only 5kgs. The world record price for the most expensive Darjeeling tea ever to be sold in a public auction belongs to Castleton tea estate, which was sold for Rs. 13,000/kg in 1992 (around US\$ 180/kg today).



- *The world-famous Darjeeling flavour*
- *Black tea made with orthodox manufacture*
- *Grades of Darjeeling tea*
- *FTGFOP1*
- *Recently, Darjeeling has also started making white, green, oolong, as well as artisanal teas*



## Types of Darjeeling Tea

### Manufacturing Process

Almost all of the tea produced in Darjeeling is Black Orthodox Tea. Recently, some estates have also started producing small quantities of Green and White Teas.

**Black Tea** is a product of the manufacturing process where the withered and rolled tea leaves are spread in thin layers in cool, humid rooms to allow them to get oxidized / fermented. Depending on the season and climatic conditions, fermentation can take anywhere between 1-4 hours. It is during oxidation that the green tea leaves change their colour and become black. The chemical reaction that happens during oxidization is the secret to Darjeeling Tea's unique flavour and character.

**Orthodox Tea** is the traditional (hence the name 'orthodox' or older) manufacturing process where the withered leaves are rolled between cast-iron rollers for 20 minutes to an hour, depending on season and climatic conditions. The rolling process ruptures the tea leaves and their juices are released. These juices then react with the oxygen in the air during the next stage in manufacture (oxidation).

The newer manufacturing process is the CTC method (Crush, Tear, Curl). Compared to Rolling, the tea leaves are passed through a series of cylindrical rollers with sharp teeth. This cuts, tears, and curls the tea leaves into small granules or pellets. This process usually produces quicker brewing teas that have a strong

flavour and is usually consumed with lots of milk. Teas manufactured by CTC manufacture are called CTC Teas. Most teas produced in Africa and Assam are made by CTC manufacture. Darjeeling only produces Orthodox variety of teas.

**Darjeeling Green Tea** is manufactured in the same orthodox process skipping the oxidization stage. This process prevents fermentation of the rolled teas and hence, the tea leaves retain their greenish tinge and hue. When brewed, the liquor of Darjeeling Green Orthodox teas has a light green colour with a sweet, vegetal flavour and a grassy undertone. It has a very mild taste.

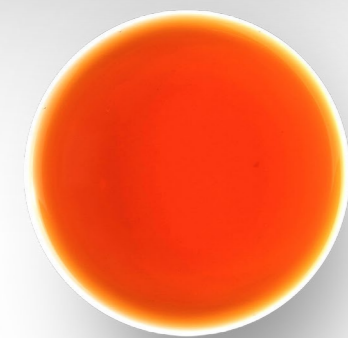
**Darjeeling White Tea** is produced by simply withering and drying the leaves and buds. Only the newest and freshly sprung young buds and unopened leaves are handpicked. It is the fine, white hairs of the buds that gives it its name. White tea is the least processed of all teas and is as close to natural tea as possible.

Darjeeling White Tea is among the most delicate and expensive teas in the world.

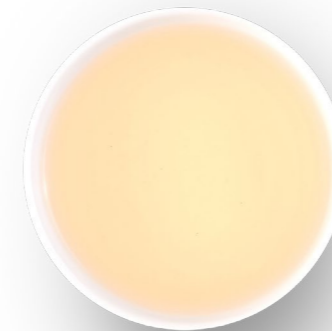
**Darjeeling Oolong Tea** In the manufacture and processing of Oolong teas, the tea leaves are allowed to oxidize only halfway. This gives Oolong teas a unique lightness and character. One can say they are in-between Black teas and Green teas. They have a pleasant mouthfeel with a distinct sweetness.



Darjeeling Oolong Tea  
(halfway oxidized)



Darjeeling Black Tea  
(full oxidized)



Darjeeling White Tea  
(least processed)



Darjeeling Green Tea  
(non-oxidized)

## Flushes and Seasons

### Seasons and Flushes

The top three seasons for Darjeeling Teas are Spring, Summer, and Autumn. In tea parlance, these are called First Flush, Second Flush, and Autumn Flush. Such is the popularity and romance associated with each 'Flush', that all premium tea brands now have Darjeeling First Flush, Darjeeling Second Flush and Darjeeling Autumn Flush as their top-of-the-shelf collections.

### What is Flush

A Flush refers to the plucking cycle. Typically, the tea bushes are plucked every 10-12 days, depending on climatic conditions. It is important to understand that when we say Second Flush, it does not mean that the leaves are plucked for only a second time! Second Flush simply means the second distinct season or phase of plucking. In other words, tea bushes may be plucked 6-8 times during May-June and all teas plucked during this time are collectively referred to as Second / Summer Flush.

### The First Flush or the Spring Flush

Also fondly called the Lover's Blush, this refers to the fresh, young leaves and buds that awaken after their winter hibernation with the arrival of the first showers of Spring. Typically, the first flush season is from March to April.

Tea leaves from the Spring/First flush have a silver/green tinge or appearance. When brewed, they make a light golden liquor that has a very slight astringent taste. It has a distinct floral flavour and freshness.

The first flush teas are usually highest in demand and attract the top highest price tags.



***A Flush refers to a plucking cycle.  
Typically, the tea bushes are plucked every 10-12 days,  
depending on the climatic conditions.***

### **The Second Flush or the Summer Flush**

Plucked in June, the Summer/Second Flush Teas are distinctly blacker than the Spring/First Flush teas. When brewed, the liquor is more colourful and full-bodied, resulting in a mellow and mature cup. It is during the Summer/Second Flush that some Darjeeling teas develop the highly sought after Muscatel Flavour.

### **The Monsoon or the Rain Flush**

The Monsoon / Rain Flush Darjeeling Teas are plucked during July to September, when the monsoon is at its peak. The leaves have the highest moisture content and hence, the teas are denser, darker, and stronger. Due to the high moisture content, the flavour is at its lowest. Monsoon teas, due to their strong and full-bodied liquors, are usually had with milk.

### **The Autumn Flush or the Cold Flush**

After the heavy rainfall has subsided, the weather quickly changes in the month of October. This heralds the onset of autumn, and the quality of tea changes dramatically from the monsoon flush. The tea leaves become wiry and stylish with a light coppery hue. Some light-fired teas can also have a greenish tinge. When brewed, the liquor is mellow and light golden. The flavour is delicate and distinct and can sometimes be reminiscent of the First Flush, but connoisseurs can easily discriminate these due to their 'winter touch' and almost taste the 'cold weather'.



First Flush



Second Flush



Monsoon Flush



Autumn Flush





## Muscatel Teas – Mercurial, Magical, Mystical

*“Tastes like sweet-sour peaches grilled on charcoal, with an undertone of tobacco.”*

*“No, no – I get a distinct lychee, grapes and hint of spice...and cedar!”*

*“Come on, how can’t you taste honey and cantaloupe and plums?”*

These are the typical reactions of experienced tea tasters when they sip the elusive Muscatel teas from Darjeeling. And perhaps there is no other topic that is as much debated as ‘Muscatel teas’. And if you were to sneak in and take a sip, you would perhaps differ with all of them...and join the heated debate yourself !

This is the mercurial, magical, and mystical world of Muscatel teas.

Produced only for a short span of ten days to two weeks in May/June during the famed Second Flush period in select Darjeeling tea estates, Muscatel teas evoke the sweetest memories - just like the shortest love evokes the sweetest memories.

If Darjeeling teas are rare, consider this - out of these 87 tea estates, only a handful produce the mercurial and magical teas with the elusive Muscatel flavour - and that too, for only two weeks in a year. Out of 8 million kgs., merely a few thousand kgs. are considered pure Muscatel teas.

### **The Magic and the Mystery...and the Myth!**

Much like Cinderella’s magical hour, Mother Nature’s magic at select Darjeeling tea estates also happens for a brief ten-day to two-week period in late summer - end May to mid-June. What makes Muscatel teas so elusive, almost ephemeral, is their uncertainty and unpredictability. An estate can produce the finest Muscatel teas this year, and the next year, the magic can completely bypass it.

Here is how nature’s magic combines with human genius to produce this mercurial, magical and mystical tea :

The hot, humid and rainy climate in late summer in Darjeeling causes a rapid rise in infestation. Small insects and flies thrive on the rich flora and fauna



during this period, which is also the peak Second Flush period in Darjeeling tea estates. Green insects called ‘Jassids’ and ‘Thrips’ appear abundantly around the tea plants. While they are definitely pests, they are vital catalysts for producing the Muscatel flavour.

Greenish in colour, they are like leaf-hoppers, just about a tenth of an inch in size. They feed upon the tender buds and leaves of the tea-bush, feasting on the rich sap. As they suck out this sap, the moisture content in leaves reduces, causing them to get stunted, shrivel and curl. Also, due to the many tiny needle-points created by these insects on the tea leaves, natural fermentation occurs even though the leaves are not yet plucked. With lesser moisture content, the flavours get concentrated, and the green leaf starts turning yellow. A chemical compound called ‘Terpene’ is also produced within the tea leaves and buds. During the oxidations (fermentation) process, it is this compound ‘Terpene’ that creates the unique Muscatel flavour.

And yet, there are some planters who will dismiss this explanation outright! They regard this explanation as a myth. While they concede that teas made during the second flush period, that are affected by Jassids, do make exceptional teas with distinct fruity notes, they still do not and should not qualify as true Muscatel teas. They believe that pure Muscatel teas are produced only from authentic Chinary bushes without intervention or infestation of insects. For them, it is the combination of nature’s quirk and human skill that creates this most enigmatic of teas.



### Character

Pure Muscatel flavour ranges from intense, sweet to fruity. From the whiff of woody cedar to perfumed peaches, to spiced honey, a Muscatel tea can contain all these notes. When brewed properly, it has an amber liquor (yellowish orange or orangish yellow) with a very positive and sweet 'nose' and a mellow to mild astringency. When stored properly, Muscatel teas are like wine, and get better as they mature, tasting more intense and adding layers of flavours.

### The First Muscatel Tea

The first Muscatel tea was produced at the world-famous Castleton Tea Estate in 1985. The credit goes to the then factory manager of the estate, Mr. Gomden. He noticed in the June of 1985 that the teas produced had a very peculiar and intense flavour, which was quite unlike and different from the normal flavoury teas produced during the time. Upon tasting these, he found that they had a distinct fruity flavour, rich and intense that lingered on

the palate. It reminded him of the rich, intense flavour of the Muscat grapes, used for making fine wines. He named this batch of teas, Muscatel - like Muscat grapes. Since then, Castleton Muscatel teas have won top awards and honours internationally, not to mention world-record prices. In 1992, a lot of Castleton FTGFOP1 Muscatel tea was sold for Rs. 13,000 per kg. at the Calcutta tea auction.



*Today, select estates that make fine Muscatel teas include Jungpana, Gliddapahar, Gopaldhara, Seeyok and Okayti. From the top tea boutiques in the world to the most exclusive and prestigious tea-rooms in the UK and Europe, Muscatel teas are amongst the most prized and sought after by connoisseurs. And the moments of sipping and savouring this exquisite Muscatel tea becomes life's sweetest memories – like the shortest love.*

A scenic view of a tea plantation in Darjeeling, India. The foreground shows a lush green tea field with several workers. One worker in the center is wearing a pink shirt and blue pants, and another on the right is wearing a white shirt and blue pants. Both are carrying large, round, woven baskets on their backs. The background is a vast, rolling landscape of tea fields under a clear blue sky. The text 'Famous Estates of Darjeeling' is overlaid on the right side of the image in a white, serif font, with a small floral icon above the word 'Estates'.

Famous Estates of  
Darjeeling

## Castleton Tea Estate

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If Darjeeling tea is the Champagne of teas, then definitely the elusive Muscatel tea is the Champagne of Darjeeling teas. And the renowned Castleton tea estate produces some of the finest Muscatel teas in the world! In fact, the first-ever Muscatel tea was made here in 1985.

Located in the South Kurseong subdivision of the Darjeeling district, the garden was planted and started by Dr. Charles Graham in the year 1885.

The 130-year old estate has an altitude ranging from 2500 feet to 5500 feet, characterized by lush hilly slopes of Kurseong and Pankhabari. With a plantation area of 318.98 hectares, Castleton has an almost cult-like status amongst tea connoisseurs and has an annual production of 100,000 kilograms.

Erstwhile known as “Kumseri”, this picturesque tea garden had a building called “Bank Ghar” in its vicinity which had the features of a traditional castle, hence giving the garden the name ‘Castleton’. It was acquired by the Goodricke Group in 1984. The Castleton Tea garden is one of the five gardens owned by the Goodricke Group.

One of the unique facts from this garden is that they have names for their individual tea sections, instead of the usual rule of assigning a number for these sections. The names are : “Bhalu Khop” which in the local language means a bear cave ; there’s “Dhobitar” which means washerman’s clothes-line ; “Baseri” which stands for a place to rest ; and “Jim Basha” which means an erstwhile manager’s place.

Another interesting fact, in 1992, a batch of Castleton Muscatel tea was sold at a whopping price of Rs. 13,001 per kg at the Calcutta tea auction. Castleton is the first tea garden to receive ISO 9002 certification. It is also FSSC 22000 Certified, Rainforest Alliance Certified, and ETP Certified.

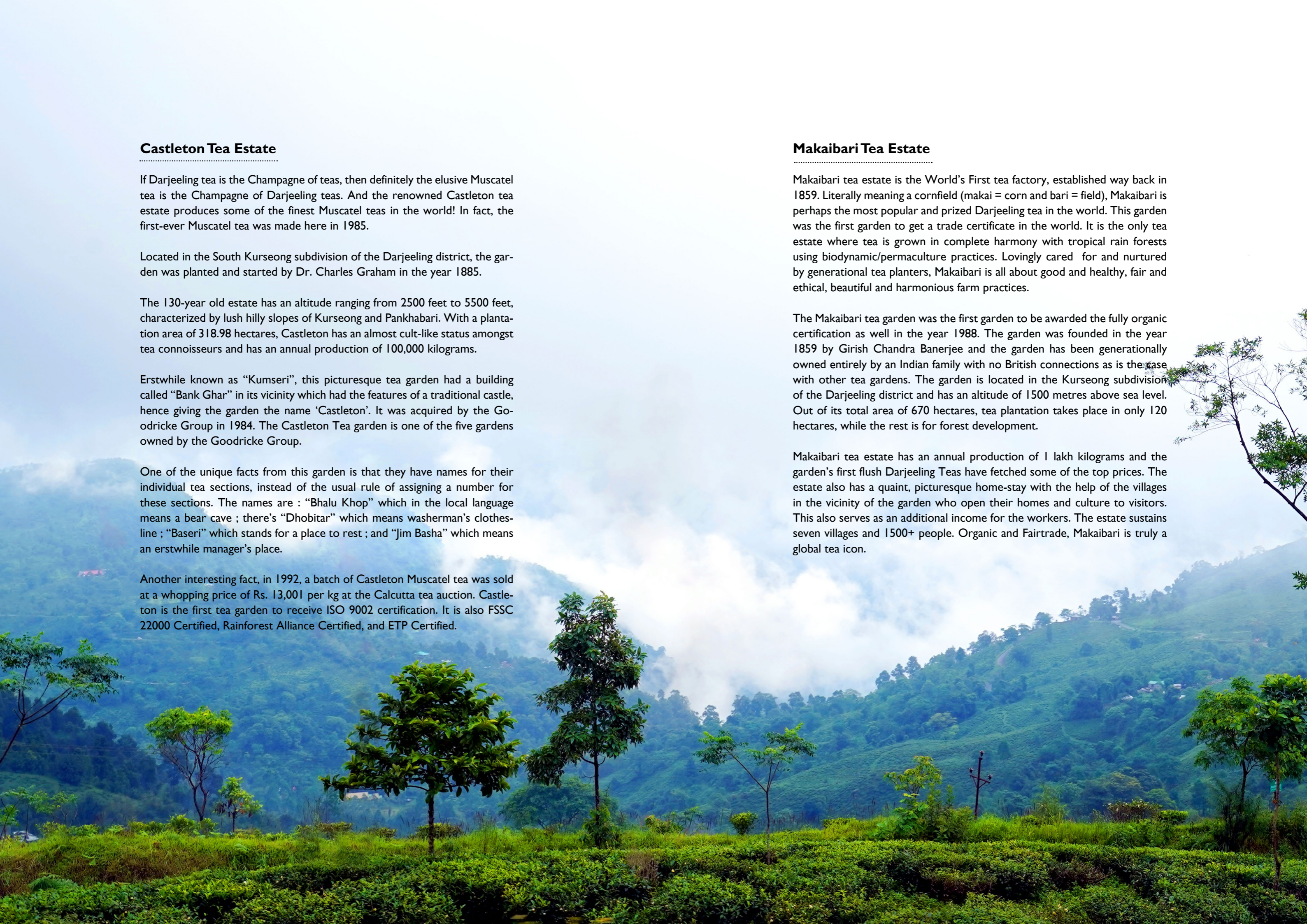
## Makaibari Tea Estate

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Makaibari tea estate is the World’s First tea factory, established way back in 1859. Literally meaning a cornfield (makai = corn and bari = field), Makaibari is perhaps the most popular and prized Darjeeling tea in the world. This garden was the first garden to get a trade certificate in the world. It is the only tea estate where tea is grown in complete harmony with tropical rain forests using biodynamic/permaculture practices. Lovingly cared for and nurtured by generational tea planters, Makaibari is all about good and healthy, fair and ethical, beautiful and harmonious farm practices.

The Makaibari tea garden was the first garden to be awarded the fully organic certification as well in the year 1988. The garden was founded in the year 1859 by Girish Chandra Banerjee and the garden has been generationally owned entirely by an Indian family with no British connections as is the case with other tea gardens. The garden is located in the Kurseong subdivision of the Darjeeling district and has an altitude of 1500 metres above sea level. Out of its total area of 670 hectares, tea plantation takes place in only 120 hectares, while the rest is for forest development.

Makaibari tea estate has an annual production of 1 lakh kilograms and the garden’s first flush Darjeeling Teas have fetched some of the top prices. The estate also has a quaint, picturesque home-stay with the help of the villages in the vicinity of the garden who open their homes and culture to visitors. This also serves as an additional income for the workers. The estate sustains seven villages and 1500+ people. Organic and Fairtrade, Makaibari is truly a global tea icon.





## Ambootia Tea Estate

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Nestled in the celestial foothills of the Himalayas, the Ambootia tea estate traces its history to 1861 when it was established. It is said that the name Ambootia comes from the Tibetan-Lepcha word – Am-butia, meaning mango grove. Located in North Kurseong, a subdivision of the Darjeeling district, where the cool weather and the lively Himalayan springs contribute to the vitality of these bushes. No wonder teas from Ambootia have distinct fruity notes!

The Ambootia tea estate was one of the first 30 gardens to be established in the region by the British. The garden has a total area of 790.64 hectares, out of which the cultivation area is 350.48 hectares. Teas are grown at an average altitude of 4500 ft. The garden moved to being a certified 100% Organic and bio-dynamic production in the year 1992 and it got its Fair-trade certification in 1994. In addition to these, Ambootia also is HACCP and SQF certified.

Ambootia tea estate was selected as a Model Organic Farm by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), IFOAM as well as the Tea Board of India. The garden today has one of the most advanced state-of-the-art factories that meet international food safety standards and stresses on maintaining these top-notch standards. Ambootia teas are renowned all over the world for their light-bright cup and a sweet palate and lasting floral notes.

## Chamong Tea Estate

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Established around 1871 under the British rule, the Chamong Tea estate, also known as the 'Chamu Tea Garden' is located in the Sadar subdivision of the Darjeeling district. In summers, the garden would be inhabited by chirpy birds, called 'Chamoo' by the Lepcha people. It is believed that there was a particular pond inside the Chamong Tea estate which provided clean, fresh and sweet water to the residents of the garden. Whenever twigs and leaves would fall into the pond, making it dirty, these beautiful Chamoo birds would help clean this pond by picking up the twigs and leaves and taking them to their nests. Hence the Chamong Tea estate was named after these 'Chamoo' birds.

The Chamong Tea estate was one of the first gardens in Darjeeling to be acquired by the renowned Lohia Group. Located near the Sukhiapokhri area, a small town about 17 kilometers, southwest of Darjeeling town. This tea estate is surrounded by tea estates like the Turzum Tea Estate in the southeast and the Seeyok Tea Estate in the South-western part of the garden.

This estate has a tea plantation covering the area in altitudes from 3600 ft. to as high as 6000 ft. The estate stretches over 332 hectares of land and has a cultivation area of 132 hectares, with a small area that houses the tea factory and a village for the workers. The Chamong Tea garden has a Fair-trade certification. It is also is Naturland and Rainforest Alliance certified.





## Glenburn Tea Estate

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Looking for a perfect cup of tea? Then you are not alone! According to a local legend, Mr. Kimble Murray, the first manager of the Glenburn tea estate, still roams around here looking for a perfect cup of tea! The history of this world-renowned tea estate dates back over 150 years and is now a heritage site.

Glenburn is one of the first tea estates to have come up in 1859 in Darjeeling. The name is a dead giveaway! Yes, it was the enterprising Scotts who started this estate and named it Glenburn - fondly remembering the glens of the Scottish Highlands.

Glenburn is today owned and lovingly nurtured by the Prakash family. In fact, it is now the fourth generation of the family who is managing it. They are famous as the Chaiwala family for their century-old association with the estate. The Doon valley, where the East India Company first thought of establishing tea gardens, also happened to house the ancestral home of the patriarch of the Prakash family, Lala Darshan Lal. He started from being an ordinary tea planter and grew to be an established tea magnate.

Located in the Sadar subdivision of the Darjeeling district, the garden stretches over a total area of 1600 acres, out of which only 600 acres is for tea cultivation. The remaining 1000 acres are reserved for forests with two rivers that run through the garden. Situated on a hillock above the banks of the River Rungneet, one can experience stunning vistas of the mighty Kanchenjunga - the third highest mountain in the world.

The Glenburn tea estate is famous for its exquisite first flush teas manufactured from clonal bushes. Apart from being a scenic tea garden, the estate also has a luxurious hotel for visitors to stay and take in the breathtaking views.





## Bannockburn Tea Estate

Established in the 1850s, the Bannockburn Tea Estate was one of the first tea gardens that were established in Darjeeling. It is named after the famous Battle of Bannockburn in which Robert the Bruce of Scotland defeated the English King Edward II in 1314. The hilly area near Darjeeling probably reminded the original Scot planters of their home terrain and the tiny hamlet near Glasgow. Even in these post-colonial times, the name of the Bannockburn Tea Estate in Darjeeling keeps a little bit of Scotland in India and commemorates and perpetuates the famous Scot victory.

The Bannockburn tea estate is located west of the Darjeeling town and is flanked by three renowned tea estates on three sides of the estate. The garden stretches over a total area of 300 hectares, out of which the plantation covers an area of 143 hectares, producing approximately 90,000 kilograms annually. The signature Bannockburn single estate Darjeeling tea has been a traditional favourite with British connoisseurs and has won several Taste Awards including the 2003 Great Taste Gold Award for the best single estate specialty tea.

The classic first flush Bannockburn is multifaceted and balanced: the most satisfying cup of tea you can get. A mature tea from one of the first Darjeeling gardens, it is fresh yet fruity with citrus and apricot notes; crisp yet mellow with honey undertones.



## Jungpana Tea Estate

Legend has it that a faithful Gurkha named Jung Bahadur saved his British master from a leopard attack. Jung Bahadur was fatally mauled before his master scared away the beast. Jung Bahadur asked for a final drink of water ('pana' which means 'water') as he was dying, and his master took him to a nearby stream. As the dying man had just managed to get a sip, he died there. This area started to be known as Jungpana which translates to "where Jung Bahadur had his last drink of water". When a tea estate was started here, it became known as Jungpana tea estate - a name carried on till day.

The garden was established under the initiative of Mr. Henry Montgomery Lennox. Eventually passed down to the ruler of Nepal and then to the Kejriwal family, post the country's independence, who still own and run the garden with great precision and care.

"Vintage" is the word that aptly and appropriately describes teas from Jungpana. While being one of the smaller tea estates in Darjeeling, the quality of its teas, especially its Muscatel teas, have made Jungpana one of the most endearing and famous single-estate tea in the world.

The Jungpana tea estate is spread over 32 hectares of land and the elevation ranges anywhere between 1000 metres to 1500 metres. Located in the Kurseong subdivision of the Darjeeling district, and in an extremely remote and isolated region of the rugged Himalayas, it is almost like an impregnable fortress created by Mother Nature to safeguard the precious tea bushes. One has to climb close to 600 steep steps, cross a wooden footbridge across the river 'Changey Khola' (rivulet/stream in the local language) and then arrive at the garden factory.





## Goomtee Tea Estate

One of the most scenic tea gardens of Darjeeling, the Goomtee Tea Estate is located in the South Kurseong subdivision of the Darjeeling district and lies in a prime quality belt, nestled between two famous estates - the Jungpana tea estate to the East and Castleton tea estate to West. The picturesque estate has several waterfalls and a passionately landscaped and maintained flower garden that allures the senses of visitors who stay at the beautiful heritage bungalow of the estate.

The Goomtee tea estate has China bushes planted at an elevation between 3,000 ft and 6,000 ft., with an average elevation of 4000 ft. The misty, cold, and gentle sunshine aids in slow growth, resulting in teas that are mellow, brisk and bright with a soft and subtle flavour.

The garden has a total area of 225 hectares, out of which 110+ hectares are under cultivation.

There is a belt within this cultivation area that produces organic teas and is marked as the 'Muscatel Valley'. The garden has 100% organic certification for this Muscatel Valley division. Additionally, the garden has a fair-trade certification as well.



## Happy Valley Tea Estates

One of the oldest tea estates in Darjeeling, Happy Valley goes as long back as circa 1854. This is the closest tea estate from the town of Darjeeling. The garden is spread across 177 hectares and is situated at an altitude of 2100 metres. Here the slopes of the Himalayas wind their way between India, Nepal, and Bhutan. The garden employs more than 1500 people and is also one of the highest tea factories in the world.

The first tea bushes were planted by an Englishman, David Wilson, who named it the Wilson Tea Estate. By 1860, Wilson Tea Estate was producing some of the finest Darjeeling teas that earned a reputation in London. In the year 1903, the estate was purchased by a Bengali aristocrat, Tarapada Banerjee, who also purchased the neighbouring Windsor Tea Estate in 1929. Banerjee merged both the estates and named the larger estate as the Happy Valley tea estate.

Happy Valley faced an existential crisis at the turn of the millennium. The collapse of the USSR in 1990, which used to be India's biggest markets, led to severe cuts in the maintenance of its heritage bushes and factory. It was sold to its current owners, who invested in caring for the bushes and built a new factory. Today, Happy Valley produces its finest teas in the last 166 years – fine, elegant, shiny black leaves with greenish hues that create a magical bright golden cup with honey-floral notes. The first flush and second flush teas from this estate are much popular in tea connoisseur circles.

The Happy Valley tea estate was certified by the United Nations FAO project as a model estate and the garden also is certified organic by USDA, IMO, JAS, and HACCP. Visitors are welcomed into the estate and are allowed to take a look at the manufacturing processes inside the tea factory.





### Lopchu Tea Estate

Nestled between Glenburn and Tukdah tea estates, Lopchu, established in the 1860s, is amongst the most recognised and loved single-estate teas globally. High-fired, smoky and malty – Lopchu teas are almost an addiction! The word ‘Lopchu’ comes from Lepcha, a local tribe of the Himalayas.

The Lopchu tea estate is situated midway between Darjeeling and Kalimpong, on the low lying hills of Darjeeling that are closer to Sikkim. The garden is spread across a total area of 226 acres. The garden is perched at an altitude of 4800 ft. overlooking the ethereal and majestic Kanchenjunga peak. Situated Lopchu has been known to produce some of the finest Darjeeling teas, cultivated from the originally transplanted bushes from Yunnan province of China, with an annual production of a hundred thousand kilograms. Most of the teas get exported to Germany and some other European countries.

The garden was owned by the British empire well until the 1950s. It was then bought by the Kanoria brothers and the estate still is maintained and cultivated with great care under the ownership and guidance of the Kanoria family.

### Seeyok Tea Estate

Established in 1869, the Seeyok Tea Estate is situated along the Indo-Nepal border facing the scenic Rongbong Valley and shaded by the mighty Kanchenjunga mountain. The estate is spread across 406 hectares in the Mirik Valley of Darjeeling, with 154 hectares under cultivation. The elevation of this estate ranges from 4250ft. to 5250ft. and has more than 65% of original Chinese tea bushes.

The Seeyok tea estate is owned and run by the Mohan family who have built a lasting legacy with some of the best quality Darjeeling teas that come from a truly organic and fair-trade estate. In fact, Seeyok was one of the first tea estates to become organic as early as 1994 due to the visionary foresight of its owners.

It is one of the longest certified tea estates in India. The estate today is also biodynamic certified. The tea bushes are interplanted with wild cherry, lemongrass, and sunflower plants, and natural insecticides and weedicides are used in place of harmful chemical fertilisers. The garden also provides employment for over 482 workers who follow the Demeter principles of organic farming.

Seeyok teas are amongst the most demanded organic teas by tea connoisseurs with their signature amber-golden cups with balanced astringency and an unmistakable flavour. The estate also produces some incredible Green teas with a distinct Darjeeling flavour.



### **Selimbong Tea Estate**

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Established in 1886, Selimbong Tea Estate also belongs to the same owners as Seeyok Tea Estate. Needless to say, the estate is also certified organic and bio-dynamic. Also located in the Mirik Valley, Selimbong reaches an elevation of almost 6,000 ft.

Located at a distance of 25km from the iconic Tiger Hill, the organic Selimbong tea estate is situated at an elevation of 1000 meters to 1700 meters above sea level. Out of the total area OF 315 hectares, a select 160 hectares is allocated to tea plantations, popularly referred to as 'Silbung' by the locals. The estate produces 90 tonnes of tea annually and is known the world over for its exquisite black teas. In fact, in the plantation area of the tea estate, oranges, maize, and ginger are also grown.

Selimbong has won many awards including the prestigious award by the Tea Board of India for its exceptional quality. Its second flush teas have been getting 'super star' status regularly.

Selimbong teas have distinguishing dark leaves with generous silver tips. The famous second flush teas from Selimbong brew an intense, coppery cup with a hint of spicy note, and a soft nutty, fruity aroma.



## Turzum Tea Estate

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Turzum was the top-ranking Darjeeling tea estate in 2019. It is one of the earliest tea estates in Darjeeling, established way back in the 1860s. The history of the Turzum tea estate is incomplete without mentioning the Sungma tea estate as well. Way back in the year 1934, an earthquake had demolished the factory at the Sungma tea estate, following which, it was merged with the Turzum tea estate into one processing unit. The word 'Sungma' comes from the word 'Sanga Maru' in the Tibetan language which means a place where mushrooms grow. The word 'Turzum' on the other hand comes from the Tibetan word 'Taru Zum' which means a weekly bazaar.

The garden's ownership went through several hands. The Jhunjhunwalas took over the garden by the late 1950s and then it was bought by the Jindals in the year 1975 who actually ran and managed the garden with great care for over 16 years. Finally the garden was sold to the Jayshree group, who are known to manage several gardens in Darjeeling and Assam, producing some of the best quality teas.



Situated in the Rungbong valley, the estate is linked to Darjeeling by a town called 'Sonada' which is 25 kilometres away. The estate is very close to the famous Mirik Lake. Turzum has an elevation between 3,600-5600 feet above sea level. The estate is HACCP certified, organic certifications from NPOP, NOP, JAS, and IMO.

The Turzum tea estate produces the finest teas that are prized by connoisseurs for their exquisite flavour and distinctive floral/fruity character.





## Tindharia Tea Estate

Tindharia Tea Estate is a family-owned, vintage boutique Bio-organic tea estate. Tin (three) Dharia (edges or ridges) means the place of three mountain ridges and is located at the confluence of three mountain streams in the South Kurseong district of Darjeeling. With singing streams and lush greenery, the estate begins at an elevation of 1400ft. and reaches 3300ft.

The garden is located in Tindharia is a railway settlement town that is located along the much popular Darjeeling Himalayan Route (DHR), a UNESCO World Heritage site, on which the famous 'Darjeeling Toy Train' runs. Owned and run by the Kanoria family. With an idyllic cottage which has stunning 360-degree views of the lush plantations, it also happens to be where Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore also spent some time writing.

Apart from traditional Black teas, Tindharia is particularly well known for its unique Darjeeling Green teas. At Tindharia, time rolls back as they produce green tea in a vintage manner where the fresh green leaf is individually dipped in boiling water. This labour-intensive and expensive process steams the leaf most evenly and generates a high-quality sweet flavour rarely found in teas from a boiler/roaster. These teas are particularly cherished in Europe and the USA.

Tindharia's White tea 'PEARL' is a treasured tea and was the Gold Medal winner for the Best Indian tea at the U.S Annual Tea Conference 2012. This tea is completely hand-made from the first tender leaves plucked right at the start of the First Flush in Spring. Leaves exclusively plucked from young clonal bushes in their first five years of harvest are used to produce this treasure. The tender leaves are plucked at the crack of dawn by trained pluckers who only manage to bring back a few grams of leaves, each to be hand-rolled tenderly and sun-dried.

The Tindharia tea estate has an annual crop production of 70-75 Metric Tonnes. The garden is certified organic by the Control Union for USDA, EU and JAS. It is certified HACCP, ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 22000:2005. Tindharia is also audited by the Ethical Tea Partnership. All the teas that come from Tindharia tea estate are traceable, from bush to the cup.





## Okayti Tea Estate

Such was the consistently high quality of teas from this 150-year old estate, that in the London auctions, they came to be known as 'the only okay tea'! No wonder, the name 'Okayti' was adopted for this renowned tea estate.

Located in the blissful Mirik Valley in the Darjeeling district, this scenic estate was established in the 1870s and is one of the oldest tea estates in the region. Also known by its local name 'Rangdoo', the Okayti tea estate is now owned and run by the Khumbat family. The estate spans over a total area of 647.49 hectares out of which 208.82 hectares are under cultivation. Tea is grown between 4000 ft. to 6200 ft., making the estate one of the highest elevation gardens in the region as well. One can view scenic waterfalls, wonderful pine trees, and a stunning view of the Himalayas.

The Okayti Tea estate also has one of the oldest tea factories in the region, built in the year 1888, and has proudly stood the test of time. The annual production of this estate is close to 140,000 kilograms, producing some of the finest Darjeeling teas.



These mesmerizing teas were served at the Buckingham Palace prior to India's independence in 1947. Queen Elizabeth, Jawaharlal Nehru - independent India's first Prime Minister, and Nikita Khrushchev - the Soviet leader, were among the many ardent admirers of the delectable teas from the Okayti Tea estate.

Okayti produces the best orthodox First Flush and Second Flush Darjeeling black teas and selects varieties of green and white teas. Located very close to the Indo-Nepal border, this estate offers picturesque views of the Mechi River and its surrounding habitat.

The teas harvested from Okayti have a perfect balance of astringency and a well-rounded body. They have hints of dried fruits and nutty taste which contribute to the delicious finish on the palate. Today, Okayti is a 100% bio-organic certified tea estate.





## Arya Tea Estate

Savour the unique flavour of freshly plucked tea leaves from Arya Tea Estate - the only tea estate not founded by the British. Earlier known as the 'Sidrabong' tea estate till 1885, it was renamed as the Arya tea estate by a group of Buddhist monks.

In the early 19th century, a group of Buddhist monks was truly enamored by the beauty of this valley and had started to plant the first tea bushes at this historic tea estate. They lovingly nurtured these bushes, experimenting till they attained 'perfection' in the brew, resulting in some of the finest Darjeeling teas that the world has known of.

The Arya tea estate is located on the outskirts of Darjeeling town. Spread across a total area of more than 125 hectares, the garden starts at an altitude of 1820 metres, spreading down to 900 metres, with the average altitude being 1500 metres. These teas are still made with the same 'human touch' that was established by the Buddhist monks centuries ago.

The Arya tea estate is a bio-organic tea garden and produces 70 tons of tea annually. The garden is renowned for producing 'jewel' range of teas, namely - Ruby Black tea, Emerald Green Tea, Pearl White Tea, and the Topaz Oolong Tea, amongst others. These teas from the jewel range are harvested from special clonal tea bushes that are planted on the highest altitude of the garden. Their muscatel variety of chinary teas with a distinct 'musky flavor' have also earned a golden reputation.

When you sip a cup of the First Flush teas from Arya, you are sipping more than tea - you are sipping the labour of love and a legacy of perfection!



## Margaret's Hope Tea Estate

Perhaps one of Darjeeling's most romantic estates with a uniquely poignant and touching memory, the Margaret's Hope Tea estate is located in the Northern valley of Kurseong subdivision of the Darjeeling district and is known for producing some of the finest teas in Darjeeling.

Earlier known as 'Bara-Rington', this garden gets its name from Lady Margaret, the daughter of the garden owner - Mr. Cruickshank (or Bagdon to many others) who sailed from England to visit the garden with his two daughters. Margaret, his younger daughter, instantly fell in love with the tea-estate and was heartbroken to leave it, but hoped that one day she would return there.

Unfortunately, during the return voyage back home to England, Margaret fell ill on-board and died. In her memory, her aggrieved father changed the name of the tea-estate to Margaret's Hope Tea Estate.

The garden has an altitude that ranges from 350 ft. to 6000 ft. and is spread across an area of 1450 acres with two rivers also flowing through the plantation area. One would be mesmerized by the panoramic views of the Himalayan mountain range that is visible from the Tea Deck in the garden.

Margaret's Hope tea estate is owned by the International group - Camellia Plc and is governed in India by the Goodricke group and Amgoorie Group Limited.

Owing to the high elevation and cooler temperature, Margaret's Hope produces tea much later as compared to other gardens in Darjeeling that are on lower altitudes. The clonal teas from the garden are floral and invigoratingly aromatic, marked by notes of ripe mangoes. Margaret's Hope is also very popular for producing some exquisite Chinary teas that are vegetal and have a spicy character. This is due to the flush of minerals in the water that these bushes receive from the two rivers that flow through the garden. The garden is famed for its first flush, second flush, and Autumn flush Darjeeling teas.

The garden is FSSC 22000 certified, Rain-forest alliance certified, and also has an ETP certification.

## Thurbo Tea Estate

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Situated close to the Indo-Nepal border, one can witness spectacular views of the mighty Kanchenjunga mountain (the third highest mountain in the world) on a clear day from the scenic Thurbo tea estate. The garden was planted in 1872.

The name of the Thurbo tea estate originates from the local word 'Tombu' which means 'tents'. It comes from a historic event when the British had set up camps and stayed in tents, during the Nepal invasion. 'Tombu' eventually became Thurbo, and hence the name of this legendary garden that has been producing some of the finest teas since then.

The Thurbo tea estate is located in the Mirik Valley subdivision of the Darjeeling district. The garden has an altitude that ranges from 980 metres to 2440 metres. It has a planted area of 485.11 hectares. There are two rivers that flow through this beautiful plantation, the Mechi and the Rangbang rivers respectively.

The Thurbo tea estate is owned by the International group - Camellia Plc and is managed in India by the Goodrick group and the Amboorie Group Limited.

Thurbo teas are imbued with a rare, delicate fragrance and command premium prices. The 'Chinas' are bright and flavoursome, while the Assam hybrids are rounded and sweet.

The garden is also very popular for its Second Flush Moonlight Teas. Moonlight is a gourmet tea made with the finest buds and very, very high quality leaves. Created with precision timing, which can only come with years of experience, these rare teas are made under the loving supervision of the estate manager.

Moonlight teas produce a deep golden yellow liquor in the cup with pleasant floral notes and a hint of honey sweetness. The finish has a subtle fruity and citrusy undertone. Limited to the top tea boutiques of the world, VAHDAM brings you these highly sought-after prized teas from the peak second flush period.

The Thurbo tea estate is a Rainforest-Alliance certified, FSSC 22000 Certified, UTZ and ETP certified as well.



## Mim Tea Estate

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Established in 1860, the picturesque Mim Tea Estate is situated at an elevation of 3,000ft. to 4,500ft. The name Mim is a derivation of the word Mem, which means a fair (British) lady in the local dialect. The estate was once managed by a British Lady, who was called 'Mem Sahab' by the locals, and the name of the estate eventually became Mim.

The garden is located in Jorebunglow, located between Sukhiapori and Lepchajagat of the Darjeeling district. The elevation of the garden is around 5000ft from sea level. The Mim tea garden happens to be the only tea garden in Darjeeling which is run by the Government of India under the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Enterprise.

Owing to the fact that the tea is grown on such high altitudes and in relatively cool weather, the tea bushes take time to grow and hence the garden only grows teas in limited quantities. The annual production of the Mim tea estate is about 115 tonnes.

Mim tea estate has mostly Chinese cultivars. First flush teas from Mim are particularly in high demand from tea connoisseurs all over the world for their light, golden cup and a sweet, floral flavour. In springtime, the teas have a unique melody of flavours of lime, fresh vegetables, with hints of floral aromas. The garden is known for its Oolong teas as well.

The garden is HACCP and ISO certified. It also has a Rain forest Alliance certification, and complies with NPOP and NOP technical standards of the USA that are certified by IMO control.





## Gopaldhara Tea Estate

One of the most sought after tea estates of Darjeeling, the Gopaldhara Tea estate was established in the year 1955 and has had an impressive legacy of producing some of the best varieties of Darjeeling teas from the Mirik valley for just over 50 years now.

In the year 1881, this garden was planted amidst lush green paddy fields which belonged to an individual named 'Gopal', from where the garden gets the first half of its name. One can see that there are paddy fields interspersed with natural streams flowing through the garden called 'Dhara'. Hence the name 'Gopaldhara'. The garden has been in the Saria family since 1953 and is managed by them till date, under the banner of the 'Sona Tea Group' who also manage the Rohini tea garden in Darjeeling and New Glenco and Soonagachi Tea Estate in the Dooars.

The Gopaldhara tea estate, known as "one of Darjeeling's Pride" is one of the highest tea estates in the world with an average elevation of 6,000 feet, with the highest peak being over 7,000 feet. The garden is spread across a total area of 790 acres, out of which 430 acres are under plantation. The high altitudes offer a perfect combination of moisture and ample sunlight for high-quality tea leaves.

Gopaldhara Tea Estate produces the finest teas in the category of Black, Green, White, Oolong, Flavored, Speciality Tea, and Handcrafted teas from the ethereal land of Darjeeling. The famed tea 'Maharani of Darjeeling' is one of the most sought after First Flush Darjeeling Teas in the category. VAHDAM® now brings you select teas from this prized high-grown estate in Darjeeling. Sip these finely plucked, lovingly made, and exquisitely delicate whole leaf teas - literally from 'top of the world' and 'fit for the Gods'.

The garden has an annual production of 90,000 kilograms and to keep up with the demand and subsequent production, the estate has constructed a new factory. The garden has the HACCP food certification under RVA Netherlands.



## Giddapahar Tea Estate

Among the smallest tea estates in Darjeeling, Giddapahar makes up for size with quality. Giddapahar means Eagle's Cliff (Gidda = Eagle and Pahar = mountain or cliff). The famous Giddapahar Tea Estate is located in the heart of the scenic Kurseong Valley in Darjeeling.

A relatively small tea garden, run by the Shaw Family, this estate has a total area of 115 hectares, out of which 94 hectares are under cultivation. The lush, beautiful plantation is situated at a height of 4864 ft. above sea level.

The garden grows Chinary, Clonal, and Assam, including the premium AV-2 and P-312 varieties of tea bushes. The chinary tea bushes along with some clonal varieties in this garden are grown at an elevation from 4500 feet to 5200 feet from sea level. Owing to the low temperatures and the soil type in the location, Giddapahar Tea Estate is known for its flavorful first flush Darjeeling teas which have a heady, invigorating aroma. The quality further peaks in the Second Flush with rich muscatel teas. The garden also produces delectable select batches of green teas in the month of July every year.

The Giddapahar tea estate is certified as an ISO : 9001 and ISO : 21000 company. The annual production is around 30,000 kilograms.

The teas from Giddapahar are produced from the delicate leaves and buds of the Chinese bushes, which create a light yellow cup with a mellow taste. But it is the exquisite and characteristic floral, fragrant flavour that makes teas from Giddapahar highly sought after by connoisseurs all over the world.





### Avongrove Tea Estate

Nestled in the Himalayan foothills and spread across two hillsides, with lush tea bushes on the crests and lush forest in the valleys, the beautiful Avongrove tea estate is located in the Rungbong Valley overlooking the beautiful Balasun river. The word 'Avongrove' means Bird's Nest.

The Avongrove garden sits at a height of 2200 ft. above sea level and goes up to 5600 ft. above sea level. Close to 456 acres of land is under plantation and the garden employs close to 500 tea workers to pluck in rounds.

The Avongrove garden was shut for some 20 years, before the Kanoria family bought the estate and revived it, subsequently being taken over in 2008 by the International company named KPL International Ltd.

The factory was built in 1998 and has an annual production of 60,000-70,000 kilograms of tea. The Avongrove tea estate is certified as an organic tea estate under the USA (USA), JAS (Japan), NOP, NPOP (India and the EU).

### Namring (Upper) Tea Estate

Established in 1855, Namring Upper is one of the oldest tea estates in Darjeeling, at a time when the district only had four gardens. The Namring tea garden is one of the largest tea estates that is divided into the Upper and Lower Division - Poomong, Jingiam, and Namring respectively. Namring is the highest of them all located in the Teesta Valley region of Darjeeling.

The garden is situated at an altitude of above 1000 metres and produces 300 metric tons of teas every year. This plantation is managed by Darjeeling Impex who have 30 years of rich experience in growing, manufacturing, and exporting Tea.

The garden is spread across 475 acres which produce the famed Muscatel teas, which is the beautiful result of the combination of three different types of tea bushes, consisting of three-fifth China leaves, three-tenth of Clonal leaves, and one-tenth from an Assam hybrid bush.

Namring Upper teas are highly sought after all over the world. The First flush teas from Namring Upper have bright, green leaves with an abundance of tips. They brew into a light-golden to yellow cup, delicate and smooth with distinct floral notes. The Second flush teas are ruby-red and intense in their cups, with a sharp, fruity flavour and a hint of wild honey and roasted nuts.

The Namring tea estate is a Rain forest Alliance, Fair-trade and ETP certified garden.





## Risheehat Tea Estate

Risheehat Tea Estate is located in one of the most beautiful valleys that overlook the majestic Himalayan range. Surrounded by the Arya tea estate in the East and the Chongtong Tea estate in the West, this beautiful garden famous for producing the best organic teas has some spectacular views of Kanchenjunga mountain.

Formerly known as 'Tshering Bagan' when the British had planted the garden in the 19th century, the garden adopted its name from the dominant local tribe 'Tshering'. It was later named 'Risheehat', which means 'Home of the Sages'. ('Rishee' means Sages, and 'Hat'- Home). One of the most steep gardens of Darjeeling, the Risheehat tea estate was acquired by the prestigious Jayshree Tea group in circa 1955 and is still managed by the same company with great care with an eye for exceptional quality.

Risheehat has a cultivation area of 256.45 acres and is famous for growing some of the best quality organic teas. A variety of factors, like the steep slope, rich and fertile soil, temperature, and the amount of rainfall - all of this happen to just optimally conducive to growing the best Organic Darjeeling teas. Teas from both Risheehat and Liza Hill are famous for their delicate and floral First flush teas as well as muscatel and fruity Second flush teas. The garden has an annual production of 180 tons.

The estate also has a famous division called Liza Hill. Risheehat is a certified bio-organic estate and has zero percent vacancy. The estate has a Fair Trade certification, ISO 1901:2008 awarded by TUV NORD, and the HACCP certification. Additionally, it also has organic certifications for NPOP, POP, and JAS by IMO.



*We hope you have enjoyed reading the fascinating Darjeeling Tea story as much as we have enjoyed writing it.*

*But wait, there is more to come...*

*We are working out on Part 2 of this book where we will look at many more aspects of Darjeeling Tea and cover the remaining of 87 tea-estates of Darjeeling.*






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A woman wearing a brown headscarf and a blue sweater is harvesting tea in a lush green mountainous region. She is carrying a large woven basket on her back, which is lined with a blue cloth. The background shows rolling green hills under a clear blue sky with a few white clouds.

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In the world of teas, Darjeeling Tea occupies the highest pedestal. There is no other black tea that is so much loved and longed for as Darjeeling Tea. From the floral spring teas to the fruity summers teas to the elusive muscatel teas to the elegant autumn teas, each season in Darjeeling produces a tea that is uniquely different, and differently unique.

In this specially created book for tea connoisseurs, VAHDAM® India's tea experts passionately recount the fascinating aspects of Darjeeling Tea story : history, flushes, manufacture, muscatel teas, before showcasing some of the famous estates of Darjeeling. Lucidly written and lovingly conceptualised, this book is bound to make you stop and smell the roses, spend moments of serenity in the stampede of life...with a cup of Darjeeling Tea!

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