

Delicately Nuwara Eliya

Posted on



The Mahagastotte Division of the Pedro Estate sheathed in mist

**Golden steam rises, dissolving into the cold of the Island's highest peaks.
Ceylon Tea is a refreshing sip; a warm cuppa worthy of a royal banquet.**

Words Keshini de Silva | **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Anuradha Perera



The hills of Nuwara Eliya roll with the mists of history, aromas of pine and cypress swirling in the crisp air. A delicately fragrant bright cup with a tinge of green is the hallmark of these slopes. As the British fondness for this particular brew grew, an industry was born.

Although coffee arrived here before tea, these plantations were not as successful as those in Kandy due to the harsher climates of the high elevation.

Nuwara Eliya was in these early years merely a watering hole for the coffee planters from the surrounding lower elevations, providing them a taste of home. Churches such as the Holy Trinity Church built in 1845 tightly knit their community together. It was the cultivation of tea in the 1870s that converted the fortunes of this lush plateau, transforming Nuwara Eliya into a little England.

At an elevation of 1,868 metres (above sea level), where the Island's coldest temperatures reign, the tea brewed is of a golden hue. It is a vintage taste; an exquisite bouquet with a delicately fragrant flavour leading to the adage that teas of the Nuwara Eliya region are the champagne of Ceylon Tea.

In colour and flavour, this brew greatly differs from the teas produced in the Island's other regions. A unique character that is the result of production taking place at night, where with temperatures being less than 15 degrees Celsius, oxidation is slow. The oxidation process too is limited and the tea is directly fired to stop oxidation.

During the day however the fields are alive with activity as tea pluckers harvest with machine-like efficiency. Scenes that are to this day postcard-perfect. In bubbly groups, tea pluckers head to the factory in the evening, laden with their day's bounty. During transactions, the grounds are bustling with chatter. To them precision is everything. Pluckers can be seen everywhere, expertly sorting out inferior leaves from their harvest; a minimum collection of 18 kilogrammes. These bright green leaves are then hauled off to the withering trays. At midnight, the machines in the factory begin to churn, perfuming the air with whiffs of tea, it's where the magic happens.



The harvest of the day being sorted and weighed

Nuwara Eliya teas benefit from both the Western/Dimbula Season, from February to March and the Eastern/Uva Season from July to August. The Eastern slopes of the Nuwara Eliya planting district show an improvement in quality from August till mid September. With the onset of the North East monsoon, higher production is experienced in December. A warm day and rainy night are the ideal conditions for higher leaf growth.

Pedro Estate, which is at the foot of Sri Lanka's highest peak, Piduruthalagala is almost a historic landmark in the 150-year journey of Ceylon Tea. It is referred to in

the annals of history as one of the first places that tea was planted. 19 years after James Taylor introduced the first seedlings to the Island's soil, 200 plants were rooted in the Naseby Division of the estate.

While the Estate's Mahagastotte Division, dotted with characteristic tall trees, was planted as early as 1870, according to Pedro Estate, the plantation known today as the Lover's Leap is believed to be one that was overseen by James Taylor. Here is produced a brew of refined quality that sits lightly on the palate, a flavour nurtured by the gushing sound of the scenic Lover's Leap falls, veiled in a romantic epic of oppressed love. Pedro Estate also holds an affectionate place amongst the British royal family as Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh planted a single seedling in a plot here in 1954. Tea from this plot was served at a banquet at Westminster Hall held in honour of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

Just as the British royalty still treasure its delicate flavour, decades on, the teas of Nuwara Eliya continue to attract the devotions of the nearer Pacific and farther Atlantic lands.



