

The Japanese Tea Ceremony: Steeped In Tradition

What is a Japanese Tea Ceremony?

The Japanese tea ceremony is steeped in tradition. It is a social, yet sacred event in which the participants attempt to live "in the moment" with perfect humility and with a heart empty of selfish desires. Don't mistake the Japanese tea ceremony with a tea party. It is an intricate practice with religious overtones that is performed very seriously by the Japanese.

The Japanese tea ceremony was created by Zen Buddhists in the 14th century with four principles in mind: harmony, respect, purity and tranquility. The original ceremony is said to have been modified by legendary tea master, Sen No Rikyu. After years of learning, conducting and perfecting the ritual, he added the creation of a tea house, which ultimately led to the more social aspects of the ceremony.

It may be difficult for Westerners to understand the meaning behind the [Japanese tea](#) ceremony, but it's not unlike today's tea-drinking ritual. We drink tea to unwind from a busy day, or to sip while spending time with a good friend. So the next time you have a cup of tea, try to savor it and live "in the moment" like the Japanese. You may just enjoy your tea a little bit more.

The Japanese Tea Ceremony: An Intricate Practice

What does one do to prepare for a Japanese Tea Ceremony?

In Japan, drinking tea is considered an art form. They even have an entire ceremony dedicated to the practice of drinking tea. It is so intricate that people spend their entire lives trying to master it. Here are just some of the rules that the Japanese follow just to prepare for their tea ceremony.

To plan the ceremony, the host invites the first guest through an invitation. Then the first guest must take the initiative to plan a guest list and send invitations to the other invitees. It is their responsibility to RSVP for all of the guests to the host.

Once the list is set, the host will spend days preparing ingredients, setting up the tea room with the host's finest, most expensive [tea set](#) and utensils and cooking a thoughtful meal that will not only complement the tea, but also show great respect to guests.

After the guests arrive, the host will individually clean each utensil in the presence of the guests in a predetermined order. Then these utensils are arranged exactly in accordance with the particular style of tea ceremony that is being performed.

Finally, when the ritual cleaning is performed, the host will finally begin to prepare the tea

Styles Of Japanese Tea Ceremony

How many types of Japanese tea ceremonies are there?

The Japanese tea ceremony is a social, yet sacred event in which the participants attempt to live "in the moment" with perfect humility. Mastering the tea ceremony can take a lifetime and there is more than one type of ceremony to learn. There are many types of Japanese tea ceremonies, including indoor and outdoor options that vary by region. Generally, though, the most practiced types of tea ceremony are classified as Chaji and Chakai.

Chaji is very structured and formal. It consists of the serving of a thick tea, followed by a thoughtfully prepared meal, then a thin tea and a variety of desserts. This ceremony can last between three and five hours and contains more religious than social overtones.

Chakai is an informal meeting, in which only thin tea and sweets are served. This tea ceremony can last between twenty minutes to an hour and is generally a more social practice.

Arranging Flowers For The Japanese Tea Ceremony

How do you arrange flowers for a Japanese Tea Ceremony?

The traditional Japanese tea ceremony is an intricate, thoughtful ceremony designed to promote a feeling of "living in the moment," often with religious overtones. It is such a revered ritual that even the flowers are arranged with much thought and care.

Chabana, translated into "tea flowers" is the style of flower arrangement used to decorate the Japanese tea ceremony. Chabana is rooted in ikebana, which is a style of Japanese flower arranging in which the living flowers and the spirit of the person arranging them are united. Early tea masters used ikebana.

It is said that Sen no Rikyu, a Japanese tea ceremony master and the founder of the modern Japanese tea ceremony evolved Chabana from a method used by the ancient tea masters. He taught that Chabana should give the flowers the appearance that they are still growing naturally. In order to achieve this, unnatural or out-of-season materials are never employed in this type of flower arranging. At its most basic, a chabana arrangement is a simple arrangement of seasonal flowers placed in a container. They typically are made up of a few items, or even just a single blossom. Simplicity and beauty are key, as the arrangement is supposed to be a representation or a reflection of the host's heart.

Tea Ceremony Dress

What does someone wear to the Japanese tea ceremony today?

Japanese tea ceremonies are very involved tea tastings with religious overtones and prescribed movements and rituals. Everything from the washing of the utensils to the flower arrangements and food choices is an intricate process. Although many of the Japanese tea ceremony traditions are still strictly adhered to today, some aspects of the event are not as stringent. This may be due to the modernization of the tea ceremony, or the migration of the culture to other parts of the globe.

One aspect of the tea ceremony that has changed is the kind of attire one will wear while in attendance. The donning of a kimono used to be mandatory for the host and guests of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony, however, today some people choose to wear formal western attire instead. It is not uncommon to see guests of a tea ceremony in coat and tie, or long dress, however, the hosts of these ceremonies almost always wear kimonos since many movements within the tea ceremony are designed with the kimono in mind. If the host chooses to wear western clothing at the tea ceremony, the host must wear clothing with places to keep the utensils and fans involved in those movements.

But no matter what kind of attire the guests and host choose to wear, it is still advised to wear subdued clothing, so as not to prove distracting to the ceremony itself.

Tea Ceremony On Tatami

What is the role of Tatami in the Japanese tea ceremony?

Tatami is a type of floor covering that is often used in the Japanese tea ceremony. It is an important part of the ceremony as it helps maintain balance in the room, directs the guests where to walk and makes it more comfortable for the guests to sit during the tea ceremony.

Shoes, sandals and other types of footwear are not allowed to touch the tatami floor, and unwashed feet or unfresh socks are considered taboo. The tatami floor is to remain as clean as the utensils utilized in the tea ceremony.

In the tea ceremony, tatami are utilized in a number of ways. Their location influences how and where a person moves through the tea room. While treading on tatami it is traditional to shuffle, to prevent causing a disturbance. This helps maintain the balance within the room. Additionally, tatami can be slippery if a guest is wearing tabi (traditional foot covering), so shuffling can keep a person upright.

Tatami provide a more comfortable surface for sitting seiza –style. When sitting in a seiza position, guests kneel on the floor, folding their legs underneath their thighs, while resting the buttocks on the heels.

Additionally, the tatami may be reflective of celebration, and at such times, it is may be covered during the tea ceremony with a red felt cloth.

Studying The Japanese Tea Ceremony

Where do the Japanese learn the traditional tea ceremony?

For those in Japan that want to study the traditional tea ceremony, they have the option to join a tea circle. The term "circle" in Japan is similar to the term "club" in the United States. Japanese tea circles meet in private homes, high schools and colleges. Most are run by established tea schools for a monthly fee, which covers the equipment, the tea, the [tea sets](#) and the sweets that students serve and consume in class.

Although western wear is allowed in some classes, many classes require the donning of a kimono, as it is an essential part of the hosting of a Japanese tea ceremony.

Because the Japanese tea ceremony is so involved, new students typically begin learning through the observation of the more advanced students. As they learn more about the ceremony, the eventually are taught solely by the teacher.

Once the students have satisfactorily mastered a portion of the ceremony, they are given a certificate of mastery. However, because it can take years to master the entire ceremony, it can be very costly.

The Japanese Tea Ceremony: A Zen Experience

Why do the Japanese hold a tea ceremony?

For Westerners it may seem odd that the serving and drinking of tea can be considered an art form in some countries. However, in Japan, the art of serving and drinking tea is ingrained in the culture and ultimately culminates into an intricate ritual with religious overtones. This is called the Japanese tea ceremony.

Zen Buddhism is the religious approach taken during a tea ceremony. Zen Buddhists liken the ritual of drinking a cup of tea among friends to experiencing the whole universe in the here and now, complete with a heart empty of selfish desires. However, it's not just the drinking of the tea that is meaningful; the process of making the tea is fraught with nobility and purpose. The heart and thought poured into the simple acts of selecting utensils, boiling water and brewing tea for the ceremony is just as important, as it helps the host show the guests that he or she wants to give them the

very best and ultimately shows that his or her intentions are unselfish. If successful, then the entire ceremony will be a Zen experience for everyone involved.

Japanese Tea Ceremony Tools

What kinds of tools are used in a Japanese tea ceremony?

From the tea caddy and tea scoop, to the [tea pot](#) and tea bowls, there are so many utensils utilized within a Japanese tea ceremony. Here is a list of just some of the tools involved:

- **Kama:** A kettle for boiling the water
- **Futaoki:** A bamboo platform for the kama lid
- **Kensui:** A bowl for waste water, or any surplus water left after making tea
- **Kakemono:** A hanging art scroll or banner, that represents the theme of the ceremony
- **Mizusashi:** A jar that contains fresh water for making tea
- **Chaire:** A container that acts as a tea caddy
- **Shifuku:** A small pouch made of silk that protects the tea leaves
- **Chawan:** The bowl in which the host makes the tea
- **Chasen :** Whisk used to stir the matcha tea (green tea)
- **Chashaku:** Bamboo scoop for matcha tea powder
- **Hishaku:** A water ladle made from bamboo

A complete Japanese tea ceremony can include all of these tools and more. Part of the tea ceremony involves the appreciation and beauty of these tools and the tea set used to serve the guests.

Japanese Tea Ceremony Guest Protocol

What are some of the rules a guest within the Japanese tea ceremony has to follow?

The Japanese tea ceremony is filled with so many procedures and traditions that it can be difficult to master, even after years of practice. Here are just some of the rules a guest has to follow upon arrival to a tea ceremony.

When guests arrive at a Japanese tea ceremony, they first has to wash their feet and hands in a small stone basin before entering the tea room. Once inside, bows are exchanged between the host and the first guest, and a tea bowl is presented. The first guest then bows to the second guest, and raises the tea bowl in a gesture of reverence toward the host. To steer clear of drinking from the front of the bowl, the first guest will rotate it, take a sip and then softly speak the prescribed phrase. The guest will then take two to three sips, wipe the bowl, bow and pass the bowl to the next guest. This process repeats until every guest has had a turn taking tea from the same bowl, which eventually lands back with the host. Then, over the course of the next 3 to 5 hours, thin tea, the main course, thick tea and desserts are served, and each serving has its own sets of rules to follow.