

Oolong – The New Green Tea?

Hollywood has caught on to this interesting brew, and celebrities like Angelina Jolie and Oprah are enjoying Oolong (or Woolong as it is also called) for its exquisite taste and its health benefits. What however is this Oolong tea and how could it possibly compete with the great variety of benefits green tea has to offer?

Oolong teas have their origin in China. It was in the Fujian Province at the end of the Ming Dynasty (around 1400 A.D.) when these exceptional teas were first produced. The name “oolong” means “Black Dragon” or “Black Snake”, referring to the wiry leaf shape of the traditional oolongs which resembles the image of a dragon. During the late 19th century, Chinese settlers brought the tea to Taiwan where the art of oolong processing was cultivated to perfection. Today, this special varietal is considered a masterpiece in the Chinese art of tea.

Oolongs are a unique family of tea, somewhere in between green and black tea in oxidation. Oolongs are typically oxidized from 20% to 70% which explains why there is such a wide flavor profile among these teas. Caffeine levels are generally more moderate than those of black teas but a little higher than green or white teas. The typical flavor ranges from light with floral notes of a high grown “Tung Ting” to full-bodied and nutty of a lower grown “Formosa Oolong”. The partial oxidation causes the leaves to retain all of the nutrients and natural healing factors we find in non-oxidized green tea but without the grassy taste and the impact it can have on people with sensitive stomachs.

The processing of Oolong teas is very complex and requires care and attention to detail. Once the leaves are picked – and even here, distinct picking methods determine the quality in the cup, time is of the essence and the production must not be interrupted. Much like vineyards, each plantation and area is producing its own unique bouquet and flavor and each year the character of the tea is influenced by climate conditions and harvest time.

As important as the quality of the tea is its proper preparation and appreciation. Traditionally, Oolongs are prepared “Gongfu” style which involves the use of a small unglazed teapot, filled generously with leaves. Before the actual steeping, the leaves are rinsed off with hot water to remove any leftover particles and dust. The ideal water temperature is just below boiling and steeping times range from 2-4 minutes. Unlike many other varietals, oolong teas can be steeped several times and even after the sixth or seventh steeping will not disappoint.

Every cup of tea represents an imaginary journey and if you are eager to learn more about this and other exquisite teas, I invite you to explore the world of tea during one of our informative and entertaining tea tasting classes!

Log on to www.souvia.com to find out when the next classes are scheduled and how to sign up.