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Wandering the Web — How About a (Virtual) Cuppa? A Highly Selective Introduction to Tea Online

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Column Editor's Note: From the *Huffington Post* to *Time Magazine Online* to *WebMD*, the Internet is afloat with the health benefits of tea. — **JM**

Tea Is Good for You

The second most popular beverage on Earth? Yes, tea. Second only to water, tea is the most-consumed beverage on the planet. Why? From help with weight loss to stress relief (there's a symbiotic relationship there!) to fighting free radicals to improved exercise endurance and more, the humble cuppa — elsewhere in the world the most-consumed beverage — is coming into its own in the United States.

The Blog at HuffPost Healthy Living posted “6 amazing health benefits of tea” (2013). Time magazine online touted “13 reasons tea is good for you” in their Health and Family section (2012). WebMD created a short video clip reporting on the increase in tea consumption and published online articles on the health benefits of different types of tea (2013). After viewing the WebMD material, you can even take a quiz to test your knowledge on green tea! Dr. Oz and Fox News also showcase information on the health benefits of tea.

Getting interested? Good. I'll put the kettle on, and we'll learn some more over a nice hot cup of tea. What kind of tea? Glad you asked! We have lots of choices — there are literally thousands of blends of tea in the world, although true tea derives from one plant, *camellia sinensis*, and a varietal, *camellia sinensis assamica*. Differences in flavor, color, and benefits derive largely from the processing after the tea leaves are picked.

The four most common types of tea in the West are black (most oxidized or fermented leaves), green (leaves are steamed), oolong (or *wu long*, fermented, then pan-fired), white (least cured or fermented), and recently gaining in popularity, pu-erh (fermented, raw, or aged tea, often sold in cakes or bricks). It is interesting to note that black tea, as it is popularly known in the West, is referred to as red tea in its country of origin, and indeed the origin of all teas, China.

A (Very) Few Tea Vendors (among Many): A Drop in the Vast Teapot of Online Tea Vendors

Tea grows best in high, moist elevations, and the *camellia sinensis* plant can be found all over the world. According to the Tea Association of the USA:

Much of the world's tea is grown in mountainous areas 3,000-7,000 feet above sea level, situated between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn in mineral-rich soil. Leading tea-producing countries include Argentina, China, India, Indonesia, Kenya Malawi, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Taiwan (Tea Fact Sheet, 2013).

There are a number of small, artisanal tea gardens in the United States, but the best-known commercial U. S. tea producer is the Charleston Tea Plantation, owned by Bigelow Tea, which produces American Classic Tea.

You say you like flavored teas? Well, sit back and take a fortifying sip or two, this could take a while. Popular online tea vendor Adagio Teas boasts more than 57,166 blends, as of May 2014. How is this possible? Brilliant social media marketing: Adagio customers create and rate tea blends online, often based on popular culture fandom. For example, TV series fandom blends include highly subjective and wildly varied teas based on characters from *Sherlock*, *Dr. Who*, and the late, lamented *Firefly*, to name but a few of the popular groups of blends.

Teavana, now owned by Starbucks, is opening tea specialty stores following the phenomenally successful Starbucks coffee bar model. Originally in upscale malls or freestanding stores, with colorful walls of tea tins and heavy on the Asian style tea accessories, Teavana was perhaps the first national chain to popularize and yuppify tea. Teavana advertises more than 100 teas on their Website.

On the less trendy side, don't be put off by the crowded, narrow screenspace of the Upton Tea Imports Website (as of this writing). Compared to the more colorful imagery and photos of teas to be found on other vendor sites, Upton comes off as dowdy as Aunt Matilda's tea

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I think that it was **Samuel Johnson** (*Boswell's Johnson*) who wrote that one may learn a lot simply by reading the spines of books on shelves. An erstwhile friend of mine once told me that when he first visited the home of his wife's parents, he noted that the only books that they owned were some Reader's Digest Condensed Books and a medical dictionary. Were those books and what they represented the a root cause for my friend's divorce? Or was it his prolonged but successful pursuit of a Ph.D. in English literature? What one finds on the bookshelves of those one visits provides insights about interests, mindsets,

politics, and levels of education. To suggest that the contents of a bookshelf might have led to a divorce is silly on the face of it, but to focus on the selection suggests a disparity in interests that might well manifest itself in ways that led to a parting of ways.

When I was in the Army, another college dropout (**Stanford**, in his case) accused me of being a literary snob because I used to give him a hard time for reading nothing but mysteries. When I shared a barracks with him I was reading **Edward Albee**, **James Agee**, **Ayn Rand**, **Thomas Wolfe**, **Malamud**, **Bellow**, **Kesey**, and **Kerouac**, to name a few of the writers that occupied much of my free time at Ft. Bragg. I read mysteries now and my first and only eBook reading was a mystery. I regularly read mysteries now and have for years and prefer

them to most films and television programs. But I am not really a literary snob as much as I am someone with certain preferences, and most of what I enjoy reading and need to read to satisfy an inner hunger, needs to be in my bookcases or on an end table where I can see them and take them in my hands and read them or consult them whenever I want to without turning on a machine or typing a command or search query. There is nothing but space between me and my books, and when I leave this earth I will have made provisions for my old friends much as others do for their pets. And I will continue to write with a fountain pen, and as long as those cards and letters survive in the hands of friends and family, a part of me will live on. 🐸

parties for the blue-haired set. The Upton difference, however, is in the details. Every one of “the 480 loose teas and tisanes” offered is as eloquently described, carefully sourced, and thoughtfully priced as on other, flashier tea vendor Websites. Their extensive catalog is available in a simple plain white paper format or online as a PDF. Upton Tea Imports is *serious* about the quality of its tea sources.

Somewhere between the busyness of Upton Tea Imports and the colorful graphics of Adagio Teas or Teavana is the stately yet welcoming Harney & Sons, a family business in upstate New York that imports and blends tea for international royalty — and the rest of us — at reasonable prices. Experience Palm Court, blended for the Plaza Hotel’s elegant room of the same name, or Paris, an *homage* to French Breakfast Tea that adds that *je ne sais quoi* to your morning cuppa. A key to navigating the various tea varieties on the Harney & Sons Website (as of this writing): Click the photo of the white cup of tea nestled in tea leaves — that links to the main page for each blend. Like most online tea vendors, you can try a variety of Harney & Sons original blends in inexpensive sample packets.

Another friendly tea vendor is the English Tea Store, which carries a variety of established brands from Barry’s to Typhoon, in addition to their own blends of tea, many of which are simply delicious and are also available in variety samplers. If you like a good Earl Grey, try their Dorian Grey, Double Bergamot, or Earl Grey Cream. There is even a CO₂-decaffeinated Earl Grey — not too much of a good thing for the true fan.

Tea and Social Media

Beyond suggesting online sites to buy tea for your patrons, there is a growing social media aspect of tea for the novice as well as the *connoisseur*. Care to debate the merits of raw versus aged pu-erh? Want recommendations on fair-trade, organically grown white tea? Confused about the caffeine content in green tea? No worries — there’s a forum — and an app — for that. Tea drinkers have always been a social bunch, that much is evident from tea’s illustrious — and common-garden-variety — history (see suggested reading below). Technology has made reaching out to fellow tea-lovers amazingly easy. Tea reviews, tea swaps, tea FAQs, tea Q&As, and virtual tea-tastings abound at sites like Steepster and TeaChat.

Thirsty for more information on this near-miraculous beverage? If you are planning a program about tea, there are some wonderful visuals to illustrate the impact of tea on SharePowered’s “It’s Tea Time: A Collection of Tea Infographics,” or you can add to the wildly creative tea images already posted on Pinterest or Tumblr. From tea parties (of the china teacup variety) to the politics of tea (the beverage, *not* the party), there have been scores of books written that detail the rise of the humble tea leaf. See below for a handful of titles that showed up repeatedly on several best-of lists.

How people came to drink tea is steeped in legend, so the history of tea picks up more or less when it became a drink fit only for royalty — or a huge cash crop. Take your pick. Now sit back, relax, and enjoy a cup of tea.

Selected Resources about Tea

Social Media

Pinterest Tea Boards — www.pinterest.com/search/boards/?q=tea
RateTea — ratetea.com/ — includes articles, reviews, and information about tea-growing regions

Reddit — www.reddit.com/r/tea, r/TeaExchange — discuss and exchange, post photos of tea, teapots, tea sets, etc.

Steepster — steepster.com — review, exchange, and discuss all aspects of tea

TeaAdvisor — TeaAdvisor.com — Discussion forums, articles

TeaChat — www.teachat.com — part of Adagio Teas, this site includes TeaMap, a tearoom directory; TeaChef, recipes using tea; TeaCritic, reviews of various teas; Tea Class (www.teaclass.com) and TeaMuse, a monthly newsletter.

Apps

Adagio Teas. (2014). Tea map app (iPhone): www.adagio.com/iphone/index.html

Google Play (2014). Tea apps. Retrieved from play.google.com/store/search?q=tea&c=apps.

Iglesias, S., and Tyler, M. (2013). Tea 2.0 [iPhone tea app]. Retrieved from teapp.com/ and itunes.apple.com/us/app/tea/id397979692?mt=8.

Perfect Tea Touch. Teavana cell phone app [iPhone and Android app]. Retrieved from teacoupons.com/blog/teavana-cell-phone-app-perfect-tea-touch.

Blogs & News

A Tea Addict’s Journal — www.marshaln.com

Lainie Sips — www.lainiesips.com

MattCha’s Blog — mattchasblog.blogspot.com

SpontaneiTea — cazort.teatra.de

T Ching — www.tching.com

Tea Blog, Official Blog of the English Tea Store — englishtea.us and related blogs:

World in a Teapot — teatimewithaccargill.blogspot.com

Tea Guy Speaks — www.teaguyspeaks.com/

Tea for Me Please — www.teaformeplease.com

Tea Magazine — teamag.com

The 39 Steeps — 39steeps.blogspot.com

The Half-Dipper — www.half-dipper.blogspot.com

Walker Tea Review — walkertea.com

Whittard of Chelsea Blog — www.whittard.co.uk/customer/whittard_blog

World of Tea — www.worldoftea.org

World Tea News — www.worldteanews.com

Vendors

Vendors are a very small corner of the huge online tea world.

Adagio Teas — www.adagio.com

Arbor Teas — www.arborteas.com

Art of Tea — www.artoftea.com

Charleston Tea Plantation, American Classic Tea — www.charlestonteaplantation.com

Culinary Teas — www.culinaryteas.com

English Tea Store — www.englishteastore.com/

Harney & Sons — www.harney.com

Mariage Frères (France; UK site) — www.mariagefreres.com/boutique/UK/welcome.html

Mighty Leaf — www.mightyleaf.com

Tea Gschwendner — www.teagschwendner.com/US/en/Homepage.TG

Teavana — www.teavana.com

Teavivre — www.teavivre.com

Upton Tea Imports — www.uptontea.com

Books

19 Lessons on Tea: Become an Expert on Buying, Brewing, and Drinking the Best Tea, A Guide by 27Press, 2012.

A Decent Cup of Tea, by Malachi McCormick, Clarkson Potter, 1991.

For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World’s Favorite Drink and Changed History, by Sarah Rose, Penguin Books, 2011.

New Tea Lover’s Treasury: The Classic True Story of Tea, by James Norwood Pratt, Publishing Technology Associates, 1999.

Tea, by Lydia Gautier, Chronicle Books, 2006.

Tea: History, Terroirs, Varieties, by Kevin Gascoyne, Francois Marchand, and Jasmin Desharnais, Firefly Books, 2011.

The Book of Tea (expanded edition), by Okakura Kakuzo and Bruce Richardson, Benjamin Press, 2011.

The Harney & Sons Guide to Tea, by Michael Harney, Penguin, 2008.

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The New Tea Companion (2nd edition), by **Jane Pettigrew** and **Bruce Richardson**, Benjamin Press, 2008.

The Story of Tea: A Cultural History and Drinking Guide, by **Mary Lou Heiss** and **Robert J. Heiss**, Ten Speed Press, 2007.

The Tea Drinker's Handbook, by **Francois-Xavier Delmas**, **Mathias Minet**, **Christine Barbaste**, Abbeville Press, 2008.

The Tea Enthusiast's Handbook, by **Mary Lou Heiss** and **Robert J. Heiss**, Ten Speed Press, 2010.

Organizations

American Tea Masters Association — teamasters.org/

Association of Tea Bloggers — www.teabloggers.com

Fair Trade USA, Product Certification Tea Program — fairtradeusa.org/certification/producers/tea

Tea Association of Canada/Association du Thé du Canada — www.tea.ca

Tea Association of the USA, Tea Council USA, Specialty Tea Institute — www.teausa.com

United Kingdom Tea Council — www.tea.co.uk

United States League of Tea Growers — usgrowntea.wordpress.com

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Tea Council. (February 2014). Tea and health brochure. Retrieved from http://www.teausa.com/teausa/images/Tea_Council_-_Tea_Health_Brochure_-_2.14.pdf.

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And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — ASA Annual Conference and 33rd Annual Charleston Conference

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Association of Subscription Agents & Intermediaries Annual Conference — “Transforming the Scholarly Landscape” — London, England, February 24-25, 2014

Reported by: **Anthony Watkinson** (Principal Consultant, CIBER Research) <anthony.watkinson@btinternet.com>

ATG readers may not be aware that for some years now the **ASA** with **Peter Lawson** of **Karger Libri** at the helm and **Nawin Gupta** as Secretary-General (both resident in the USA) have established an international conference in England that routinely draws between 120 and 160 registrants. February is a good time for an event as it is not surrounded by other conflicting conferences and seminars: it is a boring time in London! It is also an event that, like the **Charleston Conference**, brings together librarians, vendors, and publishers and because of the special position of agents and intermediaries presents new perspectives on much discussed topics — see the title.

The organising committee were very fortunate in getting **Y.S.Chi** of **Elsevier** to give the keynote. It was probably easier to get him because he disclosed that for eighteen months now his base has been in London. His presentations are perhaps the best from the publishing giants, and this one was no exception. On the whole he avoided a sales pitch, but on the whole the sort of initiatives described were ones where **Elsevier** is in the lead. He spoke about the evolution of publishing; about what is new, what is changing, and what is staying the same. “Traditional” publishing is regarded by many outside the industry as a relic but actually the traditional functions are still required by the academic authors and readers:

publishers were early into technology and are just doing their old jobs better with its help. However, publishers have now embraced new roles and it is these that he concentrated on. There is much to be done with content. His company provides augmented content, no longer just content as received — “content-based experience” is delivered and dead content becomes live (interactive) content. Publishers are also delivering solutions and tools. Users save time because the right content is being delivered at the right time and in the right context. Tools take traditional content and mix it with analytics. He faced up to big data head-on and advertised the opening up of content to text and data mining. However, readers do not know yet what they want. **Elsevier** is trying out business models such as freemium, agile, bundling, subscriptions (in areas where this approach is new). “Fail often but fail early” is a company motto. There was a lot more and there were some good questions and answers. A librarian suggested that the real challenge was opening up from open access. **Chi** projected that we are moving to a multiple-option world but insisted that someone has to pay for open.

A lot of the content of the keynote (much denser than can be recorded here) was echoed in the next session on transformation from a publishing perspective. **Stephen Rhind-Tutt** of **Alexander Street Press** led off: for him roles are becoming interchangeable. Are agents, libraries, and publishers becoming one was his question. His warning was that survival of any player is not mandatory. **Eileen Welch** of the **New England Journal of Medicine** explained how **NEJM** was experimenting with social media. They seemed to be a little slower than some other leading medical journals, but what they were doing showed openness to outside influences. Actually for the moment social media initiatives were concerned with reinforcing

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