

# Tea Travels Through Sri Lanka

By Danielle Beaudette



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We drive through areas where the Singalese are celebrating their New Year holiday with week-long festivals, offering food, games, bike races, and much more. Politicians take this opportunity to drive in their enormous speaker-laden automobiles through the streets soliciting votes.

It isn't unusual to find a roadside stand selling freshly cut pineapple served with salt and cayenne pepper, or "beatle in a leaf" (this is the areca nut wrapped in a betel leaf). Pomegranate is

trees to produce the rubber and when they are too old, they cut them down and use them as fuel for the furnaces in the tea factories. Rice paddies can be found deep in the countryside offering a lush, tropical landscape with rich red clay.

We drive to the New Vithanakande Tea estate in Ratnapura. The owner, Navaratna Pilapitiya, produces tea

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Ayubowan (hello, long life) is how I was warmly greeted in Sri Lanka as we pass by the locals walking in the streets; they smile and wave at us, happy to see Americans. The crisp white, colorful dresses of the women carrying brightly colored umbrellas are picturesque.

## New Vithanakande Tea estate



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## Roadside Stand

the state fruit found everywhere and rubber tree farms are all throughout the country. They use the sap from the

that is manufactured under the most hygienic and modern conditions. They have won the Ceylon Specialty Estate of the Year award that decorates the wall of their factory along with other awards honoring the exceptional teas they produce. Their tea is medium bodied with an aromatic, clean and natural flavor – outstanding! My favorite is the Extra Special, a beautiful wiry leaf that

## Sri Lanka Street Scene



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offers exceptional qualities in the cup and a captivating bouquet. From the top of this estate, you can see the rain forest on its borders. Ratnapura has long monsoon regions and the weather produces a healthy and succulent environment for growing tea bushes. They take great pride in preserving the rain forests. On the outskirts of this region, small homes (smallholders) have tea bushes in their yard instead of grass. They pluck their bushes and send the tea to the larger factory for production. This helps to support the income of the families outside of the major tea estate.

We move on to Nuwara Eliya where the sunrise at the Strathdon Estate Bungalow is an experience I will never forget. The view from the veranda includes sloping mountains all around,

with tea bushes swirling in rows as far as the eye could see, providing a natural painting that was breathtaking. The sunrise above the mountain peaks is spectacular. The chef brings us out a tea tray to sip their freshly brewed tea as we admire nature's serene beauty unfold before our eyes. Here, time stands still and peace is all around us.

We leave Nuwara Eliya and drive through mountain slopes with trickling streams everywhere. A stop at an Anglican Church, built in 1878 by the British, showcases a chapel that is perfectly situated with its ornate gravestones on a hill overlooking a clear blue lake surrounded by sloping hills of tea bushes. The men and woman who are buried here are some of the first to labor over the harvesting of tea from

this area. It is a fitting and beautiful landscape for them.

Near Kandy, we visit the Kenilworth Tea Estate in Kirkoswald, managed by Venmathirajah, the group manager. This tea factory contains state of the art machines including the fiber

**Kenilworth Tea Estate**



Photos © Danielle Beaudette



**Strathdon Estate Bungalow**

**Anglican Church, built in 1878**



Photos © Danielle Beaudette

extractor and sorting machines. He educates us in detail on the types of teas produced in the different months during dry and wet seasons, and how they are used in the rotovane, a unique rolling machine.

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We are provided the exclusive experience of touring the nursery where we receive an in-depth account of the process of producing different varieties, and growing new bushes from seed, versus grafting a new plant from a more mature tea plant. The knowledge I gain here contributes significantly to my studies in learning about tea from the planting of the tea seed to its final production in the factory. This is essential information that I can pass on to my customers in better understanding the processing of tea.


Soon after, I meet with Anil Cooke, the President and CEO of the Asia Siyaka Commodities. This is one of

the largest tea brokers in the country. He gives me an overall background of many of the teas in Sri Lanka and how the brokerage firm works. This is the most important step in getting the tea out of Sri Lanka and into the tea importer's hands, and ultimately to our customers.

My experience in Sri Lanka with the tea estate owners, our gracious driver, the outpouring of generosity of all those we met, and most importantly Pearl Dexter who made this all happen, was unbelievable. I found the relationship between tea, nature, and its environment spoke to me. It helped me to connect to nature peacefully, through a steaming cup of hot tea.

Thank you - istuti, pronounced "stutti". I hope you enjoyed your Tea Tour through Sri Lanka as much as I have in recounting it!



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### Asia Siyaka Commodities

