

Australian Tea Culture

If we seek a single cultural thread running through Australia's First Nations and multicultural life, tea culture is it. Often dismissed as a colonial leftover or a relic of 1950s white Australia, this view is incorrect. It ignores the bush teas consumed by First Nations people long before British arrival. It overlooks the millions of migrants who brought rich tea traditions with them. And it pays no credit to the iconic Australian billy tea—immortalised by Banjo Paterson in *Waltzing Matilda* (1895): *“And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled.”*

That same poem, now used regularly as an unofficial national anthem, captures tea's place in Australian folklore.

This misperception must be addressed. The now-finished Australian Tea Cultural Society successfully demonstrated tea's role in cultural identity, conversation and innovation. It showcased art, ceramics, music, poetry, ceremony, costume and education. The society invited international and local specialists, explored collaborations with Australian industries, and featured musicians, poets, comedians and artists to highlight cultural connection.

Tea culture connects First Nations peoples, the arts community, multicultural Australians, business, cultural tourists, young people, elders, as well as metro, regional and rural Australians.

So why is true Australian tea culture so hard to define? Is it ceremony? Fine China, silver or pottery? The elements of water, fire, air and plant working together? Or simply time spent in conversation over a cup of tea or two? It is not easy to describe—but it is certainly not a leftover from a bygone era.

Recently, tea's role in difficult times has re-emerged. Mood Tea addresses youth mental illness, and the Australian Tea Cultural Society held a 2022 Sydney seminar on tea and mental health support. Tea and its culture can certainly assist in the mental wellbeing space.

Tea culture is part of the Australian story and deserves a place in its future. Including tea culture in the new cultural policy would offer this ancient tradition acceptance, acknowledgement and a rightful place in the continuing story of Australia and all who call this land home.

Personal Introduction:

With more than 26 years of experience in the Australian tea industry, I find myself in quite a unique position.

My experience includes wholesaling tea, retailing tea, tea education up to post graduate master's level, keynote and forum panel speaking and international representation.

Member of the China International Tea Cultural Institute, Hangzhou and founder of the Australian Tea Cultural Society.

I believe our youth and young people globally are the future of tea culture, if we can captivate their enthusiasm, energy and fascination but the knowledge and history must be shared by the elders of tea culture in our story telling and education.