



TEA FOR THE SOUL

Five ways to choose a good online tea seller

Shopping for tea online can open up a world of choice and quality for the avid tea drinker. Online tea sellers have the scope and flexibility to offer some very high quality, new and exciting products.

In particular, smaller operations can afford to carefully hand select each of the teas in their range and buy from small-scale tea gardens that produce exceptional and bespoke teas in small quantities.

If they are an online only seller, they are likely to have low overheads, which means they can sell higher quality, often higher-priced teas at prices that bigger stores cannot. They can choose teas for a niche and discerning customer base, rather than holding a large range of commercial production teas to satisfy the mass market.

But like any product, quality can vary considerably. So how do you choose?

Even though you can't smell and taste the teas in person before you purchase online, there are a few key things that will help you navigate your way and find the tea seller/s that are right for you.

1. Appearance of the teas

You can still visually inspect the teas online, providing the seller provides good, clear photos of the leaves in natural light.

Can you see the detail of the leaves? How is the colour, the consistency and the integrity of the leaf? Do the leaves look bright and fresh? Are they intact, full leaves?

If the seller has taken care to show their product in detail, you can be confident that they are confident in the product they have to offer.

2. Information provided by the seller

How much does the seller tell you about their product and themselves?

Does the seller put their name behind the teas, tell you who they are, where they are located, and why they are offering this range of teas? Are you confident that the teas have been sourced responsibly?

If you can't determine who is selling the teas, and where they are located, you could be buying any old stuff.

Specificity about the origin and the tea itself is also important. First of all, buying a product called 'green tea' with origin 'China' is like buying a bottle of wine labelled 'Australian white wine'.

Ideally, you will be able to determine the style of tea, its country and region of origin, and the year and season of harvest. Sometimes the seller might want to specify the mountain or growing area as this is important for some teas. For example authentic Taiwanese oolong Dong Ding originates from Dong Ding Mountain in Lugu Village, Nantou County, Taiwan – so Lugu, Taiwan will be the important identifier in this case. For other teas the province or county will be sufficient.

Growing elevation is also often provided, particularly for high grown teas. High grown teas (over 1000 metres elevation) are typically highly prized due to their finer and more complex flavour profile, and the seller may want to highlight these.

You will want to know when the tea has been harvested. This is partly because you probably don't want to be buying tea that's been sitting in a warehouse for five years.





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Keep in mind that tea, when properly stored, has a good shelf life. So tea harvested one or two years ago is not necessarily old stock. Sometimes a tea will be purchased from a previous year as it may have been a particularly good season for that tea, and also because some teas improve with age (not just pu'er teas, which are intentionally aged).

And of course, a good description of the flavour and other characteristics of the tea are important.

3. Range – handpicked or bulk?

Does the store include hundreds of different teas or does it have a smaller range?

This is the difference between shopping at the supermarket and shopping at a deli or gourmet grocery store. If there are hundreds of teas in the range, it's unlikely that they've been carefully hand selected.

Many large companies order off menus from big tea distributors based in Europe. (This can also clock up some flight miles not to mention costs.) This is the difference between shopping at the supermarket and shopping at a deli or gourmet grocery store.

Products in a smaller range are more likely to have been individually selected for their quality and flavour, and coherence in a curated range. Traceability is easier, and if the seller specialises in a particular tea or style of tea, they are more likely to have in depth knowledge about those products.

4. Price

It's true you get what you pay for. However, a high price does not necessarily guarantee a good quality premium tea.

Keep in mind you could be paying a high price for cheap low to medium quality teas, which incorporates expensive packaging, staff and shopfronts, marketing and advertising campaigns and other big business overheads.

Very good teas are rarely cheap. With this in mind, you will be able to make a judgment about how much of the price you pay is likely to reflect the quality of the tea itself, and what proportion of the price charged goes into business overheads.

5. Reputation

What do other people think of the tea? Does the seller have a good reputation and proven results? What do real customers have to say about the company?

If you can tell that others buy and enjoy the products this is a great sign! You're not stepping into the unknown. If you can identify with those customers, whether individuals or businesses, this is even more reassuring.

Each of these 5 points together should give you a good idea about whether the product that arrives in the mail is going to be your cup of tea!

When it comes to experiencing the best that tea has to offer, you will often need to go off the beaten track. Having confidence in your online seller will allow you to become your most adventurous tea-drinking self.

Like any more information or advice?

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