



BREWING UP A STORM

The coffee connoisseurs in town will try and tell you otherwise... but these days, it's the tea scene in Hong Kong that is truly thriving. With more independent tea brands and cool tea-focused venues popping up all over town, now's the time to learn your Jasmine from your Earl Grey! We chat to three businesses currently brewing up a storm in Hong Kong.

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By Rachel Read

MINGCHA

Co-founded by Vivien Mak when a friend asked her to design teapots for his teashop, unwittingly awakening her desire to learn more about the drink, award-winning local tea brand MingCha has gone from strength to strength over the past 14 years. Mak works directly with farmers to understand everything about the plants used in her unique blends (even down to the soil!), and says that it is her "mission to guide people to good quality teas at an affordable price".



Which Tea?

MINGCHA

Now sold in major retailers like Great Food Hall, Oliver's and ThreeSixty, Mak's signature blends are based on her deep understanding of the different tastes and health benefits of each individual leaf and flower – for instance, the 'For Her' blend includes Tangyang Golden Rim tea combined with mini rose buds to combat poor blood circulation and insomnia... perfect for those with cold hands and feet that can't get to sleep at night.

Famous for innovative tea-tasting workshops at their Quarry Bay tea house (a runaway hit on TripAdvisor), where Mak pairs teas with chocolates or shows folks how to make the perfect brew, Mak believes that MingCha is changing people's perspective on tea; their philosophy is to "make tea fun and full of potential... we believe MingCha tea can be associated with anything in life". Look out for even more new products – like their patented Rose Honey or MingCha tea chocolates – coming out later this year.



TEAKHA

Everyone's favourite (not-so) secret Poho café, Teakha is the creation of tea lover Nana Chan – who simply wanted to share her passion for tea with others. Why tea? Well, it's "more versatile than coffee, there's a tea for every mood, festivity or culture," Chan explains. "And it's also healthier!"

Every cup of tea at Teakha is brewed individually cup by cup, with customers visiting from far and wide to try their ever-popular Masala Chai and special tea blends; previous creations include a Keemun Rose Tea for Valentine's Day and a Cold Brew Chrysanthemum Oolong to cool down in summer. Chan gets inspiration for her drinks from her travels around Asia, what produce is in season and what she's currently baking... no wonder then that Teakha's cakes and pastries are the perfect complement to their brews.

Teakha has quickly become a bustling neighbourhood hangout, recently celebrating its second birthday with a Tai Ping Shan street party. Chan says she still gets "goosebumps" when she thinks of all the former coffee drinkers she's converted to the way of the tealeaf.

TEAPIGS

Forget Twinings or Lipton... these days, there's far more choice for your humble teabag. Leading the charge are independent British tea company Teapigs, who have won a dedicated following thanks to their quirky blends (popcorn tea, anyone?) and eco-friendly ethos.

Simon Disler, director of Drinks 99 (the company responsible for bringing Teapigs to Hong Kong), believes the tide is turning in the beverage world, with even everyday drinkers paying more attention to the quality of their cuppa. As the first brand to put loose-leaf tea into a biodegradable 'tea temple', Teapigs provide what Disler regards an accessible affordable alternative to both standard mass-market brands and intimidatingly high-end ones. "When people taste Teapigs, they can taste the real flavour of lemongrass, liquorice or peppermint," Disler explains. "People who try our teas can't go back to drinking other brands!"

Local bestsellers interestingly include two totally caffeine-free varieties, Chamomile Flowers and Lemon & Ginger; Hong Kong has been a little slower to catch onto Teapigs' global bestseller, their organic green matcha 'super-tea' – but with a wealth of scientifically proven health benefits including weight loss, improved skin and 137 times the amount of antioxidants found in regular green tea, it can only be a matter of time before health-conscious Hong Kongers are swigging their matcha with gusto. With a dedicated Hong Kong Teapigs e-store plus regular stalls at markets around town (including Island East Markets, of course), your afternoon tea options just got a whole lot more interesting.

