



茶

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Infused with Tea

# Introduction to Uji Green Tea

Understanding its rich cultural heritage



# Contents

- History..... 2-5
- Tea Timeline ..... 6
- Types of Green Tea ..... 7-8
- Benefits of Drinking Green Tea ..... 9
- Discover Green Tea ..... 10-12
- Preparing Green Tea ..... 13-14



## History

Uji Green Tea has been the gold standard of premium green tea for centuries, its success intertwined with Japan’s religious, social and political history.

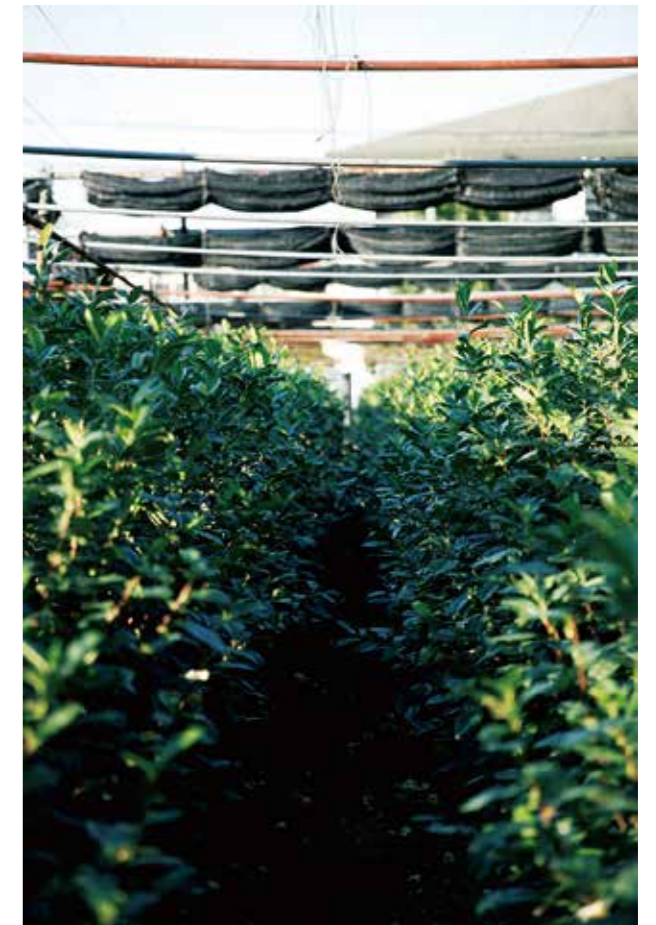
### Early history (7th–15th century)

Tea was first brought to Japan by buddhist monks - envoys sent to China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). They went to study Chinese culture, literature, and the arts and brought back not only knowledge but artifacts too, including tea seeds and blocks of brick tea (*dancha*). China already had a long history and appreciation of the humble tea leaf by this time and the monks were eager to impart their newfound knowledge to the emperor.

The emperor Saga (786–842) became a big fan of drinking tea and in fact all things Chinese, and in 815 ordered the establishment of five tea plantations around the ancient capital of Heian Kyo - today’s Kyoto. Tea production was small-scale however and consumption restricted to the imperial family, nobility, and buddhist monks. After his death, drinking tea fell out of fashion, as did interest in Chinese culture in general.

It wasn’t until nearly 300 years later during the Kamakura period that Japan rekindled its love affair with the beverage. In 1191, the monk Eisai returned from a trip to China, having studied in depth about the medicinal qualities of tea according to traditional Chinese medicine. In 1211, he wrote the seminal text *Kissa Yojoki* – lit. Drink Tea and Prolong Life, in which he described the various health benefits of drinking tea, including curing fatigue, indigestion, and even hangovers! His writings also provided the blueprints for cultivation and processing and ushered in a renewed interest in tea and its medicinal qualities.

Eisai gave some seeds to the monk Myoe, high priest of Kozan-ji temple in Kyoto. Myoe planted these seeds in the grounds of his temple in Togano-o and also in Uji, which became the sites of the first large scale cultivation of tea in Japan.



In the 15th century, Uji tea growers had their first big break, by being officially recognised by the shogunate (the *bakufu*) - the military government of Japan, as producing the finest tea in Japan. The bakufu essentially ruled Japan in place of the figurehead emperor, who had very little real power. They ordered the development of seven tea plantations in Uji - the *shichimeien* (lit. seven famous gardens), one of which, the Okunoyama plantation, still exists today. This cemented Uji’s importance as a tea growing region and kick-started an 800-year history of tea cultivation and culture in the surrounding Yamashiro area.



Preparing matcha tea during the tea ceremony

### The Feudal period (16th century)

During the feudal era that followed, with rival clans jostling for power, tea became an important symbol of status. The act of taking tea was elevated to a zen-like pursuit by the celebrated tea master Sen no Rikyu. He was tea master to both Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, daimyo lords attributed with unifying Japan after years of civil war.

Sen no Rikyu's formal tea ceremony and its austere *wabi sabi* aesthetic became the version of the ceremony that we know it today. The popularity of the tea ceremony grew rapidly among the samurai class, and the demand for premium tencha (the leaves ground into matcha) skyrocketed.

Under intense pressure to improve their product even more, the Uji tea growers developed a covered growing technique (*ooishita saibai*) using screens of woven reeds and straw to shade the plants from the sun. The reeds

were collected from nearby Lake Ogura that used to lay midway between Uji and Kyoto, before it was drained to make way for a rail network during the Meiji Restoration.

Shaded growing allowed for richer, more flavorsome *tencha* leaves, and enabled Uji to produce the most coveted tea in the country. This covered Uji method soon spread throughout the whole Yamashiro region and eventually grew to encompass Nara, Shiga, and Mie. Such was its importance to the Shogunate, not only culturally but financially through taxation, that Uji was the only area authorised to use the technique.

Underlying Uji Green Tea's significance as the preeminent tea in the country, a tea tasting competition (*tocha*), popular since the Kamakura period, involved contestants guessing whether the tea was *honcha* (real tea), or *hicha* (not). Originally this had meant whether it was from Togano-o (traditionally considered the finest tea) or not, but by this time, it meant if the tea was Uji Green Tea or not.

### Shaded growing

*Ooishita saibai* is a method of cultivation that controls the amount of direct sunlight the leaves receive, using natural or manmade sunscreens. Once the new buds start to appear in the spring, the plants are covered with straw and reed screens, or synthetic cloth, to create cooler conditions and prevent the chemical process that creates too much astringency. This method

produces tea with vivid, dark green leaves and a rich, yet less astringent flavor - essential for premium tencha and gyokuro production. Sencha tea on the other hand is grown under natural light conditions.



### The Edo period (17th–19th century)

The feudal era ended when Tokugawa Ieyasu seized power from the Toyotomi clan after the battle of Sekigahara in 1600. He moved the administrative capital from Kyoto to Edo (present day Tokyo), and his shogunate remained in power until the Meiji restoration. Tea cultivation and production continued to flourish together with the demand for sencha, with huge plantations appearing in Kyushu and Shizuoka. Drinking tea became acceptable for everyone to enjoy, and no longer a luxury of the rich and powerful. The market subsequently shifted from premium artisan tea to large scale production.

In 1738 after years of trial and error, Uji tea grower Nagatani Soen perfected a ground-breaking new method of steaming and hand rolling tea leaves in the Yuyadani area of Ujitawara Town. The resulting tea retained its natural green color and intense flavor, a far cry from the sun-dried brown tea that had been the norm up until then. His technique sparked a revolution in sencha production in Japan and became commonly known as the Uji method, a process that remains largely unchanged to this day.

The booming demand for sencha meant tea plantations began to spread to the hillsides of neighbouring mountainous areas, forming the scenic landscapes typical of Ujitawara Town and Wazuka.

In 1835 Uji growers were able to apply the method to their own premium shade-grown leaves, bringing to market the most prized of all premium green teas - *gyokuro*. The Ino-oka area of Kyotanabe near the Kizugawa river became a hub of *gyokuro* production and Uji became synonymous with premium tea production once again, both domestically and abroad.

Tea leaves from production areas all over the region were transported to the Kamikoma tea wholesale district in Kizugawa city, strategically located along the important Kizugawa river system. From here, tea could be transported via the waterways to Osaka and Kobe beyond.



Scrolls depicting Nagatani Soen's hand rolling production method



Nogatani Soen's thatched roof house in Ujitawara - now a small museum  
▶P10 MAP

### Uji-cha aiming for World Heritage status

The Yamashiro area of Kyoto has been producing Uji-cha tea for 800 years, resulting in a scenic landscape dotted with tea fields and steeped in history. In 2015, the history and culture of Uji tea and its picturesque tea fields collectively received Japan Heritage status as "A Walk through the 800-year History of Japanese Tea" and now, in a bid for international recognition,

Kyoto prefecture is currently applying for UNESCO World Cultural Heritage status for its unique "Uji-cha Tea Cultural Landscape".



Ishitera Tea Fields ▶P10 MAP



### The Meiji restoration (late 19th century)

From 1868, ending more than two centuries of self imposed isolation under Tokugawa, Japan underwent a rapid industrial revolution. The imperial household's power was restored and the shogunate disbanded.

Japanese tea began to reach foreign shores from the

ports of Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama, and to meet demand, the area of tea production expanded once again, from the hillsides to the tops of the mountains in areas such as Dosenbo in Minamiyamashiro village, shaping the landscape that still exists to this day. The neat horizontal rows of tea bushes that typify the landscape of the Ishitera, Erihara, and Kamatsuka areas of Wazuka-cho are especially beautiful.

## Let's Talk About Tea

All types of tea, believe it or not, come from varieties of the same humble camelia plant. It is the processing method that changes. If the tea is oxidized it is black tea, semi-oxidized - oolong tea, or if unoxidized - green tea. When it comes to Japanese green tea, there are three distinct sub forms, dependent on the cultivation and processing method.

### Sencha

These are tea leaves sourced from the young shoots of plants cultivated in uncovered, open-air fields and that are steamed and dried while being kneaded. The most common form of green tea enjoyed in Japan.



### Tencha and Matcha

Grown in covered tea fields, the very newest leaf shoots are harvested, steamed and allowed to dry without kneading. This highly prized *tencha* is then stone-ground into a fine powder to create the *matcha* green tea renowned throughout the world.



### Gyokuro

Much like sencha, but using the fresh shoots of plants from covered tea fields, to create the highest quality tea leaves available. Gyokuro is so good, you can even eat the leaves after preparing the tea, but it comes at a high price. Expect to pay up to 10,000yen for 100 grams.



### Taisho and Showa periods (20th–21st century)

The skills required for the tea ceremony were viewed as an important cultural heritage, and one that should be preserved. It was thus integrated into the curriculum at Women's universities, ensuring its survival and sparking a renewed demand for matcha.

Tea production became quickly mechanised and in 1924 a new method to kiln-dry prized *tencha* tea leaves was developed in Uji by Horii Chojiro, improving both the quality and cost performance, and laying the template for today's automated machinery, remaining largely unchanged, except for the addition of sensors and computers as the technology became available.

During the late Showa Era (1926–1989) green tea flavored products gradually began to appear, such as green tea ice-cream, and even chewing gum, paving the way for the plethora of green tea products available today.

### Present day

As the birthplace of Japanese green tea, Uji has a long and cherished association with the humble tea plant. In 2015, this cultural legacy was recognised as "A Walk through the 800-year History of Japanese Tea" by the Japan Heritage committee, and and now, in a bid for international recognition, Kyoto prefecture is currently applying for UNESCO World Cultural Heritage status for its unique "Uji-cha Tea Cultural Landscape".

Although no longer one of the largest producers, the Yamashiro region still continues to cultivate highly-prized, premium green tea, 800 years after the first seeds were planted. Supported by the patronage of emperors and shoguns throughout the centuries, and with the constant innovation of its growers and traders in producing the first matcha, sencha, and gyokuro tea in Japan, Uji green tea has become an inseparable part of Japanese culture.

The Ocha-no-Kyoto brand was established in the historic Yamashiro growing region, to honor this rich heritage and ensure it continues to earn the recognition it deserves, both domestically and internationally for generations to come.

## Tea Timeline - 800 years of history at a glance -

### 794–1185

#### Heian Era

- 805: The Buddhist monk Saicho brings the first tea seeds to Japan from Tang Dynasty China
- 815: The Buddhist monk Eichu prepares tea for Emperor Saga and he subsequently orders the development of five tea plantations around Kyoto
- Tea consumed during this period was mainly powdered, created from compressed tea bricks (*dancha*)
- Tea consumption was limited to the imperial family, nobility, and buddhist monks, and only cultivated on a small scale

### 1185–1333

#### Kamakura Era

- 1211: The prominent monk Eisai publishes his text *Kissa Yojoki* – lit. Drink Tea and Prolong Life, creating a blueprint for cultivating and processing tea
- The first large-scale tea plantations are established in Uji and Togano-o (at Kozan-ji temple) with seeds given to the monk Myoe by Eisai
- Drinking tea becomes synonymous with Zen Buddhism

### 1334–1392

#### Nanbokucho Era

- Tea competitions (*tocha*) become popular among the warrior classes,
- Uji emerges as the forefront of Japanese tea production after being endorsed by the Shogunate

### 1393–1573

#### Muromachi Era

- *Chanoyu* - the tea ceremony - becomes a focal part of political and diplomatic relations
- The *Shichimeien* tea plantations are established in Uji at the bequest of the Shogunate
- Shaded growing techniques are first developed in Uji

### 1573–1603

#### Azuchi-Momoyama Era

- The modern tea ceremony is born. Sen-no-rikyu (tea master to both Nobunaga and Hideyoshi) advocates a very austere version of the ceremony, elevating it to new cultural heights and importance
- The demand for *tencha* and matcha skyrockets

### 1603–1867

#### Edo Era

- Loose-leaf team replaces powdered tea as the standard
- The tea-selling monk Baisao (1675–1763) popularises preparing leaves in a teapot
- 1738: Nagatani Soen perfects the 'Uji Method' to steam, roll, and dry tea leaves whilst retaining their color and stringency
- Premium gyokuro tea (from harvested young green leaves) is first invented
- *Tencha* plantations - shade-grown tea - spring up along the fertile banks of the Kizugawa river
- 1859: The ports of Yokohama and Nagasaki begin exporting Japanese tea to the rest of the world

### 1868–1912

#### Meiji Era

- The first terraced tea fields are established in the hills around Wazuka-cho in Kyoto as tea cultivation rapidly expands
- The Yamashiro area becomes a hub for tea growing and processing
- In 1869 a rail network is installed connecting the tea growing regions of Kyoto, Uji, and Nara
- Handmade tea is gradually replaced by machinery and automation

### 1912–1926

#### Taisho Era

- 1924: A groundbreaking method to kiln dry prized *tencha* tea leaves is developed in Uji by Horii Chojiro
- Women's universities and colleges add the tea ceremony to the curriculum

### 1926–1989

#### Showa Era

- Uji green tea ice cream, chewing gum, and other green tea infused products are introduced, expanding the possibilities of green tea beyond its traditional uses
- Green tea is distributed to soldiers as part of their basic rations
- From the 1960s onwards, growing and processing techniques are further tweaked to take advantage of technological advances, including sensors and computer controls

# Types of Green Tea

Green tea is much more than just matcha. How to distinguish between the various types of tea available

## Tencha and Matcha

The very newest leaf shoots from covered tea fields are harvested, steamed and allowed to dry without kneading. The resulting bright green tencha tea leaves are then stone-ground into a fine powder to create the fragrant *matcha* green tea renowned throughout the world.



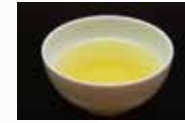
## Gyokuro

The fresh shoots of plants grown under cover for at least 20 days. The leaves are steamed, dried and rolled into extremely fine needles to create the highest quality tea available. Bursting with rich flavor, but with less astringency than sencha. The king of tea.



## Sencha

The young shoots of plants cultivated in uncovered, open-air fields are steamed and dried while being kneaded. An astringent, fresh tasting tea, with a pleasant leafy aroma, making up 80% of all green tea enjoyed in Japan.



## Kabusecha

Grown under cover for at least 14 days, new buds are steamed and kneaded during the drying process. A good balance between the astringency of sencha and the richness of gyokuro.



## Hojicha

Kawayanagi or sencha tea that is further pan-roasted to bring out a delicate smoky aroma. Makes a distinctive brown colored brew, low in caffeine. Often served chilled.



## Kyobancha

Another bancha derivative, but this one is roasted directly after being steamed resulting in a coarse, rustic finish, with a powerful smoky aroma. A Kyoto staple.



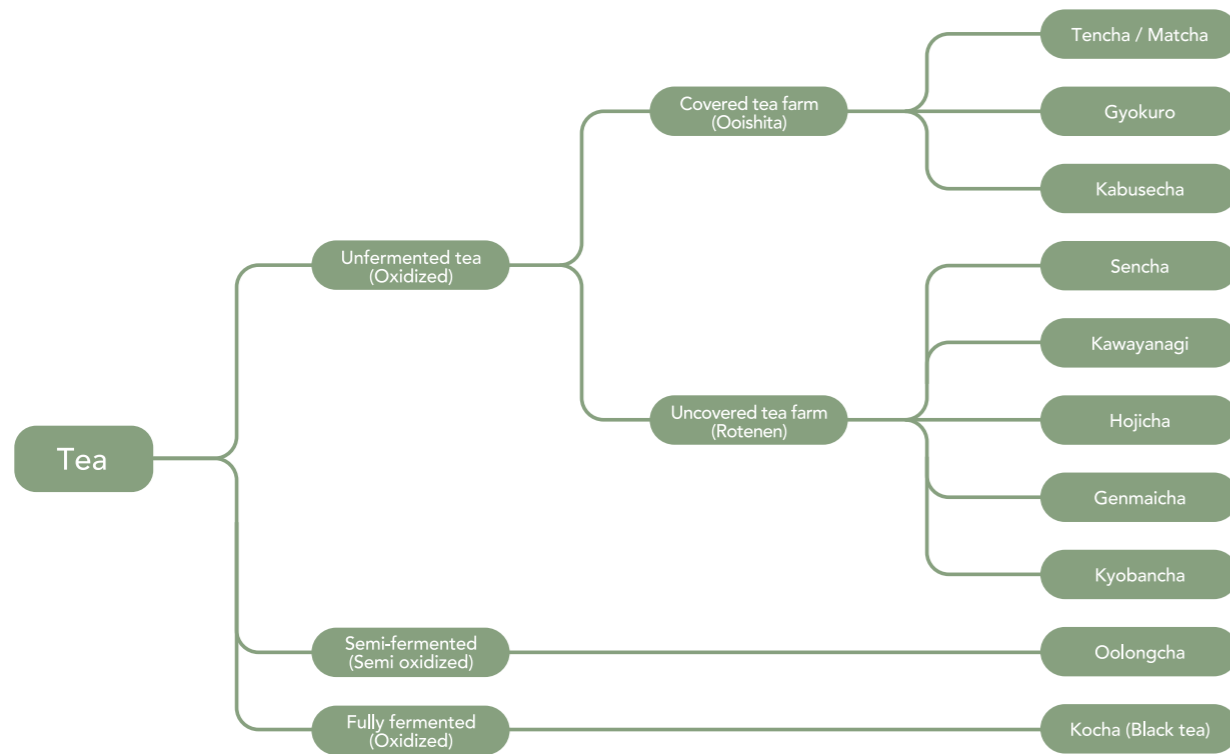
## Genmaicha

Kawayanagi or sencha tea, mixed with roasted brown rice (*genmai*). A few of the rice grains pop during the roasting, creating tiny flower-like white highlights amongst the green leaves and brown grains. A fresh, yet deliciously nutty brew, suitable for everyday drinking.

## Kawayanagi

Is a type of *bancha* (sencha leaves from the late summer or autumn harvest), made from thick, green leaves. A very subtle, light flavor that pairs well with food.

# Tea family tree diagram



# Benefits of Drinking Green Tea

Drinking green tea every day is believed to provide numerous health benefits. It is loaded with antioxidants and nutrients that have powerful effects on the body, and is often claimed to improve brain function, aid relaxation, have anti-ageing effects, promote fat loss, prevent tooth decay, aid digestion, lower the risk of cancer, and many other impressive benefits.

Nutritional information per 100g (g)

Type	Tannin	Caffeine	Protein & Aminoacid	Fat	Carbohydrate	Water	Minerals
Matcha	10.0	3.2	30.6	5.3	38.5	5.0	7.4
Gyokuro	10.0	3.5	29.1	4.1	43.9	3.1	6.3
Sencha	13.0	2.3	24.5	4.7	47.7	2.8	5.0

## Historic growing regions in Yamashiro

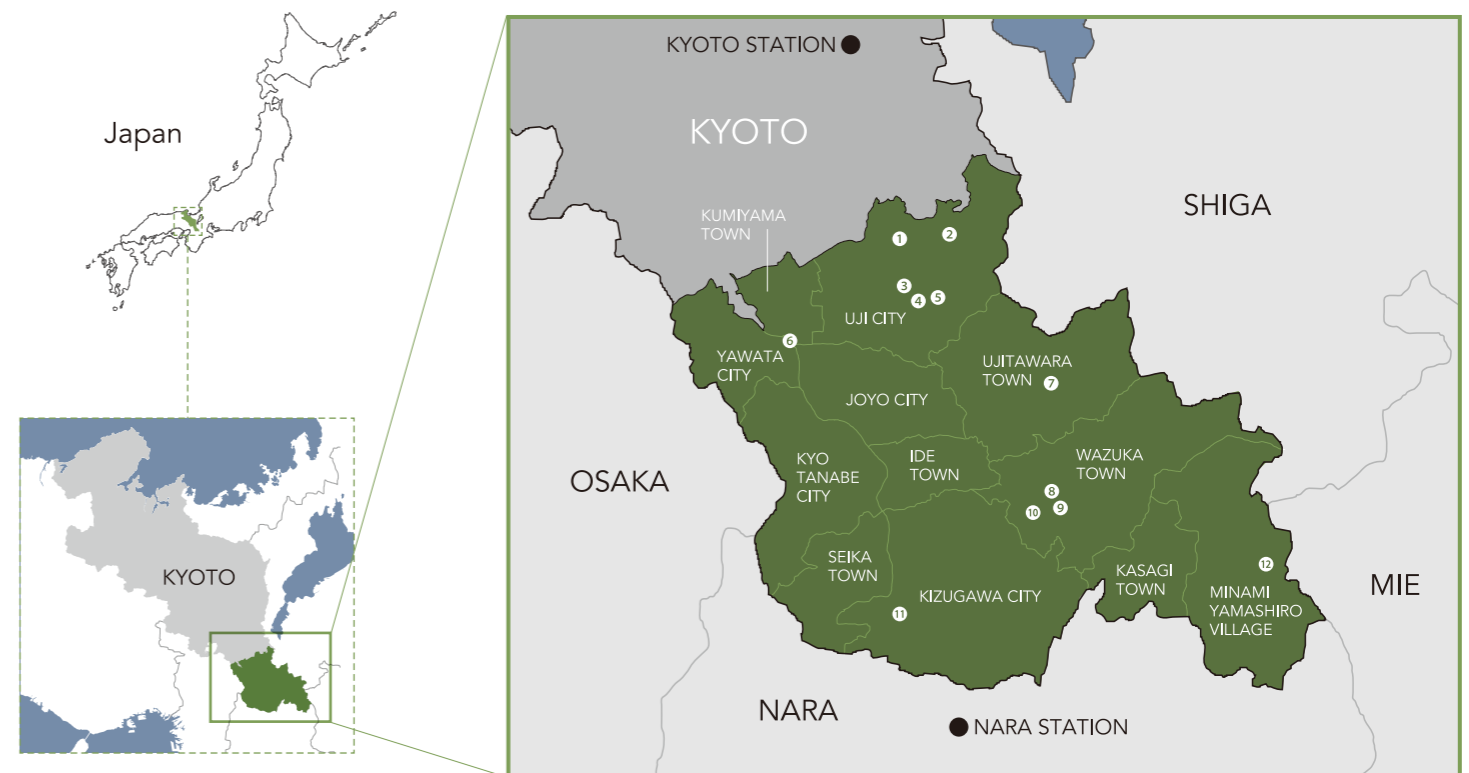
While we talk of Uji tea, it is in fact cultivated all over the Yamashiro area, with each sub region often devoted to producing one type of tea. Joyo city is famed for its covered *hamacha* tea plantations that border the fertile banks of the Kizugawa river, and remains the largest producer of tencha tea in

Japan. Kyoytanabe on the other hand, a region with numerous historic buddhist temples, is renowned for its premium gyokuro tea.



# Discover Green Tea

Delve deeper into the history of the Yamashiro tea growing region by exploring these historical sites and places of interest



- 1 Manpuku-ji Temple
- 5 Asahiya Shop & Gallery
- 9 Kamatsuka Tea Fields
- 2 Sumiyama Pottery Village
- 6 Nagare Bridge and Both banks Hamacha Tea Fields
- 10 Ishitera Tea Fields
- 3 Nakauji
- 7 Nagatani Soen House
- 11 Kamikoma Tea Wholesale Street
- 4 Byodo-in Temple
- 8 Wazuka-cha Cafe
- 12 Michi no Eki Ocha no Kyoto Minamiyamashiro Village



### Naka Uji

An historic area and Japan Heritage site surrounding the Ujibashi Shopping Street, whose streets are still lined with traditional Edo era machiya-style buildings. The area has long been a hub for tea houses and wholesalers, but more recently has seen some of the old buildings tastefully renovated and reopened as trendy cafes and workshops.

▶P10 MAP 3



### Kamikoma Tea Wholesale Street

In its heyday there were as many as 200 wholesalers in this traditional neighborhood close to the Fukujuen Tea Factory. It flourished as a hub for the local farmers to bring their tea to market and continues to operate to this day. The faded signs, wooden architecture and thatched-roofs of the 40 remaining structures provide a fascinating and photogenic window to the past.

▶P10 MAP 11



### Wazuka-cha Cafe

Roughly 45% of all Uji tea is produced in the Wazukacho area today. This purpose built cafe, shop, and tourist information hub is the perfect place to rest after a morning visiting the surrounding tea fields. Sample some green tea desserts, browse locally produced premium tea, and even rent a bicycle!

▶P10 MAP 6

### Michi no Eki Ocha no Kyoto Minamiyamashiro Village

A modern roadside facility in the heart of green tea country offering Yamashiro green tea, locally grown vegetables, souvenirs, and light meals. Green tea ice cream and their unique specialty Yamashiro black tea are particularly popular.

▶P10 MAP 12



©平等院

### Byodoin Temple

At the top of any Uji itinerary, this stunning UNESCO World Heritage site was never actually designed to be a temple, but instead was built as a lavish retreat for a powerful politician. It was his son that turned it into a temple and ordered the construction of the iconic Phoenix Hall - which graces the front of the 10 yen coin today. Enjoy the splendor of this important Heian Dynasty Buddhist temple.

▶P10 MAP 9



### Manpuku-ji Temple

The main temple opened by the High Priest Ingen on Mt. Obaku after being invited to Japan. It is characterized by uniquely Chinese architecture, and, with a reservation, you can try a unique zazen experience inside.

▶P10 MAP 10



### Asahiyaki Shop & Gallery

Asahiyaki Pottery was one of the seven kilns endorsed by tea ceremony master Kobori Enshu, and has been producing teaware since 1600. Visit its shop to choose your favorite

earthenware, or take part in one of its pottery workshops.

▶P10 MAP 5



### Sumiyama Pottery Village

Discover the world of traditional Kyoyaki pottery (also known as Kiyomizu-yaki) at this historic working pottery village, one of only a handful that remain today. Developed alongside Kyoto's tea culture, Kyoyaki ceramics are fired in traditional open flame 'climbing kilns', set into the surrounding hills.

▶P10 MAP 2



Nagare Bridge and Both banks, Hamacha Tea Fields

▶P10 MAP 6



### Green Tea Sweets Galore

Delicious green tea sweets, desserts, and snacks can be found throughout Japan, but Uji is home to some of the finest. Everything from green tea ice cream, sundaes, shaved ice, and even beer can be enjoyed year round.

### Scenic Tea Fields

Enjoy the scenic beauty of the manicured tea fields in the Yamashiro area and be the envy of your instagram followers. Rental electric bicycles make the exploration all the more enjoyable.



Kamatsuka Tea Fields ▶P10 MAP 9

# Preparing Green Tea

How to prepare the perfect brew

Scan the QR codes below to access videos of how to brew green tea



Matcha



Gyokuro



Sencha

## Matcha



Spoon about 2g of matcha powder directly into a large tea cup or bowl



Add about 70cc of hot water (cooled to 70–80°C)



Whisk gently with a bamboo chasen using a backwards and forwards motion (do not stir) to form a froth



An intense green color with a pleasant bitterness and a milky smoothness

## Gyokuro



Cool about 50–70cc of hot water to 40–50°C and warm the cups



Spoon about 5g of gyokuro leaves into a small ceramic teapot and pour over the warm water



Cover with the lid and allow to brew for 2–3 mins before pouring into small, shot glass size cups



A rich tea bursting with flavor yet with a bitter aftertaste

## Sencha



Spoon about 5g of tea leaves directly into a teapot



Add about 120cc of hot water (cooled to 70°C)



Allow to stand for 30 seconds before serving into medium sized cups



A well balanced tea with a delicate floral aroma and smooth finish

## Hojicha and Genmaicha



Spoon about 5g of tea leaves directly into a teapot



Add about 120cc of boiling water direct from the kettle



Allow to stand for 30 seconds before serving into medium sized cups



Aromatic daily drinking teas with a delicate smokiness

## Kyobancha



Place a handful of tea leaves (10g or more) directly into a teapot



Fill the pot with boiling water



Allow to brew for at least 2–3 mins before serving into medium sized cups



A tea that packs a punch with its powerful smoky aroma but has a pleasant richness

## Mizudashi-cold water brewing



Place about 10g of leaves directly into a flask



Fill with pure fresh water and refrigerate



Strain and pour into glasses



For a refreshing summer drink, try cold brewing sencha, gyokuro, or hojicha and leaving it in the refrigerator overnight





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