

newsworthy trends

Americans Rediscovering The Taste Of Tea

(NAPS)—What's brewing? Americans are trading in their coffee pots for tea kettles. With more than 50 billion servings consumed in 1999, tea is America's latest venture into the arena of gourmet beverages.

It's not just iced tea anymore. Chic teahouses and bars serving exotic blends are popping up everywhere while coffee giants like Starbucks are scrambling to acquire teahouses and incorporate tea into their menus.

The popularity of flavored teas in the U.S. has boomed over the last decade, with tea consumption increasing ten percent each year. However, Americans are late in joining the rage, as other cultures have long heralded tea not only for its flavor, but also as a healthy, healing and refreshing drink.

For example, Benihana, the international restaurant chain that introduced Japanese dining and culture to many Americans, has been serving traditional Japanese green tea since the company opened its first restaurant in 1964.

"We are definitely seeing an increased interest in the teas we serve," said vice president of marketing for Benihana, Kevin Aoki. "Americans, known for their coffee consumption, seem to be looking for healthier alternatives, such as green and black teas that have been popular in Japan for centuries."

Building on this interest, Benihana is conducting a nationwide tour to share the captivating Japanese tea ceremony experience, which transforms the everyday practice of drinking tea into an artistic display of manners and etiquette.

The Japanese tea ceremony is



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based on the concept that every single encounter is unique and will never be repeated the same way during one's lifetime. To make the ceremony special, the host prepares tea with a deep sense of sincerity and puts much thought into the appearance of the teahouse.

Peace, respect, purity and tranquility are the four guiding principles in the ceremony. Both guests and hosts purify themselves by washing their hands before entering the teahouse. No words are spoken. The host uses ceremonial cups and bowls specifically for the occasion. Every gesture is a highly specialized formality, from boiling the water to pouring the tea.

The enjoyment of the tea is secondary to the level of artistry, manners and etiquette the host displays.

The art of the tea ceremony is a rich, visual experience. For a glimpse into an ancient world of art, form and beauty, visit Japan-Corner, an area of Benihana's Web site, www.benihana.com, dedicated to Japanese cultural information.