



‘The Venice of the Orient’, as Hangzhou is sometimes called, has plenty of water resources and favorable weather for growing tea trees.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Tea culture lives at Hangzhou expo

## Upcoming event to showcase city’s legacy as hub for traditional Chinese beverage

By ZHUANG TI  
zhuanti@chinadaily.com.cn

Tea sellers are preparing to release their pre-Qin-gming tea varieties, the best tea collected in early April, in anticipation of the upcoming 2012 China West Lake International Tea Culture Expo, which is set to once again bring out the best of tea culture in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said local officials.

Tea and its related customs have been involved in shaping and developing the city’s key features for 1,500 years. Among its celebrated types of tea, Longjing, the Dragon Well Tea, is the most renowned and pricey.

Once the tea is soaked in fresh-boiled water, a sweet woody aroma rises out. Its leaves bloom like flower buds and bounce slightly up and down, which makes the brewing process itself a sight to behold.

Longjing tea is an inseparable part of the city’s cultural legacy, say local leaders. One of the most famous pieces of folklore related to Longjing tea is a tale about when Emperor Qianlong, who reigned from 1711 to 1799, visited Hangzhou.

According to folk legend, the emperor randomly arrived at a tea garden underneath the Lion-shaped Mountain in the Hangzhou suburbs. Amused by the girls who were busy gathering tea leaves there, he begun to pick some himself. Just after scooping up a handful of leaves, a messenger arrived with news that his mother had fallen ill.

Without thought, Qianlong stuffed the tea into his pocket and rushed back to Beijing to see his mother. The mother could smell the leaves in her son’s pockets, which refreshed her. As the legend goes, she brewed the dried leaves and got better after drinking them.

The emperor was pleased, so he named the tea trees he saw there the “Royal Trees” and had the tea farmers send him fresh tea every year thereafter.

It was at that time that Longjing tea became a household name.

### Long-standing tradition

Hangzhou has been producing tea since the Sui Dynasty (581-618). “The Venice of the Orient”, as it is sometimes called, has plenty of water resources and favorable weather for growing tea trees.

Drinking tea is a common practice in daily life. And



中国最佳旅游城市  
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### SPECIAL REPORT ON HANGZHOU THE BEST TOURISM CITY IN CHINA



HONG LIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

A man dries tea. The West Lake Longjing ‘Tea-stirring King’ contest will be held at this year’s tea culture expo.

the city hosts eight official organizations dedicated to researching everything related to tea, from its cultivation and culture to technology and economy.

Tea sommeliers have been listed in Chinese Categorization of Job Professions because of rising interest in restoring traditional teahouses.

However, tea culture was not secular at the beginning. It originated from Buddhist practices in ancient times.

Historians believe the earliest forms of tea cultivation occurred at Buddhist temples in the mountains that surround the West Lake, the city’s core sightseeing area.

Some even suspect that Longjing was produced by monks centuries ago who knew and explored ways to brew the tea from fresh leaves.

It is also believed that the Japanese tea-making traditions, including Chado, the tea ceremony, were based on and inspired by customs in the Hangzhou temples.

History has it that Japanese monks came to a temple at the city’s Jingshan Mountain to learn about Buddhism between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, when Hangzhou was the capital.

They brought back not only Buddhist learning but also tea culture and a whole tea service set, from which they developed their own.

When shipping began on the Grand Canal connecting Beijing to Hangzhou, tea culture became popular outside of temples and was introduced into ordinary households in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). The canal helped boost the tea trade and made Hangzhou wealthy.

Soon after, tea became a national beverage, and teahouses began sprouting throughout the city. In the Song Dynasty (AD 420-479), the city was already full of teahouses. Teahouses at the time had varying levels of service tailored to different types of consumers, according to historian.

Since then, tea has been closely tied to seasonal events and familial events in Hangzhou. The people there have dining traditions that go with the tea gathering and tea stirring. In marriage ceremonies, betrothal gifts and the dowry are named after tea. Tea is even a part of the Spring Festival sacrifice, whereas liquor is used in other cities.

### Tracing tea culture

It is not difficult to see the evidence of tea culture when traveling through the city. A lot of must-see places in and around the city have been either production areas for fine tea and high-quality mountain spring water or places where legendary figures have stayed for tea.

Hangzhou has always been a famous haunt for intellectuals and poets. According to local tales, the best of ancient poets, Bai Juyi in Tang Dynasty and Su Shi in Song Dynasty, stayed in the city’s temples, where they talked with established monks about Buddhism and drinking tea.

The places they stayed became famous, both for the scenery and for the writings left there.

Near an old dragon well, there are still inscriptions said to be left by Su Shi. The poet stayed in Hangzhou for years. There he created many of his most beautiful verses, invented a dish of stewed cubic marbled pork that was named after him and made friends with a Buddhist master.

Tea is also central to Hangzhou cuisine, as exemplified by the dish Stir Fried Shrimp with Longjing Tea.



GU YIMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Lunch at a tea-growing village near Hangzhou.

# City still capital of China’s national drink

By ZHUANG TI  
zhuanti@chinadaily.com.cn

The 2012 China Hangzhou West Lake International Tea Culture Expo will take place from March 30 to June 10 in Hangzhou, home to Longjing tea, also known by the English name dragon well tea.

More than 20 events will be held during the expo, with the aim of integrating Hangzhou’s tea-themed tourism resources and promoting Longjing tea culture as a world cultural heritage.

Under the theme of a joyous and healthy tea tour, this year’s expo will convey Hangzhou’s easy lifestyle and its profound tea culture to visitors from home and abroad.

The expo this year is also part of an effort to develop Hangzhou into a famous tea city with prosperous tea industries and tourism, and to shore up Hangzhou’s position as China’s “Tea Capital” during the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2011-2015).

The upcoming expo will emphasize local characteristics by holding many tea cultural activities.

The expo is expected to become an umbrella event for a number of special activities in Hangzhou, including a teahouse managers conference, a tea-stirring contest, a tea cultural experience festival, tea feast and tea fair. There is also a tour package combining a universal tea experience tour, a high-end special tour and a rural leisure tour.

The annual tea expo is sponsored by the Hangzhou city government, the China International Tea Culture Research Association, the China Tea Society and the Hangzhou Tea Culture Research Association.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### TEA EXPO SCHEDULE

**Opening ceremony**  
Time: March 30  
Place: Parking lot of Shuangfeng village, Hangzhou

**Qinghefang fork tea meeting**  
Time: April  
Place: Wushan Scenic Spot, Qinghefang Ancient Street and Nansong Yujie Walking Areas

**2012 Universal Tea-drinking Day**  
Time: April 20 to 22  
Place: the Bai Causeway (Bai Di) of the West Lake

**2012 Zhejiang - Shizuoka Green Tea Expo & 2012 China (Hangzhou) International Famous Tea Expo**  
Time: June 8 to 10  
Place: Zhejiang World Trade Center & Exhibition Center

**2012 West Lake Longjing ‘Tea-stirring King’ contest**  
Time: March 31  
Place: Longwu Trade Center of the Hangzhou West Lake Tea Market

**2012 China Teahouse Managers Conference**  
Time: April 7 to 8  
Place: Liuying Hotel, Hangzhou

**2012 The 15th West Lake International Tea Fair**  
Time: March 30 to April 20  
Place: China Tea Museum

**2012 Qiandao Lake Tea Cultural Experience Festival**  
Time: March to April  
Place: Lishang Town and Jiukeng Town, Chun’an County

**2012 Lin’an Folk Tea Customs and Cultural Tourism Festival**  
Time: April 16 to May 18  
Place: Lin’an People’s Square and Lin’an Shenlong Scenic Spot

**Closing Ceremony & the 11th Tea Master Festival**  
Time: April 21 to May 21  
Place: Jingshan Town, Yuhang District, Hangzhou



Tea is regarded as China’s national beverage. Teahouses continue to sprout up in the city of Hangzhou.



Locals pick Longjing tea in Hangzhou. The local government is promoting the city as China’s ‘Tea Capital’.



CHEN HAILIN / FOR CHINA DAILY