



01 Preparing for a tea ceremony © De Federico Magonio/Shutterstock

Tokyo in a tea cup

In Tokyo, Lucy Dayman discovers the art of traditional Japanese tea ceremonies, and how they have been used to promote mindfulness and calm for centuries.

“Tea is more than an idealisation of the form of drinking; it is a religion of the art of life,” wrote scholar Kakuzo Okakura in his now-legendary 1906 essay *The Book of Tea*. To this day, his philosophy still rings true. There is no other tradition as synonymous with Japan as the tea ceremony, known in Japanese as *chanoyu*. It embodies the nation’s history and spirit, and puts into physical form the culture of appreciation for purpose, mindfulness and awareness of the fleeting nature of our existence. In short, it’s an act of complete presence.

Japan’s capital, Tokyo, is home to modern energy, yet a legacy of pride in cultural history endures. Thanks to the melange of new and traditional, experiencing a tea ceremony here is rather unique.

Tokyo-based tea master Machiko Soshin Hoshina is the personification of the city’s unique approach to the ceremony. Hoshina’s family lineage can be traced to the Tokugawa General Daimyo (Lord of Samurai) family line of the Edo era, a history that spans more than 800 years. However, Hoshina herself is a woman of great international influence, having resided abroad for a significant portion of her life.

“The international setting influenced me to understand Japanese culture from many sides,” she says. “When you try to explain or want to share anything that relates to you originally, sometimes it is rather difficult to do so, because these things are too ‘normal’ for you. I wanted a different point of view, so I intentionally moved out of my community and studied as an exchange student.”

Today, Hoshina runs tailor-made tea ceremonies within different venues through her company Charen Tranquiletea, offering guests of all backgrounds and interests an accessible and intimate way to appreciate this timeless tradition. It’s a practice she believes has great importance in the modern-day – not just as a connection to history, but a way to deal with contemporary stressors.

“The tea ceremony was perfected in the 16th century when Japan was at war,” she explains. “Samurai warriors practised tea

to feel mindfulness and gain energy to live in a pressured life. They cherished *ichi-go ichi-e* (once-in-a-lifetime encounters), just like a moment in a tea room. I believe this idea can definitely be shared by people in modern days as well.”

Hoshina’s more recent offering, the collaborative mindfulness yoga and tea ceremony experience, is the perfect example of how traditions can be brought into a modern setting. “Traditional culture is often showcased as ‘heritage’ or something from a history museum, but this is not right for a tea ceremony,” she says.

“The idea to combine yoga came after I experienced my friend’s yoga session. She does yoga in the most mindful way. I felt so relaxed, just the same as how I feel in my tea room with a matcha bowl. Then we went deeper and found a connection between the two cultures. Finally, we decided to create our original yoga and tea experience where you can open your five senses, connect your body and soul, feel oneness with your surroundings and gain the confidence to live in this hectic modern life.” ♦

Travel file

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