

Celebrating 150 Years Of Ceylon Tea In 2017

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Producing 350 million kilograms annually and employing over two percent of the population of Sri Lanka, Ceylon Tea is one of the top five export earners for the country. An industry that is inherently linked to the very fabric of society and has made an impact on the social, cultural and economic spheres, tea is Sri Lanka's most important agricultural commodity. With its beginnings in 1867, the tea industry is set to celebrate its 150th year anniversary in 2017. Anselm Perera, Chairman of the Colombo Tea Trader's Association speaks about the plans made to celebrate this momentous occasion where the entire industry will come together to ensure that Ceylon Tea is appreciated within Sri Lanka and globally. The events

planned will also highlight the importance of preserving this sector for posterity.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe

Tea Industry consists of three main stakeholders. They are, the Growers, the Brokers and the tea buyers who are the Exporters. The Growers are sub-divided into different segments such as the Regional Plantation Companies, the Private Tea Estate and Factory Owners, and the Small Holders who are involved in growing tea in large to small plots. The 150th celebration will bring all these groups under one roof. It will reflect the complexity of an industry that has sustained the Sri Lankan economy for so long. "With the 150 year celebrations we expect the world to see the enormity of the tea trade and appreciate the simple tea bag much more. Generally the consumer does not know the process that goes behind the production of tea. There is an entire chain of action that takes place as well as hard work and dedication," explained Anselm Perera. 150 years ago the pioneers of Ceylon Tea, cultivated the land, built the infrastructure and laid the foundation for an industry to be nurtured and grown. "We need to acknowledge the planters, the tea growers and the women who climb great heights to pick the 1.5 billion kilograms of green leaves that produce our 350 million kilograms of made tea".

The Colombo Tea Trader's Association together with the Tea Board and Ceylon Chamber of Commerce will be taking the lead role in formulating the activities that will begin in January 2017 and reach the grand finale in August 2017 with the international tea convention.

Educational fairs will be held in different regions for the children of plantations so that they are educated on the importance of the tea industry. This will begin in January. "We are also planning on having such fairs in the North, East and areas where tea is not grown. The tea industry is mainly concentrated in the mid country and deep south. The rest of the country does not really know about the industry although we drink a large volume of tea. Therefore, we will have educational programmes in those areas with competitions." Tea festivals, sports events and cricket matches are part of the plans to bring people from various sectors together.

A special charity auction of tea memorabilia has been organised as well. Every broker will present five items of auction and tea related sterling silver items such as a model of the oldest tea roller, a model tea tasting set, a tea pot, a tea tasting scale and a gravel. "In addition, we may introduce a single specially selected fine tea from each of the seven regions in a special sterling silver casket." All funds collected from the auction will be directed towards charities associated with the tea estate workers focusing on the improvement on their quality of life and provision of health benefits.

Another major event planned is the global tea party. "Starting from the land of the Rising Sun Japan and moving to South America, every country will have a tea party at four in the afternoon at the Sri Lankan embassy, consulate or designated location where everyone will be invited. This will be the world's largest tea party and we are aiming to enter the Guinness World Records," explained Anslem Perera.

A biscuit with the 150-year logo sponsored by Maliban in either Earl Grey or Ginger Tea flavour will be introduced especially for the global tea party. "Other short-eats, scones and cakes will be served with these biscuits where the function will be a high tea. The tea party will start at four in the afternoon at the respective locations. No one has ever attempted such a feat before."

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In order to commemorate and felicitate James Taylor as the father of Ceylon Tea, a monument will be built at the entrance of the Tea Board office. "Even though there is a private monument built in 2013 to commemorate James Taylor, this will be the first ever monument that the State has built in recognition of James Taylor and an event will be held to signify this moment." Furthermore, a stamp and first day cover as well as a currency note will be issued in celebration of the 150 years of Ceylon Tea. A 'Tea Table Book', encompassing the 150 year journey of Ceylon Tea till the present day, will be launched during the celebrations as well.

The Grand Finale of the 150th Anniversary will be the Tea Convention. “The convention will be attended by more than 300 delegates. Eminent global speakers will discuss topics ranging from tea to motivation, packaging and mechanisation. Sri Lankan entrepreneurs will talk about their success stories, research and development and other issues relating to the industry. There will be diverse points of view that will result in fruitful discussions. We want participants to leave with an open view about tea, how it is produced, packaged and consumed. All of us will invite our clients. They will go back with a wider, deeper and more appreciative knowledge of the Ceylon Tea Industry,” he explained.

“There are many events planned to commemorate the 150th year of Ceylon Tea because we feel that one event alone will not reflect the importance of this industry that has sustained the economy of this country for many years and will continue to do so in the future”, elaborated Anslem Perera.

