

SINGLE DOCUMENT

CEYLON TEA

PDO ☐ PGI ☒

1. Name of PDO/PGI

‘Ceylon tea’

2. Member State or Third Country

Sri Lanka

3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff

3.1 Classification of the agricultural product in accordance with the Combined Nomenclature heading and code, as referred to in Article 6(1) of Regulation (EU) 2024/1143

Combined Nomenclature Code: 09 02.

3.2 Description of the product to which the name (1) applies

‘Ceylon tea’ is derived from the fresh leaves, buds, and tender stems of the *Camelia sinensis L.* ‘Ceylon tea’ is obtained from quality green fresh tea leaves grown in the delimited geographical area, on the island of Sri Lanka. Picking occurs all year long, through different regions and seasons: there is no dormant period. Plucking standards adapt to that seasonal variability, but only healthy tea shoots must be plucked. ‘Ceylon tea’ is placed on the market in the form of:

- Orthodox leafy black tea, Orthodox-Rotorvane black tea, CTC (Cut, tear, curl) tea;

Visually, orthodox black ‘Ceylon tea’ is characterised by a clean and neat appearance, depending on the desired grades. The dry leaves exhibit a desirable black hue. Some grades may display fine tips. Whole-leaf grades often feature a curly, well-twisted structure. Broken leaves grades feature an even and well-made or fair-make structure, following the terminology used by tea tasters. CTC grades display even and grainy textures.

When brewed it has a strong body it has notes of dry wood, sandalwood and cedar. It has malted, jaggery and biscuity notes. It has honey, wax and leathery notes with stewed fruit, prune and tamarind notes. It is brisk and velvety, carried by bitterness and astringency, is not salty or metallic and is very lightly umami and acid.

The colour of the liquor varies from amber to ochre, mahogany and copper with brightness and transparency.

- Green tea;

Visually, green ‘Ceylon tea’ is characterised by a neat appearance, in relation to the desired grades. The dry leaves exhibit a desirable green hue, ranging from shiny green pellets to darker green colour leaves. Size varies from leafy to finer particles.

When brewed it has notes of dry wood with vegetal grass and seaweed. It has equal intensity for woody, with dry wood notes, is fruity with citrus notes and has bakery with toasted notes.

The colour of the liquor is light yellow with green or gold reflections with brightness and transparency.

- White tea (including silver tips and golden tips);

White ‘Ceylon tea’ including silver and golden tips are made out of the delicate new leaf buds on the tea plant whose visual shiny hairy appearance ranges from a silver colour for silver tips to white for golden tips. White tea made from the bud and immature tea leaves displays a white to ashy hue and is therefore known as White.

When brewed it has vegetal marine notes with notes of cooked vegetables and hay, fruity with cooked fruit, yellow fruit and citrus notes and equal intensity for floral with geranium notes.

The colour of the liquor varies from light yellow to light amber with brightness and transparency.

- The chemical profile of ‘Ceylon Tea’ is composed as follows:

Chemical Parameter	Black Tea	Green Tea	White Tea
Total polyphenol content (ISO 14502-1) (%)	14.59 ± 3.44	22.80 ± 2.86	22.63 ± 3.60
Caffeine (ISO 14502-2) (%)	3.07 ± 0.50	2.92 ± 0.51	3.64 ± 1.48
Water extract (ISO 9768) (%)	36.86 ± 3.14	41.02 ± 3.04	38.98 ± 3.95
Total Catechins (ISO 14502-2) (%)	4.42 ± 2.28	15.34 ± 1.28	11.52 ± 5.34

The data represent the mean value for chemical parameter ± standard deviation

Blending of ‘Ceylon Tea’ is permissible so long as the tea is sourced from regions within the delimited geographical area. ‘Ceylon tea’ may also be flavoured provided that the flavouring process complements and doesn’t mask the sensory characteristics of ‘Ceylon tea’ in terms of appearance, flavour, taste and mouthfeel.

3.3 Specific steps in production that must take place in the identified geographical area

All operations of cultivation, plucking, processing, grading, blending and flavouring must take place in the geographical area specified in Section 4.

3.4 Specific rules concerning slicing, grading, packaging, etc. of the product the registered name refers to

Grading of teas

The tea is sorted into different grades at the factory according to size, shape, and density, is then cleaned and prepared for marketing and transport. These grades are then invoiced and must be packed in paper or paper board sacks. The moisture content of the end product at the factory gate should not exceed 6.5% (w/w, wet basis).

Blending of teas

‘Ceylon tea’ can be a blend of teas originating in the delimited geographical area. The blending must be carried out in Sri Lanka.

Flavouring

‘Ceylon tea’ can be flavoured with the maximum amount of flavouring components not exceeding 25% of the total weight of the final product. Flavouring shall only be carried out in Sri Lanka.

Flavouring may be achieved through the use of fragrance oils, which may be natural, nature-identical or artificial aroma compounds, and/or through the inclusion of plant-derived or apicultural products. ‘Ceylon tea’ may also be flavoured through a scenting process.

Any additional flavouring notes must be complementary and may enhance the aromatic complexity, but must not obscure or replace the underlying character of ‘Ceylon tea’. The flavour and taste of ‘Ceylon tea’ must be determined by a trained tea taster qualified to certify the tea by the Sri Lanka Tea Board. In all cases, the process must ensure that the finished product remains recognisable as ‘Ceylon tea’ in terms of appearance, flavour, taste and mouthfeel.

Final packing

The tea sold under the name ‘Ceylon tea’ can only be packed in Sri Lanka.

3.5 Specific rules concerning labelling of the product the registered name refers to

Only the packs containing 100% ‘Ceylon tea’, as defined in the present Single Document are eligible to use the words ‘Ceylon tea’.

The words ‘Ceylon tea’ must appear prominently in each final consumer package.

4. Concise definition of the geographical area

Sri Lanka is an island nation located in the Indian Ocean, between a northern latitude of 5° 55' and 9° 51' and a longitude between 79° 41' to 81° 53'. The island is characterized by a teardrop shape and covers an area of 64,630 square kilometres.

The areas for tea cultivation, processing, are the following 13 districts of Sri Lanka: Badulla, Colombo, Galle, Hambantota, Kalutara, Kandy, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Matale, Matara, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya, and Ratnapura.

Blending, flavouring and packing are allowed on the whole island of Sri Lanka.

5. Link with the geographical area

The application to register ‘Ceylon tea’ is based on the reputation of the tea. This reputation is in turn based on the natural and human factors in the production of tea present in the geographical area on the island of Sri Lanka.

Reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’

Between 1815 and 1948, under British rule, Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon, a name maintained for nearly a quarter-century after independence. The name ‘Ceylon tea’ has been used in trade since 1880. The reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’, thanks to the constant efforts of the Sri Lanka Tea Board, is internationally recognised. The 150th anniversary of the ‘Ceylon tea’ industry was celebrated in 2017. This milestone showed the historical reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’, upholding Sri Lanka’s key role as a global tea supplier.

‘Ceylon tea’ is renowned for a combination of sensory and cultural traits that distinguish it from other teas. In December 2024, the independent tea website *Sally Tea Cups* described the “*global acclaim*” associated with ‘Ceylon tea’ noting its “*distinct aromas and flavor profiles*” that “*set it apart from other teas like those from China and India*”. In January 2025, *Heal with Tea* referred to its “*renown*” for a “*fresh and robust taste*”, calling it a “*unique choice among teas*” that has “*earned global recognition*” for its “*distinct flavour and unmistakable aroma*”. In May 2025, Ricardo R. Matos writing for *The Tea World* explained “*why Sri Lanka’s Teas are among the world’s finest*”, attributing their reputation to “*generations of careful cultivation and artisanal processing*” and their ability to “*deliver both brightness and body in cup*”.

‘Ceylon tea’ is also deeply embedded in cultural traditions. In Sri Lanka, offering a freshly brewed cup to visitors is a customary gesture of hospitality. Internationally, it is integrated into diverse tea cultures: in the United Kingdom, it is a traditional choice for afternoon tea; in Russia, its full flavour and bright colour make it ideal for samovar service; in Chile, it is “*one of the essentials on any Chilean table [...] among the favourites when it comes to choosing which to drink*” (translated from Spanish, *Chef & Hotel Coffee of Tea*, October 2023), particularly associated with *la once*, the daily tea-and-bread meal. Its international recognition is further evidenced by Sri Lanka’s longstanding participation at UNESCO’s International Tea Day, according to *Lankan News Web*: “*Sri Lanka proudly showcased its iconic Ceylon Tea [...] marking the fourth consecutive year of participation in the prestigious global event*” (June 2025).

Beyond its sensory appeal, ‘Ceylon tea’ is also valued for its health-related qualities, which add to its reputation. The Sri Lankan Export Development Board notes that ‘Ceylon tea’ “*also comes*

with numerous health benefits supported by ingredients such as antioxidants, polyphenols, sodium, proteins and carbohydrates”. Independent health sources corroborate this: *Healthline* reports in June 2023 that “certain types of Ceylon tea have been linked to impressive health benefits — ranging from increased fat burning to better blood sugar control and decreased cholesterol level”.

This sustained reputation has been recognised in international competitions over the past 5 years, with ‘Ceylon tea’ having been awarded the following prizes:

Name of the competition	Year	Award title
Global Tea Championship	2019	(Spring Hot) Ceylon Open – Lumbini Tea Valley (Pvt) Ltd – Sinharaja Wiry Tips – Gold Medal
Global Tea Championship	2017	Ceylon Open – Lumbini Tea Estate (pvt) Ltd – Sinharaja Wiry Tips – Gold Medal
Global Tea Championship	2017	Ceylon low grown – Lumbini Tea Estate (Pvt) td – Lumbini Tea Valley Tippy Eve – Gold Medal
AVPA	2022	Thés monovariétaux - Diplôme Gourmet – Ceylon Black Pearl – Kaley Tea
Great Taste Awards	2024	The Island of Tea - Special Pure Ceylon Black Tea - 100g Loose Leaf Tea
Great Taste Awards	2024	The Island of Tea Gold - Pure Ceylon Black Tea - 100g Loose Leaf Tea

In addition, tea-based tourism is a key asset for the island’s tourism industry, further contributing to its distinct reputation as a travel destination. Images of tea fields and tea-related landscapes are frequently featured on the covers of travel guides. Notably, the 10th French edition (2021) of the *Lonely Planet* highlighted the Odyssey Blue Train traversing lush tea plantations. ‘Ceylon tea’ is also the most purchased souvenir among tourists, with 53.1% of visitors taking it home, ranking it above handicrafts and accessories, according to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority.

Furthermore, the *Pekoe Trail*, a 300-kilometer-long walking route that winds through the highlands and tea estates pays homage to one of the grades of ‘Ceylon tea’. This initiative has garnered international recognition, winning the *Best Wider World Tourism Project 2023* award from the British Guild of Travel Writers and earning a spot in *National Geographic’s* “Top 20 Travel Experiences” for 2024 and *Time’s* “World’s Greatest Places 2025”.

Natural factors

The quality of ‘Ceylon tea’ is closely linked to the geographical area. The climate, soil, and topography of the delimited geographical area give ‘Ceylon tea’ both its physical and organoleptic characteristics.

The agro-climatic specificities of ‘Ceylon tea’ are related to the important climatic diversity in tea-growing areas. Rainfalls follow distinct seasonal patterns, primarily driven by the South-West monsoon from May to September, and the North-East monsoon from December to February. Inter-monsoonal rains occur in March, April, October, and November, covering the entire island. Rainfall amount and distribution profoundly impact tea productivity, with the wet zone experiencing minimal rainless days annually. Furthermore, the delimited geographical area’s agro-climatic conditions prove optimal exposure to solar radiation, resulting in a mean annual sunshine duration ranging from 4.9 to 6.4 hours per day.

The cultivation of ‘Ceylon tea’ ranges in altitudes from sea level to high altitudes (above 1200 meters). In the tea sector, it is common to refer to ‘Ceylon tea’ growing areas by their altitude, namely: the “*low country*” (ranging from sea level to 600m), “*mid country*” (600m to 1200m) and “*up country*” (above 1200m).

The complex topography, combined with changing weather patterns over the year, generate favourable conditions for tea cultivation, resulting in year-round production.

Human factors

The reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’ has been built through the continuous efforts of people developing specific know-how, focused on ensuring quality production at every stage of the manufacturing process.

Plucking - Most of ‘Ceylon tea’ is harvested or plucked manually. The tea pluckers master different types of techniques to identify the good leaves to be plucked, foster the productivity of the tea bush, and support the maintenance of the tea bushes.

Tea manufacture - The quality of ‘Ceylon tea’ is the result of an extensive network of tea factories, which gradually developed a tea manufacturing process to optimize natural, agronomic, logistic, and economic conditions. The machinery within these factories represents a patrimonial heritage, embodying 150 years of expertise. ‘Ceylon tea’ manufacture principles have been consolidated by the Tea Research Institute of Ceylon (TRI), notably through a series of Monographs on Tea production in Ceylon.

Tea Blending and Flavouring – The specificity of ‘Ceylon tea’ is evident in the wide range of tastes and flavours derived from the diversity of the agroecological regions. As a result, the ‘Ceylon tea’ sector has developed recognised know-how for tea identification and blending, to obtain the desired appearance, qualities, and aromatic notes in the final beverage. Tea tasters play an important role in factories, brokers, and exporters’ houses. Furthermore, blend sheets are a mandatory document, which must be submitted to the Sri Lanka Tea Board prior to export. A blend sheet lists the various teas from Sri Lanka that are mixed together, along with flavours and their respective quantity.

Reference to the publication of the product specification of the geographical indication:

<https://srilankateaboard.lk/downloads/>