

Britain's favourite beverage.

There was a time in the late 20th century when some people believed that coffee would replace tea as Britain's favourite beverage.

In the event, that has not happened, and today, tea remains firmly anchored as Britain's favourite drink, accounting for over two fifths of all the drink consumed in Britain with the exception of water.

To say that the British are fond of tea is something of an understatement. From the Royal Family down to the humblest of the homeless and the out-of-work, tea is more than just a pleasure; it is an essential part of life! It is one of those things that distinguishes life in Britain from life anywhere else. The average Briton over the age of 10 drinks two and a half cups of tea per day, over 900 cups per year – mostly tea with milk in it — which makes Britain one of the leaders in the international league of tea-drinking nations! Only the Irish and the Turks drink more tea than the British; in Europe, the nearest rival to Britain is Russia, where people only consume about 700 cups of tea per year.

In 2020, during the Covid lockdowns, tea consumption in Britain went up by 50%, as more people stayed at home all day.

The popularity of tea in the United Kingdom has a long history, reflecting the nation's development since the seventeenth century. It was in 1657 that Thomas Garway, the owner of a coffee house, sold the first tea in London. The drink soon became popular as an alternative to coffee, and by the year 1700, there were over 500 coffee houses in the British capital selling the new drink.

For a century and a half, tea remained an expensive drink; many employers served a cup of it to their workers in the middle of the morning, thus inventing a lasting British institution, the "tea break"; but as a social drink outside the workplace, tea was reserved for the nobility and for the growing middle classes. Among those who had the means, it became very popular as a drink to be enjoyed in cafés and "tea gardens".