



The KeepCup reusable cups are lightweight, easy to carry and fit into most bicycles and cars

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available

By Jane Pettigrew

## Tea to Go

*Around the world today, more care is being taken to offer take-away tea that is really worth drinking. Jane Pettigrew has been learning about some of the products and approaches that are helping to improve 'out-of-home' tea.*

**M**ore often than not, out-of-home consumers are put off choosing tea to take-away because they expect their favorite beverage to be badly brewed and badly served. Poor quality tea, too much water at the wrong temperature, cheap paper or plastic cups (or, as in Singapore, brewed tea in a plastic bag with a straw), nowhere to dump the tea or teabag once it has brewed – all these too-familiar, unattractive aspects of tea-to-go make tea lovers choose water, coffee, hot chocolate, juice – just about anything, as long as it's not a bad cup of tea! But, just as barista training has led to better quality coffee being handed, ready-to-go, across the counter, so new approaches to tea brewing are beginning to make better-quality tea more readily available in teabars and coffee bars around the world.

### Raising customers' awareness

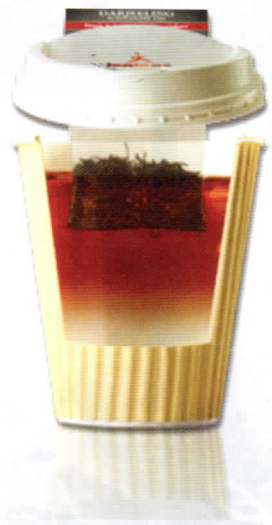
"It's all about education isn't it?" says Hannah Dupree, owner of Storm in a Teacup tea bar in Melbourne, Australia. "Our tea-to-go service is much the same as our sit down service. We do all our brewing at the counter and only send out perfectly brewed and strained tea in cups or glasses to our customers. I believe it is the tea makers job to brew the tea and to send out a perfect product. If you send out leaf in a pot of hot water and leave the brew time up to the customer they will almost definitely over or under brew it. Customers come into an establishment to catch up with friends and to be served, you would never ask a customer to pour their own latte or poach their own eggs, so why do we expect them to brew their own tea? This does upset some tea

lovers as they actually know what they're doing and enjoy being able to adjust their brew, but I can have a conversation with them about this and they almost always appreciate my stance on this. Tea-to-go fits seamlessly into our work flow and we simply decant into a bio-degradable take-away cup instead of our hand-made cups or stemless wine glasses that we serve the tea in."

Peter Eichler, international and east sales director of US company Rishi Tea, agrees that giving appropriate information is essential.

"At Rishi, we try to educate our customers as much as we can on how important such factors as brewing times, etc. can be to a good cup of tea," he clarified. "Politely suggesting they set an alarm with their smart phone is one way to go about it and help them remember when it's time to pull the bag out."

And Emilie Holmes, whose Good & Proper Tea van drives around London and the south of England to offer freshly-brewed, top-quality tea at events, street markets, food fairs, and fashion shows in the UK says, "What I hope to do, first and foremost, is change the way people think about and drink tea on the go. Tea out and about is more often than not prepared with little care using low grade tea, which is a stark contrast to what London's increasingly geeky coffee shops prepare on a daily basis for their caffeine-hooked following. Nothing makes me happier than a customer simply asking for 'a cup of tea please', happily accepting their carefully brewed Assam, and return-



Hälsesen & Lyon's teatogo brewing system



Finum's Traveler Zita with cup-shaped lid

**Polystyrene and cheap plastic cups are to be avoided at all costs!**



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ing to me to exclaim at how unexpectedly yummy the tea was. Or even better, coming back for more as now they've tasted the 'good stuff' their regular brew just doesn't cut it. The education part with regards to types will be a slower burner, but providing somewhere to get a decent cup of tea out, that tastes as good as it can and should, is something I hope to be able to immediately provide."

### Loose leaf for take-away

First up in any food service outlet is the decision between loose tea or teabags and, if using loose leaf tea, what to do with the leaf and how to ensure that it is infused for the correct number of minutes? Eichler explains that, "Rishi suggests using the large, natural fiber, unbleached filter bags since they allow the teas to open up and infuse better than the smaller more confining filters.

Teas Etc provides mug, infuser and lid for brewing and drinking tea on-the-go

TeaShed teas retail inside a reusable take away cup

But take-out tea is always tricky if you have leaves left steeping in the cup when you hand it off to the customer. If that's going to be the case, it's key that the customer is told to remove the filter bag or tea bag from the infusion after a specified number of minutes."

Emilie Holmes loves the infusers that sit inside her glass teapots on the flip-down counter of her customized 1974 Citroen-H van.

"Our customers love the theatre of the pot, brewing baskets and timers and, while the tea is brewing, I can chat to them, explain what I'm doing and tell them more about the teas," Holmes enthused.

The Good & Proper Tea van is fitted with a Marco boiler/water delivery system that allows Emilie to brew each pot of tea to perfection at exactly the right temperature, and the water for brewing is filtered on board throughout the day.

"Many places use the biodegradable pouches, *finum*, t sac, etc.," offered Kas Ali of Waterloo Tea in the UK. "In my opinion they don't impart too much flavor into the infusion, can be pre-filled ahead of busy periods, and allow a quick grab-and-go tea service.

The downside is obviously the mess when the pouch is lifted out, and also the possibility of under/over steeping if the bag is not taken out at the optimum time. Stainless steel infusers, for example the hook and handle infuser from ForLife Design is also good – it's reusable and imparts zero flavor to the brew. The customer needs to wait while the tea brews but this can be good as it allows discussion and communication between staff and customer, but it is a disadvantage for customers in a hurry. The Piao I brewers also works really well as they allow a quick infusion time, multiple infusions of the same tea with little mess, and are very easy to use behind the counter."

### Latest infuser trends

As well as the sacs and infusers mentioned above, a three-dimensional infuser called *Brewlux* is now available from TeaSpot.

## More and more companies are coming up with ideas and designs for reusable cups

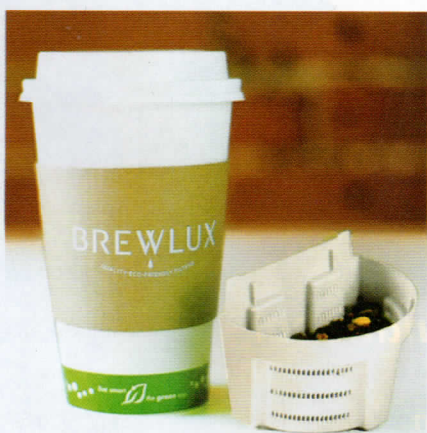


Emilie Holmes's Good & Proper Tea is brewed tea using a Marco water delivery system, infuser pots, timers, quality paper cups and FoamAroma lids



Teaspot's Steep & Go fits into the neck of disposable water bottles to allow a cold steep tea on the move

**About 500 billion disposable cups are manufactured around the world every year**



The Brewlux infuser basket from Teaspot sits inside take away cups

Made from reusable, dishwasher safe, recyclable bioplastic, it is designed for cafes, tea bars, and foodservice settings, and the open basket rests inside to-go cups and allows the leaf tea plenty of room to expand and brew properly. The fact that it rests inside the upper part of the cup means that there are no messy bits of paper, no dripping filter to dispose of and, as the customer drinks the tea, the level of the water drops and so prevents over-steeping.

"Response to the product has been excellent so far and the basket is being used in coffee shops around North America," said Maria Uspenski, who with her brother Alex invented *Brewlux*. "Because specialty tea is so rapidly growing in North America, we see tremendous potential here for the product, both in mom and pop coffee shops to significantly larger coffee chains, foodservice use in hospitality, restaurants of all kinds, any place that wants its customers to have the very best in every cup."

In the UK, a new Tea To Go Stick has recently been launched and offers a very elegant and eye-catching Japanese-style alternative to plain tea bags and infuser baskets. Created by London-based designer Jeeyun Michaelle Chung, the environmentally-conscious stick is inspired by the traditional Japanese tea whisk, or 'chasen', and is made from water-resistant paper.

Inside each stick is a transparent pyramid teabag and the idea is that tea drinkers can brew, stir and remove their tea easily from the cup while enjoying, in Chung's words, "a feel of traditional procedure of making tea and preserving the essence and value of the history."

A possible solution to wet bags and dripping leaves comes from German tea wholesaler Hälssen & Lyon GmbH is *teatogo*. This is a double-chamber lid with a tea bag attached and once the tea has brewed the teabag is pulled up into the lid to stop it from over-brewing. The company's aim was to find an answer to "challenges such as convenience, taste experience and the consumers' problem of not knowing how to sling the tea bag away; the wet tea bag is easily kept within the patented double chamber lid. Our research showed that most convenience outlets provided low quality tea and we realized that there was a need for a convenient, high-quality tea to go concept." *Teatogo* is now being used mainly in petrol station, convenience stores and coffee shops in Europe.

### Cups and lids

Disposable take away cups come in many styles, sizes, and shapes these days and include plastic, single wall paper, double wall paper, ripple paper, paper with barrier insulation, etc. Polystyrene and cheap plastic are to be avoided at all costs! And most tea lovers now agree that good quality paper cups are the best for take away tea and, as lid manufacturer Craig Bailey of lid-manufacturer FoamAroma says, most people prefer "a double-wall insulated cup with the outside wall having a ripple texture to it. It feels like a nice hand massage when it is warm."

Newcastle-based tea and tea ware company TeaShed offers a range of teas ready packed inside a paper cup with a sleeve that carries the catchy name of each of the 14 blends – Out of Milk Tea, Pick me up at 3 Tea, 4am Tea, Skinny Tea, Northern Brew, Baby It's Cold Outside Tea, All Day Breakfast Tea, etc. The recyclable cups, designed to be reused several times, each contain 20 gauze pyramid teabags and are available in more than 150 retail outlets in the UK and in nine other countries in Europe and Asia.

"The TeaShed was developed due to a gap in the market for quality tea that is convenient to use and affordable," TeaShed owner Jules Quinn explained. "We also brought a design element to the tea packaging, which helps us stand out from the crowd. The response has been excellent both in the UK and abroad and we're developing a strong brand which looks to have a great future."

The lids that are used on most take away hot beverages have just one hole – the sip hole. But innovative *FoamAroma* lids, initially developed by Craig Bailey for the enjoyment of take-away coffee, have two – one for sipping and one in the middle of the lid that allows the drinker to enjoy the aroma of the tea or coffee.

We all know that our sense of smell plays a vital role in the full evaluation and enjoyment of foods and beverages and yet, the traditional take-away lid shuts off all access to the smell of whatever is in the cup.

“The aroma hole lets the wonderful coffee or tea aroma get to the drinker’s nose. And it has enough cross-section area for the air to easily vent into the cup and allows the consumer to slurp air with the coffee or tea, thus atomizing the liquid into small droplets,” Craig Bailey explained. “Just as in wine tasting, the act of slurping is encouraged to aspirate the liquid into droplets thus coating the inside of the mouth with flavor. When Tim d’Offay of Postcard Teas in London was introduced to the lid, his reaction was very positive.

“Tea being more delicate than an average coffee-based drink is affected much more when put into a take away environment, i.e. paper cup with lid, and the senses are not allowed to explore the nuances of the tea’s aroma, thus reducing the pleasure one can derive from a tea,” he said. “The existing sip lids have always restricted the enjoyment of a specialty tea as a take-out drink.”

“The clever hole in the lid allows the scent of the tea to escape, right below one’s nose, which further enhances the drinking experience. And the lid’s construction is of good quality and fit,” added Jenna Eckert, owner of Mint Tea in Vancouver, Canada.

### Re-usable cups and traveler’s tea

With the increase in the number of take-away (and therefore throw-away) cups used each day around the planet, more and more companies are coming up with ideas and designs for re-usable cups that will help ease the amount of landfill waste that tea and coffee consumers generate.

KeepCup, designed and marketed by Australian brother and sister team, Abigail and Jamie Forsyth, is made from a plastic that uses low embodied energy in the manufacturing process, can be reused again and again, and breaks even with disposable cups after 15 uses. One medium-sized KeepCup is made from the same amount of plastic as 32 disposable cups and lids.

“International Paper estimates that annually in the United States, over 58 billion disposable cups are discarded to landfill; that’s 158 disposable cups for every US inhabitant,” the Forsyths explain. “Annually, 500 billion disposable cups are manufactured around the world; that’s about 75 disposable cups for every single person on the planet, and, placed end to end, those cups could circumnavigate the earth 100 times. We wanted to create more than just an item that was sustainable in theory and a nice idea. We had a good idea of the aesthetics. We wanted to echo a paper cup, but also be visually distinctive. The KeepCup’s reason for being is sustainability, but it’s the form and colors that people love and it’s probably why you buy it.”

The cups are dishwasher and microwave safe, come in four sizes, fit into most bicycle and car cup holders, and with their array of colors allow for 160,000 possible color combinations of cup, lid and plug.

For those who like to set out from home with a bottle of brewed tea which can be sipped, topped up, and sipped again during the day, a wide range of inventive products is now available. As well as all the standard infuser bottles with screw-caps and carrying straps, Mighty Leaf make a *Travel Mug* with a *Tea Top lid*, which has a body of double-walled stainless steel and a lid with a little slit so that “once the brew time indicated on the *Tea Pouch* tag is reached, just pull up on the string. This squeezes the oils of the *Tea Pouch* into the infused beverage below and pulls the *Tea Pouch* up to rest in a domed area.” The lid can also be used with most take-away cups and is being widely used in movie theaters, cafés, college catering concepts, restaurants and other foodservice formats. The Metro Tea *Roadie* works like a French coffee press inside which a mesh plunger pushes the loose leaf tea down into the bottom of the glass flask where it stops brewing. Teaspot’s *Steep & Go* filter fits into disposable water bottles for cold steep tea on the move, Teas Etc offers a *Tea Traveler* consisting of portable mug, infuser and lid that screw together for brewing on-the-go, and Finum’s *Traveler Zita* has an interesting cup-shaped lid that makes drinking tea from a bottle more elegant and better for the enjoyment of the aroma as well as the flavor.

Whatever the situation and whatever the equipment used, the essential elements to brewing good tea-to-go are the correct quantity of quality tea, the correct quantity of, preferably, filtered water at the correct temperature, generous space for leaves to infuse properly, a way of easily separating brewed leaf from liquor, a cup or mug of suitable material, and a lid that allows aroma to play its essential part. ☕



FoamAroma lids allow aroma to play its part in the enjoyment of take-away beverages



Japanese-style infuser based on the traditional bamboo ‘chasen’