

# Zen IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Antonio Moreno

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*In the spirit of community, we thought we'd let you travel along with us to Spain and France in the next few articles, learning more about what we do on the road, teaching Cha Dao, promoting tea family and expanding this Global Tea Hut!*

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Over the past two years, Wu De and I had been planning a trip to Barcelona so he could meet the Global Tea Hut community here, hold a series of tea events at Čaj Chai teahouse, help us further Barcelona tea culture, raise some money for Tea Sage Hut and Light Meets Life and, of course, spend some good fun-loving time together with me and my family! This October the time was right and we finally made it happen... And we even included a beautiful three-day road trip to visit Sabine in Nice and spread some Tea and Zen there!

### *Three Weeks of Zen & Tea*

All in all, it was an incredible three weeks and I'd like to share some of this wonderful experience with you, since you were all very much part of this trip. Wherever Wu De goes, Global Tea Hut goes with him. Figuratively and physically speaking. The figurative aspect goes without saying, as it's a foundational pillar in sharing and spreading Tea and Zen around the world, not to mention all of the proceeds from all the events we did went straight back to the center and future center. The physical aspect was a beautiful surprise as Global Tea Hut members from around the world booked their flights when they read the news and, beyond participating in the events, they bonded and reminded us we are a community of tea lovers who esteem each other very highly and our lives are all richer thanks to each and every one

of you! It was a special joy to meet a lot of tea brothers and sisters for the first time, some of whom I had already connected with in emails or on social networks, and all of whom I had heard of by way of mouth. And it was great to reconnect with those I did know and share some very special and memorable days together. For in this Hut we share friendship as much as we do Tea!

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Over three weeks we held numerous workshops, some short and some longer, but the highlight and centerpiece was a full weekend retreat of Zen and Tea!

Along the way, lots of people were connected to the Dao of Tea. For Čaj Chai customers it was a great opportunity to meet the master in person. It was beautiful to see how their perception of Tea was changed and given new direction. I enjoyed watching how their faces changed by the end of the workshops—softer and lighter, having understood they had found a new ally in Tea that would accompany them throughout their lives. It's not that the tea was new, but in meeting a tea monk they opened a door and invited Tea into

their lives in a more personal and spiritual way!

Those who participated in the events learned a lot about tea: Cha Dao, its potential, and about ourselves as a human species and as individuals... And they certainly left learning about things they never would have expected to, like how our lives will change if we simply begin the day drinking three bowls of tea in silence!

The workshops with Wu De were fun, humorous, insightful and loving gatherings with organic, Living Tea of the highest quality and aged teas we all felt privileged to enjoy together, especially when prepared with such fine-honed gongfu skills and the wisdom of a life spent in service of the Leaf. For the Global Tea Hut community and those who already knew Wu De through his books and magazines, it was an eagerly awaited occasion to share a cup of tea with him and imbibe the moment, savoring it like a precious tea.

For me, Wu De's first visit to Spain was a dream come true after a long time of preparation and planning, to finally spend time with my dear friend, tea brother and master, spread our tea tradition and culture and also to raise awareness about the fascinating projects we are nurturing: the Tea Sage Hut tea temple, the international community of tea lovers and walkers down the path of Cha Dao in Global Tea Hut and to raise money by way of donations for the future creation of the free tea center, Light Meets Life, whether through



his artwork, the three incredible teas they pressed this year or the workshops themselves. I give my most sincere heartfelt thanks to everybody who assisted the workshops, some of you from very far away, for your participation guaranteed the success of this trip and that more gatherings of this type will follow in the future.

For all of you wondering what kind of events we held, I'm going to give you a little summary:

## Meditative Tea

We set up the workshops so that we'd begin with events where we'd look at tea from a spiritual perspective... As a Zen Tea monk, these are Wu De's favorite types of events, where he explained what it meant to live a life of tea and how the Five Elements of Traditional Chinese Medicine work together when we prepare tea. These workshops were packed with stories, proverbs, splendid metaphors and a lot of deep bowl tea so we could really understand the special alchemy that exists in tea brewing and its unique relationship as the 'Emperor of All Herbs' and how it affects our body, mind and soul.

## Nice, France

After that first weekend, Wu De and I took a road trip to France to spend a few days performing tea events and tea ceremonies in Niza that fellow Global Tea Hut sister Sabine organized to perfection with the help of her dear friend Anne-Marie and a one-man camera crew, Raphael Zamochnikoff!

We had been on the road since morning, talking, listening to music, sharing stories and laughing and before we knew it we were arriving at the city of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Marseille. Something very beautiful happened there that I'd like to share:

We had just arrived, parked the car and immediately went out in search of a vegetarian restaurant. It was almost 6pm, and we still hadn't had lunch. We searched on, turning here and there, scoping streets, but little by little we realized we would be hard-pressed to find a good place to eat that was open... and then we found a health food shop with no food service but where they informed us that there wasn't a single vegetarian restaurant in all of Marseille. Hard to believe! So we kept searching, rejecting the few possibilities we found along the way for their quality was dubious, or at least I thought so.

After a while Wu Du stopped us and said:

*"We're doing this wrong. We're looking for a good place to eat at the wrong time, in a city we are totally unfamiliar with and we can't even speak their language. How can we think we can use our mind to find a good place to eat? We have to **feel** it! Now, **feel** it and tell me where we should turn."*

I laughed heartily, understanding his logic perfectly and how absurd it really was for us to be seeking a restaurant using our brain power when we knew absolutely nothing



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about the space we were moving through... but I also felt unsure of my ability to navigate using my intuition and I began pointing the way without much conviction.

“Ok, let’s go that way...” I began tentatively.

At every intersection he asked me again where we should turn. I’d wait a moment to feel it and point in a

“that way” direction. We were walking Lord knows where, following my intuition but I really had no idea where I was leading us or that we would find anything any time soon.

I exaggerate not when I say it only took me four “that ways” to turn a corner and know instantly that we had reached our destination! *Le Palmier Restaurant Tunisien...*

“Look! I bet they make a nice vegetarian cous-cous!”

We got a little closer and took in a glass display full of homemade Arab sweets. We entered with conviction—even though there weren’t any customers. It was easy to ascertain it was a family venture, where off-hours were spent repairing a chair or restocking a tray of pastries fresh out of the oven. We asked if they would serve us and, of course, a Tunisian family would never turn someone from their home—this restaurant was their home as well, at least that’s how they made you feel. Mint tea was on our table in no time. In the same way a Tunisian would never turn down a hungry traveler, a man of Tea will never turn away a cup of tea no matter how much sugar they put in it... It was delicious and there couldn’t possibly be anything better! We found our place and Wu De was particularly pleased because it was the kind of place he’d never find in Taiwan. (It would probably be difficult to find a more genuine establishment even in Tunisia!) I won’t go on telling you all the delicious dishes we enjoyed or how many times we helped ourselves to seconds, but it was a glorious meal and a very valuable lesson...

I’m not following my intuition as much as I should. I’m not granting it enough space to listen to it. I have the habit of using my head even in situations where it doesn’t even make sense. I spend the day thinking and controlling, organizing and doing what I must do, so that my day is full of routine and obligations. Not only is there little room left in it to welcome the unexpected, but I’m not taking advantage of the moments where I can allow myself to follow my intuition and be surprised. I had forgotten what it felt like to give into intuition and spontaneity... It’s such a beautiful, flowing, all-encompassing sensation!







### *Singing farewell songs at the retreat*

The next morning we packed up and drove onwards to Nice and were blessed with three days of meeting beautiful people, an incredible blue sea unlike any I've ever seen, the best Italian gelato I ever had and wonderful tea sessions with warm, open people, many of which were relatively new to tea and deeply moved by the stillness and depth of quiet tea, and the new perspective they gained. Our tea sessions were all recorded by Raphael, a beautiful, gentle and passionate film-maker who surely will put together some amazing footage to remember those days forever. Thank you Sabine for inviting us and organizing such a beautiful series of events!

### *Tea & Zen Retreat*

Back in Barcelona we returned to a warm greeting by the group of

international Global Tea Hut members who came to participate in the weekend retreat of Tea and Zen. The place we choose for the retreat, the In Out Hostel in Collserola Park, is a non-profit social project that fits perfectly with the non-profit spirit of Global Tea Hut.

This retreat was undoubtedly the main dish in our schedule of events: a special occasion to meet Global Tea Hut members from around the world (finally, I counted and we were 14 people from 10 different countries!) for the first time, an incredible weekend of meditation and a steady flow of bowl tea and discourse revolving around the famous proverb, "The taste of Tea and Zen are the same".

The weekend was full of emotional, deep, fun and memorable moments; with new friendships forming and more mature ones gathering greater strength. As I think

of all of you present, I can't wait to share tea with you again!

There was also a fantastic last-minute surprise that rocked my world and served as another lesson to me, along a very similar vein as what I learned when we found the restaurant in Marseille:

It occurred just as we were settling into the hostel. We were emptying the car and preparing the main hall when two young ladies who had been sitting in reception asked us who we were and what we were doing. I explained we were about to begin a weekend retreat with Tea and Zen and they could join if they liked. One of them was very interested from the get go, the other was quite unsure. Curiously, the first had studied Traditional Chinese Medicine and the second studied the properties of natural herbs in her home country. I was blown away by the coincidence! We were about

to begin a retreat rooted in the Five Elements and the curative power of *Camellia sinensis*! I explained a little more about Global Tea Hut, Wu De's new book *Tea Medicine* and what they could and couldn't expect from the workshop, assuring them there was no obligation; they could leave at any time. Then, rather suddenly, the second lady decided she was game! I was so psyched for them... for being in the right spot at the right time and for not failing to see it!

These two brave ladies had just arrived at the hostel after spending a few days in Barcelona center. They came to Collserola Park to rest a bit, but without a plan or idea what they would do there. And suddenly they were about to learn that they actually had unknowingly come to participate in a retreat that was just starting—one that later I'd find out would truly change their lives! Maybe we'll even hear from them in a future issue of Global Tea Hut. (I hear that quite amazingly these two are right now staying at the center in Taiwan!)

So, once again I was stunned by the power of the unexpected when we leave space for it, and the importance of inviting free time into our lives and allowing Destiny to surprise us.

In Tea we observe that emptiness is what gives function to all the elements we use to prepare tea. The whole process is made possible and connected by emptiness. The fact that a kettle, teapot, cup or bowl has emptiness allows it to fill up and serve its function. Even the mind of the one preparing tea should be empty, functioning as a medium to connect the fire, water, kettle, teapot and the cups or bowls of our guests. And even our guests benefit from drinking with an empty mind. Likewise, if a mind is full, it has no space to learn. If we think we know everything, how can we learn anything new? Or as Wu De likes to say, if we buy an incredibly beautiful painting that can change our lives but when

we get home we find there is no place to put it on the walls... What good is that painting?

### *Workshops to End All*

After the retreat, we took a few days rest and picked up with a very special Global Tea Hut session for our local Barcelona community and were even joined by tea-brother Alexei from Russia. Next, we continued with our schedule of events, which involved a couple of gongfu tea ceremonies and a final intensive weekend full of more "linear" tea courses on sheng and shou puerh tea, the mountain ranges of Yunnan, aged tea and Wu Yi Cliff Tea.

All in all, I'd say the trip was a huge success, as it turned a lot of people on to Tea's healing potential,

and many lives were impacted by their discoveries in Tea, which will continue to be a big part of their day in the hopes of finding a little bit more harmony in their lives.

And now that Wu De has returned to Taiwan, I've finally gotten a chance to open his new book and begin reading. I'm delighted to find that it almost reads like a summary of everything we spoke about! Wu De had just finished the book the day before traveling to Spain, so the material must have been so fresh, so near and dear to him and edited so thoroughly that now many passages of the book ring on as echoes of our shared time together... A time I can now turn back to over and over. Thank you Wu De. For everything. And thanks to all of you who made this such a memorable experience!



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### *Wu De reading from "Tea Medicine"*

