

TEA TURNS SOUTHBOUND

Sam Gibb & Friends

This winter/summer, Wu De packed up his tea things and set off down to New Zealand and Australia. There were events in several cities and their surrounds, with lots of support in every place. Many new tea brothers and sisters joined this community as a result, and are now with us in these global sessions every month. Sam recounts the trip, and also has asked several of the participants to share their experiences!

I think when anything affects you deeply you want to share it. That's how I've felt ever since the first time I drunk Tea with Wu De... *I want to share this.* When Wu De told me he was planning on coming to New Zealand and Australia, I was excited and offered to help in any way I could. When I found out that the way he wanted me to help was to organize the whole trip, the excitement turned into something less pleasant. I've never been one to take control. I prefer to just come along for the ride. The less I invest, the less I have to lose. But that outlook wasn't working. At 29, I feel like I have always jumped from one thing to the next. It is easy to walk away if your not invested, but then you never really get anywhere. As soon as something is difficult or uncomfortable I just walk away, never facing these things. Here was a chance

to break this pattern, and I was ready to take it!

After months of planning, three and a half weeks of traveling, two countries and several cities later, it was all over! I was sitting back in Taiwan wondering what happened; Auckland, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne all had Tea seeds planted... Not physical ones, but ones in the hearts of those that came to the events and shared Tea with us.

A Forest Amongst Farms

Vimutti is a Thai Forest monastery on 144 acres that has been stewarded for the last decade by Ajahn Chandako. It is right in the middle of a heavily farmed part of New Zealand and happened to be the first stop on Wu De's Australian tour. Driving to the monas-

tery the view was all too familiar: The grass paddocks, the fences and the livestock... We started to wonder what this place would be like. Their website claims that they are a refuge of peace, tranquility and wisdom. When we arrived, they appeared to not only embody these principles in spirit but also to be a physical manifestation of them. It seemed a lighthouse of wisdom amongst the surrounding farmlands. Ajahn Chandako has spent a decade replanting the valley with care and it stands in stark contrast to its surroundings. Perhaps this place offers us an insight into a solution to our environmental degradation: *change our consciousness and we change our environment!*

Here in this rustically simple yet deeply inspiring place we spent our first weekend in New Zealand. Sleeping in caravans without



connection to the outside world, we set up camp. The spot for our workshops could not have been more idyllic or iconically Kiwi! A steep tree-covered path opened up into a huge valley. In the middle of it all stood a yurt surrounded by native New Zealand bush. Inside was a room that you could feel had been used many times over the last decade for serious spiritual work, adorned with an altar to the Buddha in the center and pictures of illuminated members of the tradition, like the Venerable Ajahn Chah, surrounding it. Our days started with the three silent bowls of tea so many of you are familiar with, followed by a discourse. At lunch, we sat in the middle of the valley and enjoyed a shared lunch brought by all those that came. Afterwards we continued the workshop, starting with tea

shared in silence followed by more insights into the Leaf.

Here I had to adjust to the role of *cha tong* or 'tea boy'. Wu De often says that behind every great Tea Master is a great *cha tong*. This statement can be reflected upon from different angles. On the one hand, it is hard for a Tea Master to play his role without the support of a *cha tong*, but if we explore the saying more we also come to the realization that every Master started out as one as well. Even the biggest trees begin as the smallest seed. My first lesson of the day came after a kettle boiled over. Wu De explained the teaching to me using his most common instruction tool: a Grateful Dead analogy! Being a *cha tong* is very similar (apparently) to being a sound technician at a Grateful Dead concert. Even though you love the band, you cannot get too lost in the

music. You may love the Dead, but you are there to serve those who've come to the concert. If you drift too deeply into one of Jerry Garcia's guitar solos you might make a mistake that pulls everyone from their trance. The same principle applies to Tea. As a *cha tong* you are there to serve those sitting for Tea. If you follow the Tea too far, you may forget your primary role, which is to serve.

Perhaps the highlight of the weekend happened after the workshops had finished. Ajahn Chandako took a handful of us around the monastery on Sunday night. Scattered around the property were small huts where monks and lay people stay for extended periods of isolated meditation. He pointed off into the forest and told us that one young man was living on a small deck out there, and had been doing so for the past month!

As we got further down the valley, the forest thickened until we arrived at a small hut. Inside were the Ajahn's bed and his tea set! He invited us in, sitting down in front of a huge glass window looking deep into the forest. He explained to us that he is just a humble monk and we need to forgive him for any brewing mistakes. There, in this monk's hut, with mismatching teaware that some tea snobs may turn their nose up at, I had a deeply profound Tea experience. To me this showed one of the key elements of Cha Dao: that the most important influence on tea is not the tea or the teaware but the mind and heart of the one brewing! Here in the middle of miles of farmland was a small piece of land lovingly stewarded over the years by this beautifully open and loving human that has dedicated his life to liberation. As he poured us tea, he was not just pouring us hot water and leaves, but also his mind and heart. One of the things that makes Tea truly transformative is when the person brewing it has transformed him or herself. So to Ajahn Chandako, I bow deeply—for the space, the inspiration and for the tea.

The Magic of Brisbane

The words I write will always fall short of the experience of the tour. As the Buddha said while holding a handful of leaves, “the words I have spoken to you are these leaves in my hand and the Truth is the forest behind us”. There are so many moments of magic and beauty to convey. From Auckland to Melbourne, time and time again we were met with openness, generosity and a love of the Leaf. But to me the highlight of the tour shined through in Brisbane. It wasn't because the events were any better, the people any nicer, nor the Tea any tastier, but because here Tea did what it does best: *create community*.

Brisbane was never on the list of places to visit in Australia when we started planning the tour. Many people in other cities were surprised we spent so long there. One person in Melbourne exclaimed “Brisbane! There is no Tea culture in Brisbane!” Perhaps this is one element of why these events were so amazing. The people in Brisbane didn't have countless teahouses to visit. They were often isolated and unaware of their brothers and sisters surrounding them. So when we came, these Chajin appeared and family was instantly formed. Maybe this also highlights another misconception: that Tea culture and Tea spirit are the same thing.

You could sense people turning on to Tea. You could see it in their faces and feel them soften and open through the ceremonies. Afterwards, there was nowhere to be. And there were deep feelings of connection.

In my experience, the transformative element of Tea can happen without the culture but not without the Spirit. Not understanding how a Tea was made does not limit your experience of the Tea. You can still have an amazing session. But without the spirit, the culture of Tea serves only ego. Obviously, the ideal is to have both. In Brisbane we found a Tea seed just waiting to sprout.

Central to the beauty of Brisbane were our hosts, Matty and Lesley. We had never met in person, but a few years ago Matty had sold me my first teapot through his website. I remember being overwhelmed by the limitlessness of the Tea world. He answered my endless stream of questions with lightness, humor and compassion. I remember thinking “I would love to hang out with this guy. He has a beautiful heart.” My partner at the time could attest to this fact because I was always talking

about him, which I assume isn't normal for an online purchase. When I found out we might be doing an event in Byron Bay, two hours from Brisbane, I thought I would reach out to him. As fate would have it he had just listened to Wu De's interview with Rich Roll—for the 10th time! An overnight visit to Brisbane turned into five days over the course of organizing the tour. Matty's passion and love of the Leaf made me certain from the get go that the events there would be special. He served tea at a local market, much like us at the Tea Sage Hut, and was well connected to the isolated pockets of Chajin in the area. This trip gave a focal point to bring them together.

This was the first time Wu De had ever conducted events at the same place he was staying, and it worked beautifully. We would wake up early to the sound of tropical birdlife, then meditate and drink tea on the deck with Koalas watching from the surrounding trees. We would then eat a gorgeous breakfast prepared by Matty or Lesley. We even had Russia pancakes (you are not meant to call them that but I can't remember their name... and that's what they were) made by the skilled hands of Ilyas, one of Wu's oldest students who made the trip from Russia to help with the tour. We could then slowly move into preparing for the day's events, without the need to pack or travel.

The events were all full, often with extra people showing up, drawn in by the Leaf. There was a deep meditative quietude while we drank in silence, and as Wu De talked the group leaned in, listening to every word that was said. You could sense people turning on to Tea. You could see it in their faces and feel them soften and open through the ceremonies. Afterwards, there was nowhere to be. And there were deep feelings of connection. To stand back and watch, one could almost see the electricity in the air. You knew something was starting.



With twenty guests attending the last evening, Matty announced they would be hosting monthly Tea ceremonies. The seeds were planted! Wu De left them with this: “When I first travel somewhere, I visit a number of places and plant seeds. It is then up to you to grow your seed into something more. If I come again I will come to the places where the seeds have been tended and grown”. Last week, Matty emailed me saying that he had been sharing tea almost every day. They held their first tea ceremony a few weeks ago, and had to limit the numbers as so many people were interested! And so this seed has already started to sprout! What happens now is in the hands of those beautiful people we met there, but I have a feeling we will be in Brisbane again sometime very soon...

Sydney & Melbourne

Sydney was one part of the journey that seemed the most uncer-

tain. Even a week before, we had no idea where we would be staying or how we would get around. Our first event in Queensland was at the Harmony in Life Centre on the Gold Coast. Here we had the great fortune of meeting Michael and Penny, two beautiful souls from Sydney who were deeply touched by the event. They instantly opened their home to us! More than that, Michael kindly acted as our driver for the two days, showing us the sights of Sydney, and most importantly letting Wu De pat a Koala.

Spending so much time with Wu De over the tour was an experience that I am truly thankful for. However, one thing that can get irritating is when he starts talking about music. It often reminds me of a grandparent telling his grandchildren what was ‘hip’ in his day. Statements like ‘everyone listens to Led Zeppelin in High School’ no longer seem relevant to anyone under 40. When we met Kent at his Tian He Tea House where the Sydney events

were being held, Wu De’s eyes lit up. Kent not only had the most amazing vinyl stereo system I have ever seen, but he also had a serious collection of blues and jazz records. Wu De has been telling all the students back at the Tea Sage Hut that he would be at Tian He every day if he lived in Sydney, drinking Tea and listening to Kent’s awesome records.

In Melbourne we were blessed enough to have a beautiful venue: Impala and Peacock is a teahouse and yoga space owned by two Global Tea Hut members, Sarah and Ruan. We shared a weekend of Tea workshops on everything from Cha Dao to the magic of puerh, with support from artists like Petr Novak and Stephen Carroll. We discussed the relationship between Tea and art. Here the tour ended as quickly as it began. Lindsey, who generously hosted us during our stay there, dropped Wu De at the airport to undertake a long and well deserved journey home...



EXPERIENCES FROM THE TOUR

Tea teaches us, like all good teachers do, as individuals. Every session offers new insights and lessons to each person at the table. Whether we serve or receive, it changes us all. If I were to talk solely of my experiences, this piece would be incomplete. With so many people deeply affected by this tour, I had to ask a few Global Tea Hut members to share their experiences:

Jade Robinson, Brisbane

Sharing tea with Wu De during his Australian tour were some of the most beautiful days I have had. Wu holds space in a way that I have never seen and felt before. He filled my bowl and filled my heart. Whilst I have always had access to the Leaf and to Wu's teachings, there was one thing that felt out of reach. What Wu brought with him on his trip to Australia was one of Tea's most precious aspects of all—*community!* Before Wu's trip, there was a whole group of us here who all loved the Leaf in solitude, unaware of our tea brothers and sisters situated so close by! With the announcement of Wu's trip we were all instantly connected. It was then only a few short weeks later that we were all in a room together, connecting, laughing and hugging as the family we already were. Wu's ability to join communities, both locally and globally, is one of his most valuable gifts, and for this I will always be in deep gratitude to him. The more he travels and shares his teachings of the Leaf over warm bowls of tea, the bigger our community grows. And it is through community that the world will come back into alignment, reconnecting us to each other, to the Earth, and to ourselves. Wu De plays a vital role in this healing, and we are all very blessed to have him!

Lindsey Diacogiannis, Melbourne

Cha Dao is “not the science of hedonism, but the art of shamanism.” These words still ring in my being. As I gaze into a bowl of steaming Tea, the dark liquor speaks to me of Earth and Sky, of rain that came from the clouds, seeped into the Earth and brought life to these leaves...

For several months last year, I had been hosting local Tea ceremonies for other Tea enthusiasts and friends curious in other forms of meditation, but it had been several months since my last group session. After returning from a trip to America at the beginning of 2015, I had yet to start up another regular time to gather for Tea and meditation, though I'd definitely experienced a deeper commitment and fervor for my own daily spiritual practice centered on Tea.

Wu De's time in Melbourne rekindled a deep appreciation for the magic and wonder of the Leaf, similar to what I experienced on my first visit to the Tea Sage Hut in Taiwan in late 2013. The sessions he held were filled with a wisdom and love for Tea that was palpable. In being given the opportunity to assist him in serving Tea, I experienced the joy of serving—one aspect of this tradition that has always appealed to me. It's often said that our aim in preparing tea for others is not to simply demonstrate an ability to make tea, but to *serve*. By kneeling before the guests who came to hear Wu De speak and to experience the richness of Cha Dao, I felt a sincere honor in being able to share Tea as wisdom and medicine—healing for the body, mind and spirit.

Wu De's time here also fuelled a launch into the start of more regular sessions, to be held on a weekly basis in the same space he spoke—a beautiful and intimate room in the upstairs of Impala and Peacock Teahouse in Brunswick. I felt like I was riding the wave of the energy and enthusiasm he brought, as I hosted a tea ceremony just one week after he was here. Three Tea brothers and sisters joined me in silence as we drank, both literally and figuratively, of Tea wisdom...

Rebecca Le Harle, Auckland

I caught wind of Wu De's AUS/NZ tour immediately after a sudden resignation from my job. The Auckland dates landed on the weekend of my last week at work. This softened the strange transition I was going through. Instead of dreading change, I settled into a sense of excitement and anticipation for a weekend of tea healing and discovery. I could not have anticipated the depth, nourishment, profound spirit and sense of brother (sister) hood that came from sitting with Wu De. He graciously and silently poured tea for us many times—making me feel like an old friend, like an honored guest. At a time when I was deciding to dedicate myself to Tea, this weekend helped to cleanse me of residual career stress, realigned my spirit and fortified my sense of purpose. I am now drinking bowl tea daily with a morning (and sometimes afternoon!) tea meditation, and enjoying a deeper, more respectful relationship with Tea and with myself.



Photo & Experience by Michael Keene Chin, Sydney

Written the night we drank amazing moon-bathed Tea

Last night we had the great fortune to sit with a Tea Master who prepared tea for us in silence for over an hour and a half. As we watched him go through this beautiful ritual of boiling the water, grabbing generous fistfuls of tea and letting them fall through his palm into a small pot, gently laying out each bowl lip-to-lip in a pattern he remembered for each person in the room, pouring the boiling water into another pot set above a flame to maintain a certain temperature, then pouring a portion of that water to clean and likely warm each cup, and the pot containing the tea and discarding that water and the very first steep into a little pot by his side...

Then refilling the pot containing the tea, the Master would pour the tea in fluid, brushstroke movements mimicking a river flowing in on itself in a pattern representing the infinite from right-to-left then left-to-right, passing over each bowl several times until all the tea had been more or less evenly distributed—one vessel imparting to all others.

Setting the pot down, he picked up each bowl and placed it with a caress in front of each guest. With a palm turned upwards, he gestured us to drink.

No instructions, verbal or otherwise, were given as to how we should handle this small vessel, let alone drink the deep brown liquid that had been steeped in an ancient Tea tradition; that had been bathed only by the light of each full moon, a tea so treasured it could not be bought.

So I reached out and brought the bowl to me, feeling the almost unbearable heat beneath sensitive skin that explored the coarse clay texture of the hand-fashioned vessel: the cracks, the little “blemishes” or birth marks that dotted its surface. I observed the luster of the liquid and the thin semi-circumference of light that resembled a palm-sized eclipse. I stared into its depths, both lost and found in silent contemplation...

I closed my eyes as I brought the lip to my lips and inhaled the wafting aroma of the tea as it gently ebbed and flowed, breathing in deeply, filling my chest with the subtle wafting fragrance of tea, but mostly the air of the environment infused around me with particles that carry the scent of my body—that of fellow travelers, the incense that had once filled the room, the ocean breeze carrying traces of traffic and tree, all intermingled with the sounds of these... I opened my eyes once again as I drew the bowl away from my lips and looked at the mostly empty vessel, a residual remnant danced around tiny traces of tea. I placed the bowl in front of the Master and let my breath go...

Then, I waited for the process to again begin...

Jaanus Leplaan, New Zealand

Tea in Aotearoa

I find myself sitting in a yurt with a steaming bowl of tea in my hands, listening to the hypnotic sound of rain-drops dancing on the roof. There are other people here, too. We are all sitting comfortably on our cushions in a semi-circle, sharing tea and listening to Wu De. The yurt is located in a beautiful valley next to a small pond. The winding path that leads up to the Buddhist monastery dining hall is lined with exotic trees all planted by the only resident monk here. There is a birch and a Japanese cedar next to a magnolia. This is not a dream. The monastery itself is situated on a picturesque piece of land with rolling hills and some ancient trees near Mangatawhiri on the North Island of New Zealand.

To a traveling tea person it is always a great joy to meet others walking the same path. I had the pleasure of attending and helping out with Wu De's seminars in New Zealand last month. When the Maori first arrived in their (ocean-going canoes) they called this land *AoTEAroa* (meaning the land of the long white cloud) so Tea, one could say with tongue in cheek, has always been a part of this country! Sadly, when I arrived in November last year I was not greeted by a developed tea culture, but rather by a nation of coffee drinkers. In spite of that, the seminars were filled with people passionate about Tea and curious about Cha Dao.

Among the attendees were people from many different walks of life—from doctors to artists—and from places as diverse as Italy, China, Germany, the USA, Estonia and of course New Zealand. Many of them found it amusing that they had travelled half way around the world without ever knowing of Global Tea Hut or about our tradition only to find themselves sitting in a yurt steeped in Tea wisdom. How had they all ended up here? By pure coincidence? Everyone has his or her own story. There were people from different religions too—from Christians to a Tibetan Buddhist nun—all sharing Tea and heart space together.

During the course of the events, I witnessed solemn silence, quiet contemplation, unfurling of some eyebrows and laughter and was touched by kindness and hospitality. With Wu De as our guide, we set off on the path of Cha Dao... There were moments of sudden realization, eyes gleaming with inspiration and a feeling of belonging. Veils were lifted, minds were cleared and hearts were opened. Tea had brought us closer—to Nature, to each other and to ourselves.

Each event came with its own insights and lessons that will be working their magic on the participants for some time to come. For me, the biggest insights were about service, kindness and focus. Not only were the seminars inspirational and enlightening, but so were all the little moments before, after and in between. Helping Wu De and my dear Tea brother Sam, with organizing the events and lending a hand in solving the small practical issues, all taught me something: By serving others we are also serving our higher selves, and service is perhaps the fastest way of realizing and learning the deepest, most meaningful lessons. Here are some of my favorite grains of wisdom from Wu De:

"We are this planet. Where did that breath come from that you just took? It came from Nature; it was made for you by trees. This water that you're drinking was in a cloud less than two weeks ago..."

"After the ecstasy—the laundry! Celebrate the ordinary. The most exalted of spiritual experiences mean nothing if you cannot be happy in the most basic ways."

"There is nothing better you can put in your body than Joy!"

"There is no other Now!"

Sarah De Witt, Melbourne

One line from Wu De really stuck with me: "The shallow fears the depths, but the depths don't fear the shallow". It encouraged me to look deeper into the reasons, motivations, and meaning behind the things I do in my life. Sometimes you get caught up in the what's-your work, your family, your friends, your activities and it's easy to lose sight of *why* you do what you do. It taught me to explore my decisions and actions with a curiosity and mindfulness. He brought this point out beautifully in the world of Tea. Tea can be a meditative, medicinal, and mindful practice that can be such a wonderful part of present life. And it extends beyond drinking it—to what the tea represents—to the people and environment involved in its journey from seedling to sip.



Matty d'Argent, Brisbane

As a devoted student of the leaf for most of two decades, I have traveled and explored the world in search of the finest teas, shared cups with tea experts, specialists, artisans, and tea masters. So when Sam mentioned that he was bringing Master Wu to Australia, I reveled in the opportunity to host such an honorable guest. As you could imagine, the surreal experience of having this liquid enchanter and two of his students stay at your house for five days and yes, making incredible tea all day long, was simply quite amazing! The week of awesomeness was spent mostly attending and hosting tea workshops, connecting with beautiful passionate tea peeps, blissing out on amazing tea, sharing delicious food, learning, laughing, koala watching, Youtube-ing, and having loads of fun...

So with that said, I'd like to offer a few sincere words of gratitude to my Tea brothers Master Wu, Sammy and Ilyias. Thank you for sharing five amazing days with us; it was truly a memorable and moving experience I will never forget. Wu's influence and inspiration was a catalyst to begin hosting monthly tea gatherings and create a space for Brisbane's growing Tea community. His visit has brought forth an assemblage of passionate Tea people eager to learn, taste and share—many of which have relayed their newfound experiences with quietude, peace, emptiness and a meditative state of mind. It is beautiful to see how Tea has touched their lives and how they embrace it as a part of their daily practice.