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TEA IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

-Ganga & Tara

As we mentioned last month, November starts our weekly outings into the surrounding mountains to have tea. The winter months in Taiwan are perfect for outdoor tea. There is nothing like enjoying a bowl of tea in the mountains. We know that it is too cold for outdoor tea where many of you live (not all), but since we're enjoying it here at the Hut we thought we'd publish this piece Ganga sent us about a trip he and Tara took, and all the wonderful outdoor sessions they had along the way. They also took some amazing pictures.

Last summer, we decided to do a teaching tour called “The Seeds of Loving Kindness Tour” on the west coast of America. We planned to begin in Los Angeles and teach all the way north through California, Oregon and Washington, culminating on Orcas Island in the San Juan Islands northwest of Seattle. That route takes you through some of the most beautiful places in America, like Big Sur, the redwoods, Mt. Shasta and the Olympic Peninsula. We decided that on this tour, we'd camp wherever possible so that we could enjoy the natural beauty of America. Because tea had become an integral part of our life, we also intended to drink tea in all the beautiful scenic spots we passed through.

Our first stop was Big Sur. As we drove north along what is one of the most spectacular coastlines in the world, we looked for a place where we could camp for free. We turned off on a dirt road and found a perfect spot—a clearing in a grove of pine trees with a view of the ocean. After setting up our tent, we boiled water and brewed a pot of silver needle white tea. Drinking tea has become for us a communion with Nature. The tea plant absorbs the energy of the sun, the moon, the stars and the energy of the cosmos. When we drink the tea, we are imbibing all these energies and they empower us. As we sat on a soft carpet of pine needles, listening to the summer breeze blowing through the pines, we heard sea lions on the

beach below us and felt at one with all of Nature.

As we made our way north, we knew that we were going to camp on Mount Shasta, one of the Seven Sacred Mountains of the world. We thought that we'd only give two events in the town of Mount Shasta but the response was so great that we gave ten events, including a tea ceremony that was attended by over thirty people. We've been teaching in Mount Shasta for years but this time we stayed far longer than before and got to explore the mountain more than we ever had on previous visits. Mount Shasta is a powerful vortex of spiritual energy. It is widely regarded to be a focal point of the activity of the Ascended Masters and many spiritual seekers



Silver Falls, Oregon

from around the world are drawn there to experience its transforming energy. Camping on Mount Shasta was a sublime experience. One day, Tara and I climbed above Panther Meadow, set up our tea implements and enjoyed sipping purple red tea with the majestic snow-covered peak of Mount Shasta looming above us.

Our next stop was Silver Falls in Oregon, where a trail leads to seven magnificent waterfalls. We'd been there before with a Tibetan Lama, Dzogchen Khenpo Choga Rinpoche. Silver Falls is one of our favorite places on the West Coast, however this was the first time that we'd ever enjoyed tea there. It was a rainy day and a soft drizzle was falling as we drove to the park. As we pulled into the parking lot, the sky cleared and the sun greeted our arrival. We hiked to the tallest of the waterfalls and found a perfect spot to set up our tea and relax while drinking last year's Light Meets Life Ai Lao sheng puerh tea near the plunging waterfall.

Our destination on this tour was Orcas Island, where in 2002 we took the Bodhisattva Vows with our Tibetan Buddhist Lama. When one takes the Bodhisattva Vows, one pledges to devote one's life to being of service to all beings. Tara and I intended to renew our vows where we had originally made them on the top of the tower at the summit of Constitution Mountain on Orcas Island. As we drove up the mountain, it was typical fall weather in the Pacific Northwest, which means it was raining. We stopped halfway up the mountain and walked on a trail through moss-covered trees just as the rain let up. We walked along the trail past ferns bejeweled with glistening water drops, found a fallen tree trunk to sit on, and as a soft mist enveloped us, we enjoyed a pot of Tieguanyin oolong tea.

We had been looking for years for a place in America that felt like home where we could create a base and settle down to write a few books. Mount Shasta called to

us, so when we completed the west coast tour, we decided to stay in Mount Shasta for the winter. When we lived in India, we had a home at the base of Arunachala Mountain. Arunachala is considered by many to be the most sacred mountain in India. Now, we found ourselves living at the base of Mount Shasta that is widely believed to be the most sacred mountain in America. Like Mt. Kailash in Tibet and Mt. Fuji in Japan, these mountains are powerful places that draw people from around the world for transcendental experiences.

One day, we decided to make a pilgrimage to Crater Lake in Oregon. It had been snowing so we didn't know if we'd actually be able to get to the lake. Luckily, the road was open and we were able to walk all the way to the edge of the cliff overlooking the beautiful caldera lake. At a depth of 592m, it is the deepest lake in the United States. Tara and I set up our tea in the snow and savored some steaming hot Mi Xiang red tea while enjoying one of the most spectacular views in America. Tea and Nature are indeed the perfect combination!

Drinking tea in Nature has become just about our favorite thing in life. We've come a long way from the days when Lipton and Constant Comment were the only teas we knew of. Now, Tea is a way of life. It's our spiritual practice, a sacred communion with Nature and the Cosmic Energy. We have only begun this grand adventure into the inner secrets of Tea and are enjoying its constant unfolding...



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Crater Lake

Mount Shasta

