

Sandakphu Tea

“SAN – DAK – PHU” is a name reputedly recognized as a place for the monks to meditate. It is the highest habitable point in the district of Ilam. Ilam district is located in the far eastern part of Nepal adjoining Sikkim and Darjeeling hills of India. Sandakphu is a place also claimed by Darjeeling in India because the eastern slope of Sandakphu peak falls in India. In order to view Sandakphu peak, it is best viewed from India as the peak falls in Nepal. Geographical location of Sandakphu can also be viewed through “Google Earth”.

Sandakphu Tea Plantation and production unit is located at the foothills of Sandakphu Peak at a place known as Jusbirey Village. There is a famous high mountain Pond called Maipokhari near Jusbirey Village World wide, this place is famous for Maipokhari Ramsar Site: A World Heritage site for Mountain Wetlands. Nationally this place is famous for Maipokhari Holy Shrine. This biodiversity is known for its bio diversity and natural reserve of herbs and highest quality tea.

Tea Plantation at Sandakphu was initiated somewhere in the year 1990 with the plants derived from high quality tea varieties planted locally by ancient farmers migrating from other villages of Ilam district. The plantation is young and fresh nearing maturity and therefore, the quality of tea is considered very high as compared to many other tea areas of Nepal (Note: Young plants have highest level of aroma and character builds up as the plants age).

Unlike many tea plantations where large plantations are carried out by large corporate business houses, where workers work as wage earners (labors). The ownership of land and property in such case reside at corporate level, tea Plantation at Sandakphu has been carried out by the local farmers in their own land and therefore, Sandakphu Tea is an entirely farmer based production with the ownership of the plantation remaining at farmers level. Self employed farmers and producers at Sandakphu believe that quality can be achieved only by those who have the sense of ownership of the garden because tea quality is defined from the green leaf that is fed to the factory for processing. Since ownership of the garden is at farmers level, the farmers can therefore grow and harvest only the finest leaf for processing as against those who work as a labor for the corporate plantations.

Sandakphu Tea Processers (P) Ltd is probably the only company headed by women tea entrepreneur in the country. Flanked by Tea experts from within and outside the country Sandakphu produces and crafts only the rarest of teas found in the country. Character and flavor profile of Sandakphu is unique to its bio-diversity and unique location found only in such high elevations. Sandakphu tea production unit is located at 6500 feet while the farmers plantations are as high as 8000 feet and plus. Tea crafted at such elevations falling within 26 degree North Latitude provides flavors and character which can be compared to none in the world. ***(Note: The hills of Jusbirey stands parallel to the “Mai Pokhari Ramsar Site” a world heritage site in Nepal for wetlands. This tranquil environment makes the bio diversity of this place very unique, the pH of the water tested in Jusbirey is 7.2 and the ecology harbors many endangered species of wild flora and fauna)***

The plantation exudes different character and flavor profile from 4 different growing seasons. Seasonal teas from Sandakphu are featured as under;

- 1) **Himalayan Bold:** Fresh winds of Kanchenjunga that melts the morning dew of fine and fresh tea leaves grown in the high fields of Jasbirey creates this magical brew. Bold defines the character- "Purity with finesse". This large chunky leaves emits the fragrance of nature and the cup reflects the clarity of the snow clad mountains that surrounds Jasbirey and Ilam during Autumnal season.
- 2) **Dragon Claws (Jasbire Dragon):** The make of this tea deserves to be described in a typical limboo (tribal) terminology- so we call this creation of art "Mio Kulang" or Dragon/eagle Claws. The Character is depicted especially when it unfurls in its own infusion, the hairy buds looks like claws that open gradually. The Cup is golden in colour but the flavor or the taste innocently mild and mellow with a sweet finish depicting spring season.
- 3) **Ruby Black Tea (Sandakphu Ruby):** Ruby depicts "Fire"- the character of ruby is strength, aliveness and a lasting gentle finish. The culture of Ruby is quite old in this village. The women folk still make this kind of tea at their homes and in Nepal Ruby could be unique only to Jasbirey Village. Usually Ruby is handrolled followed by Mechanical rolling to give a fine twist, it is completely oxidized sometime over 26 hours at 6500 feet elevation. Constant flow of cold mist supplied by nature at this altitude makes the oxidation (natural fermentation) process extremely slow which allows gradual change of ployphenols to flavanoids (theaflavins and rubigins) to the extent that it is almost equal in ratio. Once desired color and nose (flavor) is attained during this natural oxidation process this tea is dried slowly and matured with time and perfection. The more you keep your Ruby the better it becomes.
- 4) **Himalayan Hand Rolled:** Literally hand rolled with gentle small hands of beautiful women folks of Jasbirey is Himalayan Hand Roll. This tea is hand rolled specially after two rounds of pickings when the leaf cellulose structure is nimble and soft. To retain the natural qualities of the leaves such expensive method is applied with care and love. Himalayan hand roll emits mellow flowery aromas of different orchids and wild flowers that flourish in this region.
- 5) **Gold and Honey/HIMALAYAN GOLD:** Usually, the Himalayan monsoon approaches with a magnanimous rush just after a short summer season in Nepal, the soil in the hills that surround the Himalayas is the first to receive it. When the monsoon is full blown the tea bushes planted in these hills feed very little and qualitatively from their roots, the physical structure of the soil also changes due to excess moisture. At Sandakphu, we simply thought that it was the perfect time to relate creativity with nature. We followed nature to make a tea that characterizes Earth, the golden red soil of Sandhakpu or Ilam district and the aromas of earth when beaten with water. Wild bees take shelter around Sandakphu forest during Monsoon and thus Himalayan Gold often called Gold and Honey develops a very complex character but dominated by the flavor of Wild Honey. This tea is long oxidized, naturally dried for several hours and then wood fired. Although, the dry leaves are impressively aggressive the cup or the liquor is mild as the Himalayan monsoon. ***This tea was selected as the Best Tea in Black Tea category in North American Tea Championship 2015.***

- 6) **GREEN PEARLS:** A crafty tea with a unique pearl (Half Moon) like shape, made with thorough love and care. It is a custom with the Nepalese tribes to prefer irregular natural pearls to the round cultured ones. Green pearls' leaves are from select bushes with high chlorophyll content. While the leaves are infused, the mystic natures of Nepali culture unfurl and exhibit pronounced lime brightness with sweet grassy or vegetal aromas. The light green liquor has a lively fresh taste evoking visuals of green Himalayan forests and hills that transcends in the cup
- 7) **WHITE PEONY:** After Monsoon withdraws in the Himalayas, sunny weather prevails changing the color of the leaves to parrot green. This change in shades of green in the field indicates the change in flavor profile of tea from grassy green to mellow green. Select 2 leaf and a bud is hand plucked by self-employed women who are the owner of their small tidy tiny small tea garden. Plucked shoots are quickly brought over to the factory and de-enzymed after a short 4 hours withering. This is then followed by gradual but constant heat pressing of the leaves. Once a desired leveling of shape is achieved, the leaves are then dried in a chain dryer. This is then followed by meticulous hand sorting of leaves and soon after they are packed in paper sacks or boxes and is ready for dispatch.
- 8) **Emerald Green:** The very first harvest is set aside for the production of Emerald Green teas. Only select first bud and a leaf of the season is selected to carry out production of Emerald Greens. The reason for this selection is to harness all the natural freshness of spring tea that comes out only at the beginning of the season. Hand Plucked one leaf and a bud is immediately taken to the factory where it undergoes a process of conditioning. Once the leaves are de-enzymed and conditioned, the leaves are hand rolled and then dried. This tea has a mild vegetal taste and flowery aroma with sweet finish.
- 9) **Spring White:** Spring white teas are produced after the production of Emerald Greens. While the first harvest exudes natural and vegetal flavor, the second harvest which is done about 4-6 days after the first harvest from the same garden, gives out the natural flavor of spring prevailing at such altitude (7000 - 8000 ft amsl). While the first harvest still has a mixed batch of old autumn leaf (that gets left during the last plucking season) and new spring leaves, the second harvest gives out a uniform batch of all new leaves. This uniformity of growth spells out spring in your Spring white tea. Hand plucked select one leaf and a bud is kept overnight under the influence of cool spring air for over 18 hours. This allows the leaves to breathe out all the excess moisture from the leaf while allowing it to undergo the mildest form of natural oxidation. This all natural partially dried teas are given a slight rustling with gentle hand roll. Once a desired level of appearance and flavor is attained, the leaves are either sundried or machine dried with the mildest form of heat.
- 10) **Sandakphu Bai Mudan/Autumn White:** Bai Mudan or the Autumn White are processed from only one leaf and a bud when Autumn sets in at Sandakphu Hills. The leaves over the year long season turn parrot green indicating decline in moisture content in the leaf. The leaves are processed in the similar fashion like Spring White. Sandakphu Bai Mudan is therefore also called as Autumnal white. Although it looks quite like Spring White, this tea is less dense and does not have any astringency sometimes found in Spring white.
- 11) **Black Yeti**
At Sandakphu, we continue to undertake research and development with regards to creation of artisan teas. This year (2013), we decided to roll out our new find. It took three years of trials

and errors working with the farmers, tea bushes and then in the factory to create a Black Yeti. A tea that quintessentially looks Black with darkest green luster (resembling spring pine forest of Sandakphu early in the morning) and tastes like wild honey. (A favorite of Yeti: A legendary snow man: as gathered from the hushed whisper of the mountain people in the hills of Sandakphu)

12) Premium First Flush

The very first bud and a new leaf is hand plucked with precision in the morning freshness from the garden located at the Himalayan foothills of Sandakphu. The leaves are then withered (removal of excess moisture from the tender bud and leaf) inside a closed room by supplying cold air. Withering process last the whole night and early in the morning, the withered leaves are brought to the rolling room where the leaves are rolled and kept for natural oxidation. Once the flavor profile required for this typical premium black teas is reached, the teas are dried in a wood fired dryer. Result is an exclusive premium first flush tippy tea that appears silvery (curled silver tips), often confused with White teas. It is extremely flowery and has a typical first flush sharpness with sweet after taste.

- 13) **White Oolong:** Silvery and Fine Tippy one leaf and a bud from First Flush at Sandakphu foot hill plantation displays the fine spring seasonal flavor. One leaf and a bud picked only in the first few sunny spring days can earn such a character. Meticulous handling and judgmental slow oxidation makes this tea fine and extra ordinary.

The very first bud and a new leaf is hand plucked with precision in the morning freshness from the garden. The leaves are then withered (removal of excess moisture from the tender bud and leaf) for about half an hour under the sun and then taken inside a closed room for further withering by supplying cold dry air. Withering process last the whole night and is combined with intermittent mild rustling of leaves by hand during the entire process and early in the morning, the withered leaves are brought to the rolling room where the leaves are lightly rolled and kept for natural and final oxidation. A careful watch on the development of nose is maintained. Varied oxidation by providing cool air by blowing fan and natural oxidation by keeping the leaves on the cool floor on a extended period of time bring about this nose typically desired for White Oolong. Once the flavor profile required for this typical tea is reached, the teas are dried in a wood fired dryer. Result is an exclusive white Oolong that appears silvery (curled silver tips), often confused with White teas. Unlike white teas where oxidation is kept at around 3 - 5 %, White Oolong is oxidized as high at 20%.

- 14) **Classic Green:** Once the Monsoon sets in, Sandakphu garden turns lush green and wet. The plant gets plenty of water thereby turning leaves very succulent and flaccid. This is the time, we turn our attention toward production of Classic Green teas. Finely plucked 2 leaves and a Bud is brought over to the factory within a span of an hour. The leaves are exposed to cold air for about 2 hours and then they are de-enzymed for 70 seconds. De-enzymed leaves are then placed/spread on cool tiled floor (at an elevation of 6500 ft) and are exposed to cold air for about 1 hour. Once the leaves breathe out all the heat from within, they are rolled for 25 minutes and then Pan Fired for about 2 hours. Dried teas are then hand sorted and allowed to rest for about 2 days. The result is our Classic Green teas. Classic green matures over time as is evident from the liquor profile.

- 15) **White Orange:** White Orange is prepared only during mid Summer or Deep Autumn at Sandakphu Garden. A Silvery bud and one tender first leaf are plucked early in the morning or

late afternoon when the sun either welcomes you or bids farewell. During this time Sandakphu foot hill plantation displays a glitter of silver as the buds are full of silvery pubescence depicting immense potential for highly aromatic mellow flavor. The very first summer or Autumnal leaf and silvery bud is hand plucked with precision. The leaves are then withered (removal of excess moisture from the tender bud and leaf) from the remaining hours of the day including overnight stay at withering troughs with a constant supply of natural air. Early in the morning freshness, the leaves are hand rolled for about half an hour and then allowed to rest for 1-2 hours depending on the weather condition at the Garden. Once the rolled leaves starts changing color, they are lightly machine rolled for 15 minutes and then dried immediately under low heat as a start up process for peak oxidation. Low fired tea is then allowed to breathe out the heat and allowed to rest for about 5 hours. Final high heat drying is given so as to increase the flavor profile and shelf life of the tea. They are then hand sorted and packed for storage or the shipment.

- 16) **Smoked Green:** This tea is manufactured during peak flavor season commencing March till June and Oct and November. Tender one leaf and a bud is hand plucked with precision early in the morning or later in the afternoon before sunset. Plucked leaves are brought to the factory immediately so as to retain the freshness of the leaf. The leaves are spread on wooden trays and are smoked from underneath the trays for about 3 hours. The leaves are then de-enzymed quickly in an enzymator for 60 seconds. De-enzymed leaves are hand rolled for about 30 minutes and then smoked again for 2 hours. Finally the leaves are dried on a high fired oven and allowed to mature over 1 month inside a village kitchen store under normal condition. Result is this exquisite green tea with distinct smoked flavor.
- 17) **Ruby Puerh:** Ruby Puerh is one of its kind. This tea is made through the art of post fermentation. Meaning Once Ruby Black tea is manufactured by reducing the drying temperature as is followed in normal Ruby Black tea manufacturing, they are allowed to mature for at least one year. The teas are kept inside the storage bins or Jute Bags under normal high elevation weather conditions as is prevalent in Sandakphu foothills. Over the period of one year, the tea gets further fermented and gradual development of mellow and smooth feel in the liquor indicates that the teas are matured enough to be ready for the market. After at least one year of maturation, tea masters make a regular tasting of this tea at least once a week so as to decide on checking the post fermentation at an appropriate time by high firing the teas.
- 18) **Ruby Oolong:** This Oolong is an aged oolong. The process of manufacturing this tea comprises of in-between process of Ruby Black and Ruby Puerh. This tea is aged after Ruby Black preparation. Once Ruby Black is prepared at lower oxidation level and fired under low heat, the teas are allowed to rest for about a week. They are then exposed with moist weather condition or are exposed with a cool mist and kept overnight. The next day the teas are fired under low heat again and this process is continued for over a period of six months. A complex character profile of this tea is thus achieved.
- 19) **Ruby Black Tea:** Ruby depicts "Fire"- the character of ruby is strength, aliveness and a lasting gentle finish. The culture of Ruby is quite old in this village. The women folk still make this kind of tea at their homes and in Nepal Ruby could be unique only to Jasbirey Village. Usually Ruby is handrolled followed by Mechanical rolling to give a fine twist, it is completely oxidized sometime over 26 hours at 6500 feet elevation. Constant flow of cold mist supplied by nature at

this altitude makes the oxidation (natural fermentation) process extremely slow which allows gradual change of polyphenols to flavanoids (theaflavins and rubigins) to the extent that it is almost equal in ratio. Once desired color and nose (flavor) is attained during this natural oxidation process this tea is dried slowly and matured with time and perfection. The more you keep your Ruby the better it becomes.

Tasting: put 2.5 grams of tea in 5 OZ cup and pour over 98 degree Celsius of water till the brim cover it and infuse for 5 minutes.

Dry leaf appearance: Dark rusty brown full bold leaf well curled and well matured.

Wet Leaf: Bright Amber Brown leaf with roasted malt or caramel flavor. Leaf opens upto 60-70% after infusion

Liquor: Dark red amber color with caramel/roasted malt flavor.

NOTE: Above tasting techniques is applicable for only Factory Managers and manufacturers to find out manufacturing defects and quality potential. This benchmark can be utilized as a guide to adjust temperature, weight of leaf cup and time of infusion to find out the best profile to advise the customers/drinker to enjoy this tea. This needs to be done by the clients with their own water and taste profile of the community.

- 20) **Black Pearl:** Only select one leaf and a bud is hand plucked during late summer season. Silvery bud and a leaf when under Black Pearl manufacturing are exposed to hot and humid air during withering as against cool air treatment in most of delicate tea manufacturing. Gradual hot and humid air of late summer air allows the leaf to breathe faster and manual rustling of the leaves in the troughs hastens oxidation process. The leaves are left in the troughs for over 16 hours and then lightly rolled in the mechanical roller for about 25 minutes. They are then shaped in the shaping machine for over 3 hours. This tea can only be made by an expert tea master who can judge the oxidation level of the tea when fed into the shaping machine. The silvery buds and the hair of the leaf turns golden and the teas are shaped into smaller pearl like shape and thus it is called Black Pearl. Black Pearl is fully fermented specialty Black Tea and sometimes also called "Sandakphu Gold".
- 21) **Single Leaf Black Pearl:** Only select one leaf (the first apical leaf only) is hand plucked during late summer season. Single Apical leaf when under Black Pearl manufacturing are exposed to hot and humid air during withering as against cool air treatment in most of delicate tea manufacturing. Gradual hot and humid air of late summer air allows the leaf to breathe faster and manual rustling of the leaves in the troughs hastens oxidation process. The leaves are left in the troughs for over 16 hours and then lightly rolled in the mechanical roller for about 25 minutes. They are then shaped in the shaping machine for over 3 hours. This tea can only be made by an expert tea master who can judge the oxidation level of the tea when fed into the shaping machine. The teas are shaped into smaller pearl like shape and thus it is called Single Leaf Black Pearl. This is a fully fermented specialty Black Tea.
- 22) **Silver Tips:** Only Select One Leaf and a Bud is first meticulously hand plucked from the Garden. These fresh leaves are then taken to the Factory to rest for about 3 hours. Once the leaf and bud becomes slightly flaccid, they are then hand separated. Select separated Buds are kept on a

Bamboo tray and are subject to more cold air for further moisture removal. This process is also called withering of buds. Withering takes place overnight and early next day the buds are oven dried. Resulting is premium Silver Tips also known to many as Silver tips White Tea. This tea is least oxidized tea of all (besides Green Tea) and if manufactured with perfection, resulting teas resembles silvery buds.

- 23) **Masala Teas:** This unique blend of masala tea is made from various Himalayan Spices and herbs with Black Leaf tea produced during the growing season. White Premium Masala tea are produced from hard withered teas from early flush, regular masala teas are made from Monsoon teas which are low withered. The teas are low withered to acquire a blackish appearance with heavier body while hard withered teas have lighter infusion. Soon after the teas are produced, various spices and herbs are mixed in appropriate proportions and then they are blended with the teas. A final mixing is carried with the process called mixing and drying in a revolving dryer. As a result fine mixture of various spices and herbs with tea is attained. Masala tea can be consumed anytime through out the day and is particularly common in household to consume after large meals because of its special attribute to help digest food.

At Sandakphu, the garden harvest is systematically segregated and set aside for the production of specific types of tea.

Brewing Instruction for 5 OZ cup: Put 2.5 grams in 5 OZ cup and add water and wait as follows.

Type	Qty Gram	Water Temperature Degree Celsius	Time (Minute)
1. Himalayan Hand Rolled	2.5	80	3
2. Himalayan Gold (gold and honey)	2.5	90	3 -4
3. Green Pearls	2.5	70	1.5-2.5
4. White Orange	2.5	75	2-3
5. Wild Yeti (Oolong)	2.5	80	3-4
6. Mountain Dew	2.5	80	2.5-3.5
7. White Oolong	2.5	80	2-3
8. Masala Tea	2.5	80	2.5 - 3
9. Ruby Black (Sandakphu Ruby)	2.5	85	2 - 3
10. Silver Tips	2.5	80	2-3

11. Golden Tip/24 carat	2.5	80	2-2.5
12. White Peony	2.5	70	2.5-3
13. Black Pearls	2.5	85	2-3

AWARDS:

SANDAKPHU TEA HAS WON PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS IN NORTH AMERICAN TEA CHAMPIONSHIP (NATC) WHICH IS PARTICIPATED BY ALL THE TEA GROWING REGIONS OF THE WORLD.

- SECOND PLACE IN WHITE TEA CATEFGORY (2012) :
- THIRD PLACE IN BLACK TEA CATEGORY (2013)
- FIRST PLACE IN BLACK TEA CATEFORY (215)
- SECOND PLACE IN DARK OOLONG CATEGORY (2016)

ALL SANDAKPHU TEAS MEET EC REGULATION