

# Heritage - Ipoh's Heritage - Herbal Tea

The whole world knows about Ipoh White Coffee as with clever marketing the drink has become truly famous. So famous indeed, that it must now be considered one aspect of our heritage, having been a solely Ipoh product for at least 90 years. However, if you take a wider look at our local beverages, you will find that Ipoh also has a tea heritage going back even further than our coffee.



Ipoh Ladies Serve Tea to Penang Refugees.  
Ipoh Railway Station 1942

Drinking Tea has been a local Chinese culture since the coolies came pouring into Ipoh as part of the Great Tin Rush of the late 19th century. They brought the culture from the homeland where tea has been drunk for many centuries. Indeed, legend has it that the history of tea began in 2737 B.C.E. when the Emperor Shen Nong, a skilled ruler and scientist,

accidentally discovered tea while boiling water in the garden. However, there is no doubt that India also claims to be the first to brew tea. Whatever the truth of the matter, drinking herbal tea became, and continues to be, a long-lasting trend. I doubt the current trend of Taiwanese-style Bubble Tea will last as long.

Personally, when I think of Ipoh herbal tea I think of Ho Yan Hor which beginnings date from 1945. The founder was the visionary herbalist, internationally known as “The King of Tea”, Dr Ho Kai Cheong. He put together his first recipe for a health-giving herbal tea – with his wife and daughter living in the same room at No. 1 Treacher Street. His tea has been manufactured in Ipoh ever since. The story is told in the very popular museum in Old Town.

However, there are much older kids on the block than Ho Yan Hor. Poh Woh Thong is credited with serving its famous ‘Fever Tea’ in Ipoh since 1895, more than 120 years. The secret recipe was brought to Ipoh by an immigrant from China. His recipe has been passed down from father to son through three generations. It is their family inheritance. In the early days, Dulang Washers would have taken tea like this to work in a traditional basket with teapot and cups.

But tea shops do not only serve tea. Take for example another three-generation family that is well known to locals and visitors alike. Known as Yee Fatt Tea Shop, it is renowned for serving an outstandingly good Curry Mee and equally famous for its tea. Here they serve a very special herbal egg tea, said to be the perfect balance to the curry, to ensure good health.

Chronologically, while considering local heritage herbal teas we must not forget Tan Ngan Lo medicated tea which is also manufactured in Ipoh. Said to be an invention of a Chinese immigrant about 100 years ago, it is still very popular here.

With such longevity of popularity, it is not surprising that other organisations have joined the tea trade, thus widening the choice. Today we also have STG offering a variety of Sabah-grown teas, Purple Cane with an extensive traditional herbal tea selection and Tea & Tattle with their wide selection of different leaf teas to choose from. As I am sure you are aware there are many more tea shops in Ipoh that are not mentioned here. Those listed are merely the tip of the iceberg.



“The King of Tea”,  
Dr Ho Kai Cheong

So, ladies and gentlemen, tea is definitely here to stay. Other short-lived beverages may appear from time to time but none of them will match our history in tea. It is part of our heritage. There is no doubt about it.

