

A still life composition featuring a silver samovar on the left, a glass mug with a metal holder on the right, and red berries scattered around. The background is a warm, textured brown. The text "Russian tea culture" is written in red in the upper right, and "Petrova Rita M-111" is written in white below it.

Russian tea culture

Petrova Rita M-111

Tea is part of Russian culture. According to a 2005 study, some 82% of Russians consume tea daily.

Russians took up tea drinking long before the Dutch began trading with China for it. No surprise. Russia spans two continents — Europe and Asia — and borders China, the source of the tea. Caravans reached them easily on the “Great Tea Road” (part of the famous “Silk Road”), carrying that special cargo.

At first the high price made tea only available to the wealthy. As the price became more affordable around the time of Peter the Great, this hearty and warming beverage became a staple of Russian life.



Black tea, usually sweetened with sugar, jams, or fruits, is the standard. It's served hot in winter and even in the record-breaking temperatures they experienced this past summer.

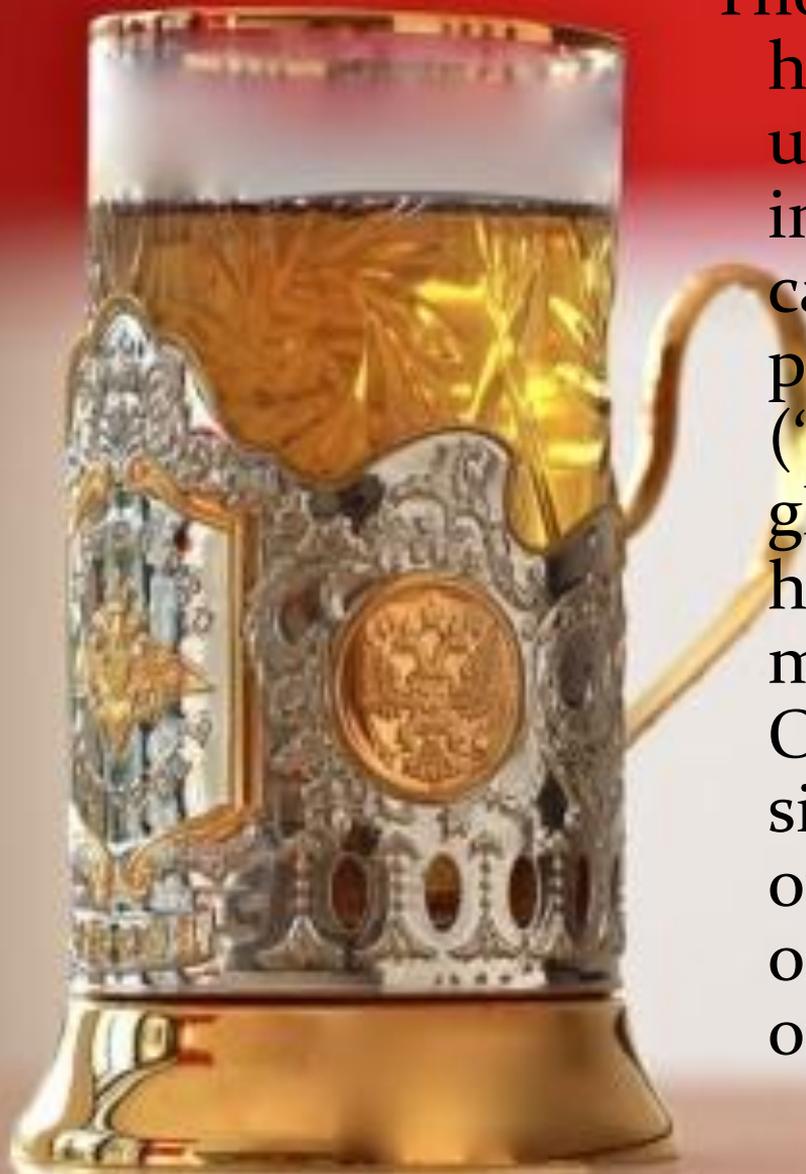
A cup of tea usually has about 1-3 teaspoons of sugar or other sweetener per cup and lemon (but *not* milk), and a selection of pastries (pies, crêpes, or pancakes), sweets, etc.

While black tea is the most common, green tea is becoming more popular due to the impression that it is a more healthy and "Oriental" style.



Most commonly, tea in Russia is consumed after meals or in mid-afternoon to bridge the gap between lunch and dinner. The affair is centered around the samovar. The family and any guests gather around it, pour tea from the teapot into their glasses set in holders, add hot water from the bottom portion of the samovar, and then sweeten it. The stronger the tea in the teapot is, the more hospitable the host is perceived to be.





Those glasses in holders are the usual drinking implement. They're called podstakanniks ("thing under the glass"). The high-end ones are made of silver. Others are nickel silver, cupronickel, other nickel alloys, or plated with silver or gold.



Tea is available all during the day, facilitated by the samovar, an item developed in the 17th century. Its design is based on kettles used by the Mongols from as early as the 13th century. Samovars are all-in-one tea steeping centers, with a container for heating the water and a teapot for steeping. Modern ones have electric water heating compartments.

Alexander Pushkin in *Eugene Onegin* displayed the role of tea in establishing romantic relations:

*Of single boredom, right away
They speak—but in a cunning way.
They call him to their samovar—
None but Dunya will pour the tea;
They whisper to her: "Dunya, see!"
And then produce her sweet guitar.
O Christ! She then begins to cheep:
"Come see me in my golden keep!"*

