

Russian Tea

A rich brew of culture, flavor and history

by MANIK JAYAKUMAR



In July 2006, I received a call from a recruiter at ACDI/VOCA, a nonprofit organization funded by the U.S. government's Aid for International Development program. The organization provides technical expertise to promote economic growth in developing countries. In the past, I had volunteered with USAID in Bolivia, where I advised the organization on strategies to revitalize the country's tea industry—an endeavor that the United States was hoping would provide farmers with an alternative to coca cultivation.

To my surprise, the recruiter asked if I would be

interested in performing a similar role in Russia. Although I knew that Russia was one of the largest consumers of tea in the world, I did not realize that they grew tea as well. In 1991, I had traveled to the former Soviet Union to work on a joint venture with a tea company based in Georgia, which has since become an independent country. As I found out from the recruiter, this was not the only tea-growing region in the area, as I had mistakenly assumed. Eager to learn more, I made the necessary arrangements and was on my way to Moscow by August.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

Coffee Traders®

Over 200 Coffees, 50 Organics,
50 Shade Grown Coffees
Fair Trade Coffees



est. 1981

Roasting great coffee for over 20 years.

Montana Coffee Traders (800) 345-5282
Texas Coffee Traders (800) 343-4875
www.coffeetraders.com fax (406) 862-7680

Muzak? Come on...get SIRIUS!

SIRIUS 
BUSINESS

69 channels from just \$24.95 per month.
No commercials. No contract.

*Just \$19.95/month!**

800.741.AMTC(2682) / www.amtc.com

* With 12-month prepaid subscription and purchase of SIRIUSBusiness Equipment Kit. \$19.95 for first 6 months, \$24.95 thereafter. A copy of this ad must be included with your order to receive discount.

FCUP0507

RUSSIAN TEA

continued from page 65

Russia has a long history of drinking tea because of its proximity to China and Central Asia. The first attempt to grow tea in Russia occurred around 1883 in the southern Caucasus bordering the Black Sea. In 1896, a Russian expedition purchased 2,000 kilograms of Chinese tea seeds, but fewer than five percent of them germinated, allegedly because the Chinese had scalded the seeds with boiling water before selling them to the Russians. Projects to grow tea in Russia persisted despite these setbacks. Ivan Koshman, a Georgian tea plantation worker, managed to plant and successfully grow 800 bushes from China in a village called Solokh-Aul, located 30 kilometers from Sochi. Eventually, the first commercial planting of tea began in Dagomys, now known as Dagomys-chai. Despite these efforts, internal production did little to meet the enormous demand for tea by the Russian consumer.



TEA BUNCH: A tea picker at Dagomys-chai plantation

Russia is currently the largest importer of tea in the world. Based on my translator Olga Bagdasarova's story about her musician husband drinking an average of 20 cups of tea a day, I can certainly see how this is possible. Much like coffee culture in the United States, tea culture is omnipresent in Russia, with restaurants and homes routinely serving only tea. Russians primarily drink black tea, rolling a cube of sugar in the mouth while sipping tea off samovars, the most ornate and traditional of which are prohibited from export. Although green tea was traditionally only consumed in the regions bordering China and Afghanistan, its popularity is growing due to its health benefits. Similarly, the use of tea bags is also spreading due to its convenience and availability in supermarkets.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 68

“Despite being insulated from market pressures, Dagomys-chai became one of the largest producers of tea in the 1980s.”

I first went to Moscow for a briefing with the local office of ACIDI/VOCA before heading south to the plantation in Sochi. The Moscow I experienced in 2007 under-

standably contrasted sharply with the one I visited in 1991. Although the Kremlin and the Red Square remain relatively unchanged, the city surrounding them reflects the wealth and Westernization that have occurred since the fall of communism. Though I was intrigued by this change, I was more eager to explore Sochi due to the limited time I had in the country. So a day after my arrival, I boarded a two-hour flight from Moscow to Sochi.

Sochi is located on the coast of the Black Sea and enjoys a sub-tropical climate. Its picturesque location, gentle sun and warm waters make it one of Russia’s top vacation destinations. In fact, President Putin has a villa near the city and is a frequent visitor. But the beach is not the only attraction of Sochi. The mountain range that surrounds and protects the city from the cold northern air is home to world-class skiing. In fact, Sochi has been chosen as a finalist city to host

For free samples or more information, please call 800-676-8558 or visit us online at www.greatdrink.com

X*Treme Freeze™ makes a consistent fruit smoothie every time. Made from 100% fruit and berries that are loaded with natural antioxidants. X*Treme Freeze™ is simple to prepare, requires no refrigeration and is shelf-stable after opening. Blueberry, Blackberry, Strawberry, Mango, Raspberry, Pineapple, Banana, Guava, Peach and more!

Gardner's
G O U R M E T

GARDNER'S GOURMET AND NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
DISTRIBUTORS—SERVING THE BEVERAGE INDUSTRY SINCE 1979



ANATOLY ISTOMIN AND RUSLAN plantation, workers pick tea from Georgia to Sochi after the

the 2014 Winter Olympics—a feat that every Russian is proud of given the country’s rich sporting history, and one that reflects the patriotism in Russia’s renewal since the end of the Cold War.

Sochi’s appeal was made clear when I arrived at the 10-story hotel and learned that every room was occupied. Luckily, I had a reservation.

The Dagomys-chai plantation is about 30 miles south of Sochi and covers about 5,000 acres [more than 2,000 hectares] spread out among the mountains of the North Caucasus that line the Black Sea. Although tea is its primary crop, the plantation also grows hazelnuts, fruits and vegetables. The tea land mass is nestled between forests and fruit trees.

The plantation has experienced tremendous organizational change since its inception in the 1970s, when all tea cultivation projects in the region were organized as a collective farm. Collective farms differed from Soviet state farms in that the laborers technically owned the farm and shared the profits, while state farms employed salaried employees of the state. The distinction had little practical outcome, though, because the Soviet state guaranteed wages and only sold tea to the state.



KRYMLYAN: At the Dagomys-chai mechanically. Istomin (left) moved Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Despite being insulated from market pressures, Dagomys-chai became one of the largest producers of tea in the 1980s. Its Krasnodar tea—which reflected the unique microclimate and soil of the region—became very popular in Russia. However, political change once again greatly affected the operation of the plantation, as Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* led to a long period of neglect as

state subsidies and attention decreased. In the last few years, a new management team has taken over the plantation and is aggressively attempting to revive it to its previous state while also meeting consumers’ changing demands.

Re-branding and improving the quality of its product will go a long way toward recapturing the area’s image, especially to take advantage of the opportunities the 2014 Olympics project will create. However, one of the biggest hurdles to overcome for the Dagomys-chai plantation and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 70

Professional Cleaning Products for the Professional Barista



Introducing

Puro Caff® Grinder Cleaner

- Natural and completely food safe.
- Cleans grinder burrs and casings.
- Removes most flavored coffee odors.
- U.S. and foreign patents pending.



Puro Caff Group

a division of Urnex Brands, Inc.

(800) 222-2826 or (914) 963-2042 www.purocaff.com



SUPERB LOOSE LEAF TEAS
 AMAZING LIQUID CHAI
 INVITING PRIVATE LABEL
 OPTIONS

INFORMATIVE TEA
 TRAINING



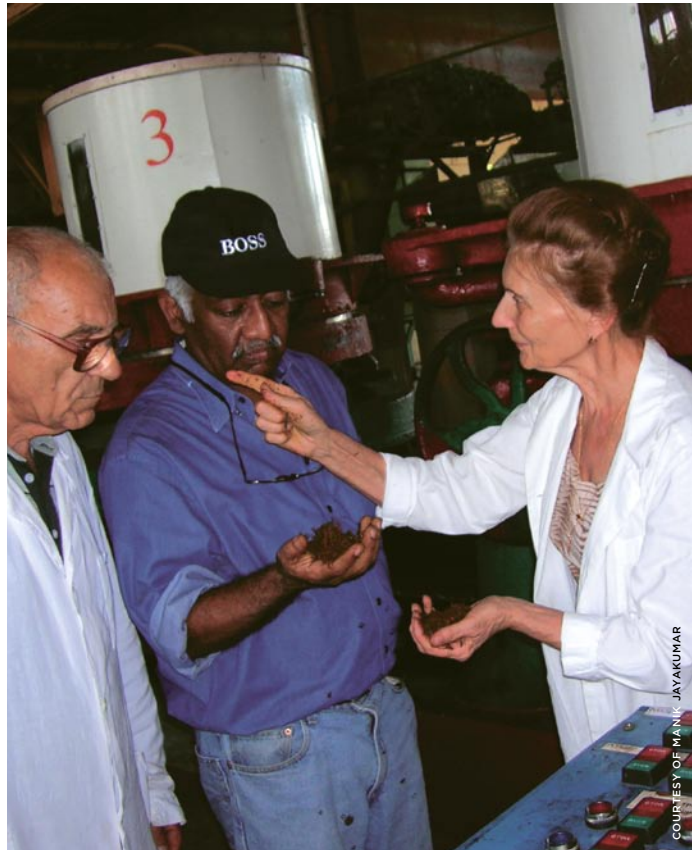
Please call us if you are searching
 for a profitable tea program that
 features and develops your brand.

www.mayatea.com www.mayachai.com
 1.877.MAYA.TEA / 1.877.629.2832
 225 West Flores Street Tucson, AZ 85705

RUSSIAN TEA

continued from page 69

others in the region is labor. There is an acute shortage of labor in the Russian tea industry, and the existing labor force is aging. Having come of age in the midst of the Soviet system, they are reluctant to adapt to the pressures of the global tea market. Unfortunately, the youth in the area are much more eager to look for jobs in urban areas instead of working on a plantation. All tea-producing countries face this challenge, but in Russia's case, the situation is more acute. In fact, the management of the plantation has unsuccessfully experimented with seasonal workers from China to supplement its workforce.



TEA'S SCENT: The author (center) evaluates teas during the production process with senior tea taster Vladimir Aksanychev (left) and Nina Vakrusheva, the technologist in charge of manufacturing.

One of the workers who made a particular impression on me was Anatoly Istomin. In 1986, he was working at a tea plantation in Georgia when the Chernobyl nuclear disaster occurred. The plantation was exposed to atomic toxins, and consequently, the plantation workers were given state pensions and housing, and then relocated throughout Russia. Because he had experience running tea-plucking machines in Georgia, Istomin was hired by Dagomys-chai.

Concepts Plus

To Do List:

— Stop by SCAA Long Beach
 Visit Booth 1308

— Check out Coffee Fest Atlanta
 Visit Booth 423

— Visit www.conceptspus.biz!

— Order mugs

P.O. Box 515 • Circle Pines, MN 55014-0515
 Phone: 877.612-2696 • Direct: 651.286.6532
megraham@conceptspus.biz • Fax: 877.402.5459
www.conceptspus.biz

“I am sure that if Sochi wins its bid to host the Winter Olympics, the Sochi Tea House will be one of the top tourist destinations.”

One of the jewels of the Dagomys-chai plantation is the Sochi Tea House. Built in the 1970s to host international guests of the Soviet state, the tea room is one of the largest and most intricate I have visited. A two-story structure that can easily accommodate more than 300 visitors, the tearoom offers panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. Visitors are greeted by men and women dressed in colorful, traditional attire. The walls are home to exquisite Russian art, which comes alive with folk music performed by singers in the main hall. The tea room’s director, Valentina Karagozyan, told me that one of the paintings displayed is likely worth more than the entire operation itself.

I am sure that if Sochi wins its bid to host the Winter Olympics, the Sochi Tea House will be one of the top tourist



TEA FOR TOURISTS: A hostess in traditional clothing greets visitors with music at the Sochi Tea House.

destinations. The Olympics will also be a great opportunity to showcase the quality teas produced by the resurgent Russian tea industry. Tea from this region remains an undiscovered jewel—the result of a rich brew of history, culture and flavor. ☕



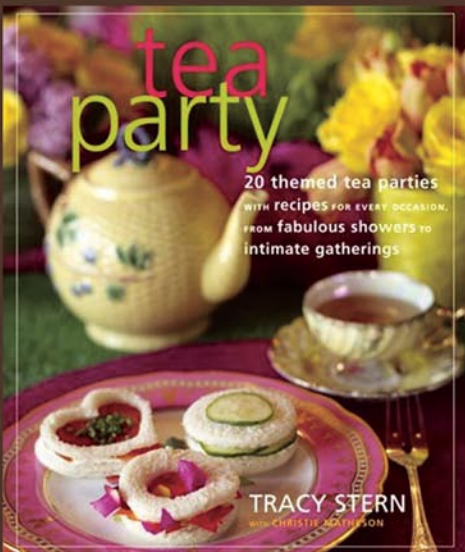
Salons in the last century celebrated the talents of the Great Romantic Artists of the day with the civilized serving of tea. Tracy Stern SALONTEA™ is steeped in history, offering exquisite estate teas. Tracy Stern SALONTEA™ is for musicians, poets, and painters at rest, along with the fashionable ladies and gentlemen of society who appreciate them. Experience the civilized pleasures of the salon with fine salon teas.

Tracy Stern

TRACY STERN



SALONTEA™
www.salontea.com



tea party 20 themed tea parties by Tracy Stern

Tracy Stern, founder of SALONTEA™, is passionate about tea. She has created wildly popular lines of teas and tea-based beauty products and has hosted hundreds of stylish tea parties to celebrate all sorts of occasions. She has introduced a new generation to the pleasures of tea without any of its traditional stuffiness. In *Tea Party*, she encourages everyone to make their next gathering that much more special by incorporating tea in the menu.

coming in April 2007

Come see us at the
World Tea Expo
Booth # 536