

Sips that satisfy

Tea, coffee and water are symbols of hospitality. These innovations are bringing satisfying sips into the cabin

by JANE HOBSON

Dilmah Founder
Merrill J. Fernando
at Dunkeld Tea
Estate, Sri Lanka



Ceylon tea is recognized as the finest tea in the world, with leaves growing in various agroclimatic regions and microclimates throughout the 25,000 square-mile South Asian island country



Offering a hot coffee, tea or cold glass of water is nearly a universal display of a warm reception. Whether it's a visitor to a hotel, a VIP delegate meeting or a Business Class passenger, this gesture is recognized by millions as a necessary element of a satisfying hospitality experience.

Now, technology is improving how well this offer can be executed, making it possible to deliver a handcrafted beverage, tea or sparkling water during virtually any passenger travel. For inflight service, these innovations come in the form of café-crafted coffee, expert tea pairings, inflight water dispensing solutions, flavored water in recyclable packaging and more.

21st century tea

Colombo-based Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company works with chefs and hospitality professionals during its Dilmah School of Tea to teach the relevance of tea to the 21st century lifestyle. Established in 2008, the 70th edition of the Dilmah School of Tea took place in February 2020 in Sri Lanka, exactly when *PAX International* requested an interview with the historic tea company's Chief Executive Officer, Dilhan C. Fernando.

The mission is to teach tea appreciation, "going beyond the confines of the commoditized version of tea that is ubiquitous

This cup is a coffee-maker in a mug, eliminating the need for a coffee machine inflight and offering more roast options to passengers



today,” says Fernando. “We focus in exploring how tea can engage a new generation of customers through tea gastronomy, tea mixology and associated tea pairing.” Founded by Fernando’s father, Merrill J. Fernando, Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company is recognized among the world’s most experienced teamakers.

For airlines, Fernando says offering Ceylon tea onboard provides an unprocessed, natural antioxidant beverage with benefits including the ability to help the body process sugars and protect against sicknesses such as diabetes, cancers and stress-related illness.

“Beyond the functional benefit lies the pleasure of tea to each of us – the most important feature of tea,” Fernando says. “It is what we focus on and in honoring the influence of nature in tea, we have succeeded in engaging international hospitality customers.”

Fernando recommends pairing tea with dishes that are part of the inflight meal service. For example, an earthy low-grown tea will pick up the caramelization of steak; long-bodied Dimbulla Ceylon tea pairs well with black cod, boosting the flavor and highlighting the texture. It also cleanses the palate for a pleasant end to the meal. Ceylon tea also pairs well with chocolate and dessert by balancing sweetness, he adds.

Marketed as Ceylon tea before the country changed names from Ceylon to Sri Lanka in 1972, tea from the South Asian island country gets its high quality from the agricultural practices involved with its production and the uniqueness of the country itself. At just 25,000 square-miles, tea from the island grows in a variety of agroclimatic regions and microclimates, from

sea level to 6,000-foot elevation and influenced by pre-monsoonal winds that eventually bring dry periods.

“These seasonal teas are sublime in aroma, taste and texture,” Fernando notes. “Each of these is crafted entirely by nature.”

Fernando believes some global tea makers nowadays are harvesting with complete disregard for the importance of good leaf in making tea – as a result of pressure from buyers and their dominating ability to demand a low cost for production. He adds that the higher price point of Ceylon tea is justified by its artisanal practices and traditions that defined it at the outset.

While it remains one of Sri Lanka’s most visible exports with the Middle East still a major importer, Fernando says Canada, the US, the UK and other countries that previously made the list of major importers now import little to no Ceylon tea. “That has changed significantly on account of an aggressive move to cheaper teas from other origins,” Fernando says.

Barista above the clouds

SkyTender Solutions supplies non-alcoholic beverage solutions in the format of either a mobile trolley or as a

Radnor Hills’ fruit extract infusion drinks have zero calories and are available in canned format

galley insert. With a mission to serve the industry with sustainable and efficient beverage solutions, the company now provides a specialty coffee trolley, multi-beverage hot and cold drinks and a water dispensing service. All SkyTender systems are connected and provide on-time consumption reporting.

“Passengers are becoming more discerning, with the expectation of having a choice of home comfort when onboard,” Wolfgang von Krogh, Chief Executive Officer, tells PAX. “Delivering bespoke customer experience is the new norm.”

The PUR VIE water dispensing system provides sustainably-sourced, packaging-free water and consistent quality inflight. The water can be used for drinking water, as well as for making hot and cold drinks. All of these uses in one system reduces over-catering and waste, which has a significant impact on lower cost, von Krogh explains. The connected consumption tracking offers complete control of the supply chain and optimizes stock levels. “Public and regulative pressure create a high demand for sustainable, packaging-free water and beverage supply,” he adds.

SkyTender’s SkyBarista EASA certified coffee trolley brings the coffee shop experience on board. The solution allows crew to prepare fresh coffee specialties in front of the passenger.

Last year, a European carrier trialed the service and the innovative trolley was the winner of Onboard Hospitality’s One to Watch Award. The year 2019 also saw SkyTender expand the SkyBarista brand with a new Coffee Specialty trolley, SkyBarista ONE which is EASA



certified and trialed successfully on a European carrier in March 2020. In the year ahead, the company has aviation and rail launch customers in Asia and Europe, with more trials planned with carriers in these regions.

Coffee machine in hand: any time, any place

The Barista Cup is an intelligent and easy-to-use invention that brews a fresh cup of coffee within the cup. The solution features a lid and filter at the top, with a coffee channel and coffee trap at the bottom of the cup. To use, add hot water and coffee grounds to the cup. As coffee grounds absorb water and get heavier, they sink to the bottom of the cup and fall through the coffee channel where they are trapped in exchange for air bubbles rise that rise to the surface. It can also brew tea the same way.

Last year was the Barista Cup's first year, which brewed up an "overwhelming, positive response from users," chief Executive Officer Aziz Patel tells *PAX*. In a year's time, it partnered with a London-based roaster and developed reusable cups that are suitable for the partner's specialty roasts.

"A trend we have noticed throughout the industry is the inspiration of apps to increase passenger experience," says Patel, recognizing the customization for seat selection, meals and pre-flight purchases that apps provide. "The addition of the Barista Cup to these apps would allow airlines to offer a variety of fresh roasts, instead of just one flavor that [was] brewed earlier. Freshly brewed [coffee] right in front of them would enhance their experience and bring the barista experience – and level of taste – onboard."

The Barista Cup is in the midst of securing new relationships with a variety of key companies ranging from transportation to hospitality. "We are expecting some great announcements within the next several months," Patel says.

Canned and flavorful

In autumn 2019, UK-based drink manufacturer Radnor Hills rolled out its range of canned spring waters. Embracing the can came as part of the company's agenda to supply airlines with more items with alternative packaging formats. The pure spring water is sourced from



SkyTender Solutions' beverage solutions include mobile trolleys and galley inserts that deliver water for drinking and making hot and cold drinks, a coffee trolley and multi-beverage dispenser



Dilhan C. Fernando, Chief Executive Officer, Dilmah

Radnor Hills' family farm in Powys, Wales, where it takes just seven minutes to filter from the ground to the can. Each aluminum can of still or sparkling water is 100 percent recyclable, lightweight, leak-proof and boasts a long-shelf life.

Along with the canned offering, Radnor Hills also supplies, fruit juices, premium presses, natural energy drinks, school compliant drinks and flavored water.

"We have had another great year for growth," says William Watkins, Managing Director at Radnor Hills. "Our flavored water range, which we have produced for more than 10 years, has grown by four percent."

The company is also launching a range of zero calorie infusion drinks in 330-milliliter format called Radnor Infusions. The drinks are naturally infused with real fruit extracts.

Watkins says customers are requesting more low-calorie options but aren't willing to compromise on taste. Other "sugar-aware" customers are seeking a less-sweet profile. In the year ahead, Watkins expects the flavored water sector to continue to grow, as well as the seltzer/infusion market, mirroring growth experience in this sector in the United States.

A royal in the water sector

In the water sector last year, British Airways tapped Harrogate Spring Water for its short-haul economy dining menu and also for all long-haul routes. Harrogate Spring Still Water (500 millilitres) and Harrogate Spring Sparkling Water (500 millilitres) both in recycled PET (rPET) are available in economy cabin to and from London Heathrow and London Gatwick, and long-haul also has other SKUs from the brand, again in rPET. The company's partnership with gategroup sees the Harrogate rPET range distributed on major airlines, with its environmental approach at the heart of supporting growth in the sector.

Global Export & Travel Retail Manager Greg Hatton tells *PAX International* that this year, the focus is sharing facts about the PET material, specifically on its positive sustainable properties versus other packaging materials, including being 100 percent recyclable, and creating interactions as part of its Incredible Shrinking Bottle recycling program developed in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy.

"We're continuing to champion our environmental credentials and promote best practices for recycling, which has recently been endorsed through the award for the business as B Corp Certified," Hatton says. "We work closely with all our partners to develop sustainable waste strategies in order to build a circular economy for PET bottles." 