

Don't bag it, tea's a treat

Dining | Annika Priest

IT'S the second-most consumed beverage in the world after water, but too often tea in Australian cafes has been relegated to a leaky tin pot and a tea bag.

But tea is making a comeback in our uber-caffeinated culture.

Asian bubble tea joints are as ubiquitous as sushi spots, hipster haunts offer up a mass array of fancy loose-leaf teas, speciality places such as Collingwood newcomer Storm in a Teacup serve only tea, and chai is no longer just for hippies.

Afternoon tea has also seen a resurgence. As well as old favourites such as the Windsor Hotel, trendy hang-outs such as Madame Brussels serve it too.

"There's always been such a large focus on coffee in Melbourne and I think it's time for tea to have its time," said Northcote tea connoisseur Kim Hay, taking a workshop on tea as part of the quirky Laneway Learning series.

"A lot of people think it's strange, but I've just grown up with tea, I've loved it ever since I was little and I'd go to yum cha with my family (Hay is half Chinese).

"It would be one of the things I'd look forward to most."

As well as antioxidants, tea contains a chemical called L-theanine, which both stimulates and calms your mind.

Like wine, there are myriad different varieties of teas - there are 3000 different types of green tea alone - which explains why there are tea sommeliers.



"That's what I like about tea, whatever mood you're in you can find something that suits you.

"Ding Dong Oolong is my favourite, it sounds ridiculous, but it's amazing."

"It comes from a place in Taiwan called Ding Dong mountain. It's beautiful, it's strong, but not too strong and has caramel qualities to it as well."

Hay's workshops will cover the historical and cultural significance of tea, its health benefits and varieties.

"Oolong means black dragon," she said.

"The Chinese look at the way a tea forms specific shapes when it's rolled and name it after what it looks like."

"They have great names like Silver Needles, Dragon Whiskers or Precious Eyebrows."

Tea! Laneway Learning is on today (May 1), 6.30pm at the Little Mule Cafe, 19 Somerset Place.

To book, email lanewaylearning@gmail.com.