

EXPERIENCES

BEVERAGES



trees that filter the sunlight. Tea as a crop needs the right amount of humidity, sunlight and rainfall all of which needs to be carefully regulated. This is why the plantations have drains as there should not be any water stagnation near the roots of the tea. Incidentally the workers pluck leaves once in every seven days ensuring that the top two leaves and the bud leaf in between are only harvested. All the tea gardens are divided into grids that ensure that the plucking schedule follows a specific cycle.

After this, the next stop was at the Kellyden Tea Estate where I witnessed the tea processing cycle for CTC (Cut Tear Curl) Tea. Assam tea is known for its special brand of black tea. The first and most important step in tea processing is withering where about 30 per cent of the moisture in the plucked green leaves is removed by placing them on rollers and blowing hot air if required. This makes the leaves ready for curling (for CTC tea) and rolling (for Orthodox tea). After the leaves are withered the leaves are sent to a leaf sifter that removes sand, stone or any waste material. After this the leaves are passed

through a leaf shredder where they are chopped.

The chopped leaves are put through a rolling process that ruptures the leaf cell-walls and the leaf maceration process happens. When oxygen comes in contact with the ruptured cells, the chemicals mix with each other to give the tea its characteristic flavour and start the oxidation process. After this the leaves pass through a sifter that segregates the tea by size. Then the tea leaves are dried in a way that the moisture level comes down to about three per cent and a sifter does the gradation. There are four main kinds of tea including whole leaf, broken, fannings and dust and the sorted teas are packaged for storage and shipment.

Considering the extensive variants of tea, a tasting session is the best way to come up close to understanding all things related to arguably what is India's favourite beverage. I had a session at Wild Mahseer located within the Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark botanical garden. This is where you can see the full growing cycle, tea manufacture, marketing and